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COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, LANGUAGE AND JOURNALISM

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

**Challenges and Limitations faced by Women Journalists in Ethiopian Media:
The Case of Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, Fana Broadcasting
Corporate & Walta Media and Communication Corporate**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the challenges and limitations encountered by women journalists in Ethiopia, specifically examining their experiences within three major media organizations: Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), Fana Broadcasting Corporation (FBC), and Walta Media and Communication Corporate. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research incorporates quantitative data from surveys and qualitative insights from in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions, providing a comprehensive analysis of the factors affecting women's participation and advancement in the Ethiopian media landscape. The findings reveal significant gender disparities, with male journalists predominating the workforce in each organization. The study highlights that female journalists make up a relatively small percentage of the workforce; for instance, EBC employs 68.5% male journalists, while FBC has 64.5% and Walta 58.3%. This gender imbalance not only limits women's representation in media but also perpetuates stereotypes and biases in reporting practices. Educational qualifications among female journalists are noteworthy, with 80.2% holding at least a bachelor's degree. However, despite their qualifications, women face numerous challenges, including gender discrimination, harassment both verbal and physical and limited opportunities for career progression. Nearly 46.5% of respondents reported experiencing gender-based discrimination, which aligns with existing literature on the broader global phenomenon where women face hostility in male-dominated work environments. The analysis also reveals that mentorship and professional networking are essential for women's career development, but participation in training and mentoring programs remains low, with 65.1% of respondents indicating they had not engaged in such initiatives. In light of the findings, the study makes several recommendations for media organizations, including the development of targeted diversity and inclusion programs, implementation of clear anti-discrimination policies, fostering an inclusive organizational culture, and providing more opportunities for female journalists to advance their careers. By actively addressing these challenges, media organizations can cultivate an environment that promotes equity and empowerment, supporting women's professional growth and representation in the journalism field. This research highlights the need for gender equity in Ethiopian media, advocating for systematic changes to improve credibility, diversity, and informed public discourse.

Key words: *Female journalist, challenges, limitation, gender, media*

1. INTRODUCTION

Historically, journalism has been a male-dominated field, with women facing significant barriers to entry and career advancement (Byerly, 2003). Nonetheless, women have made considerable strides, breaking through many obstacles and establishing themselves as influential figures in journalism and media. Despite these gains, challenges persist, including gender bias, unequal pay, and fewer opportunities for promotion. Women journalists are also more frequently subjected to online harassment and abuse, which can negatively impact their mental well-being and professional reputation (Ibid).

From a young age, girls are often taught traditional roles centered on domestic responsibilities, such as caring for the home and family, and are constantly reminded of these roles, particularly when they encounter setbacks (Oyinade, Daramola & Lamidi, 2013). This issue spans across cultures in Africa, where societal expectations typically define and confine women's roles. While some husbands would like their wives to stay at home full-time, others might prefer that they acquire careers that allow them to concentrate on household responsibilities. Women have historically been viewed as inferior to men in a variety of societal roles due to the historical notion that man was created first and woman as a companion.

Research shows that although the number of women working in the media is rising globally, men continue to hold the majority of positions in upper management, including chief editors, producers, executives, and publishers. (White, 2009). This disparity is particularly pronounced in Africa, where cultural barriers restrict women's ability to fulfill roles such as journalism, which may involve traveling, working late hours, or covering topics traditionally viewed as masculine, like politics and sports (Myers, 2009). The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) highlights the fact that while women are less likely to cover "hard" news themes like politics and the economics, they are more commonly assigned to "soft" topics like family, leisure, art, and fashion. Davis (2014) asserts that women have an equal right to participate in public discourse, including the media and their perspectives and contributions should be recognized. Media, which shapes public perception, should reflect the reality that women are powerful agents of change across all sectors of society, free from the constraints of harmful gender stereotypes.

The role of women journalists in shaping the media landscape has become increasingly significant, particularly in the context of advocating for gender equality and social justice.

Despite the notable contributions of women in journalism, they continue to encounter a range of challenges, including gender bias, unequal pay and limited career advancement opportunities, as highlighted by Byerly (2003). Furthermore, online abuse and harassment of women journalists is a significant problem that compromises their reputations as professionals and their mental health. Ethiopia's media landscape has changed dramatically in the last several years, with a growing environment that aims to adjust to changing political realities and a more transparent public sphere. It is clear that journalism plays a crucial role in promoting democracy and influencing public opinion in this changing environment. Though vital, the experiences of Ethiopian women journalists are still mostly underexplored.

This research intends to explore the particular difficulties encountered by female journalists in Ethiopia's media industry, with a particular emphasis on problems like workplace harassment, discrimination based on gender, and the impact of social attitudes on their experiences in the field. Even though research shows that there are more women working in the media worldwide, there is still a gender gap at the highest: most chief editors, producers, and executives are predominantly men (White, 2009).

This trend is particularly pronounced in Africa, where cultural impediments often hinder women from fully realizing their roles as journalists. These impediments include societal expectations regarding travel, evening work, and coverage of traditionally male-dominated topics such as politics and sports (Myers, 2009).

The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) further reveals that female journalists are often relegated to “soft” subjects, focusing on areas such as family, lifestyle, fashion, and the arts while they are significantly less likely to report on “hard” news, including politics and the economy. This pattern suppresses women's voices in critical media narratives and feeds the loop of gender stereotypes.

Understanding the unique obstacles faced by female journalists is crucial, especially in light of Ethiopia's ongoing struggles for democracy, freedom of expression, and human rights. These barriers not only hinder the advancement of individual female journalists' careers but also undermine the broader inclusion and representation of women's voices in media narratives. This investigation brought to light the various challenges faced by Ethiopian women journalists, underscoring the urgent need for structural adjustment in order to attain gender parity in media

representation and operations. We may endeavor to create an inclusive media landscape that gives voice to all by tackling these issues.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

2.1. Media Presentation and Feminist Theory

An analytical framework known as feminist media theory looks at the complex connection between gender dynamics and power structures and representations in the media, methods of production, and consumption patterns. This method, which has its roots in feminist theory, seeks to comprehend and evaluate how women are portrayed in different media formats, the consequences of these representations, and the overall social influence on media on gender relations.

2.2. Feminist Muted Group Theory

The feminist muted group theory asserts that because they lack power, specific social groups, women in particular, find themselves marginalized and silenced in societal dialogues. This theory stresses the systemic aspect of this silencing by showing how social structures frequently give preference to the perspectives and voices of dominant groups, mainly men, diminishing the significance and credibility of viewpoints held by women and other marginalized groups.

3. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative and quantitative research design, which is particularly suited for exploring the nuanced and subjective experiences of women journalists. The mixed approach allows for an in-depth analysis of individual and collective narratives, cultural contexts, and the socio-political dynamics that shape their professional lives.

4. Sampling Technique

Strategic sampling was used in order to achieve the objectives of this study on female journalists in Ethiopia, and gather data in an efficient manner. The following sampling methods used to ensure a representative and meaningful selection of participants from the total population of 452 female journalists across the three media organizations: Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), Fana Broadcasting Corporate (FBC), and Walta Media and Communication Corporate.

Given the diversity within the population of female journalists across the three organizations, stratified random sampling utilized. This technique involves dividing the total population into distinct levels based on specific characteristics, such as the media organizations (EBC, FBC, Walta Media and Communication Corporate) years of experience and job roles.

Thus, the population divided into three levels based on the media organizations, EBC, FBC and Walta Media and Communication Corporate. From each section, a random sample of journalists selected using a random number generator ensuring that every female journalist within each section has an equal chance of being chosen. This method helps to ensure representation from each organization.

Additionally, the study employed proportional sampling within each section to accurately reflect the size of each organization's population of female journalists.

- EBC (172 out of 452): Approximately 38 participants
- FBC (240 out of 452): Approximately 53 participants

Walta Media and Communication Corporate (40 out of 452): Approximately 9 participants.

This guarantees that the sample is representative of the population as a whole, enabling more broadly applicable conclusions.

Purposeful sampling was employed in addition to a stratified random sampling to select a subgroup of female journalists for in-depth interviews. This method is especially helpful for qualitative research since it makes it possible to choose participants with specific characteristics, backgrounds, or perspectives that are relevant to the investigation. Through the combined use of stratified random sampling, and purposeful sampling, this study able to gathered a representative

sample of female journalists from EBC, FBC, and Walta Media and Communication Corporate. This multifaceted approach not only enhances the generalizability of the quantitative findings but also enriches the qualitative data through targeted interviews, ultimately providing a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by female journalists in the Ethiopian media: in the case of EBC, FBC and Walta Media and Communication Corporate.

5. Subjects of the Study

The subject of this study consists of female journalists working at the headquarters of three major media organizations in Ethiopia: Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), Fana Broadcasting Corporate (FBC), and Walta Media and Communication Corporate.

The overall total population for this study can be calculated as follows:

Total Population = EBC + FBC + Walta Media and Communication Corporate Female Journalist

Thus, Total Population = 172 + 240 + 40 = 452

Thus, the total population of the study comprises 452 female journalists working in these three organizations at their respective headquarters. This population serves as a critical focus for exploring the experiences, challenges, and perspectives of female journalists within the Ethiopian media landscape.

6. Instruments of Data Collection

The primary methods for gathering data were focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and survey questionnaires. Valuable insights related to the research questions were revealed through the focus group discussions. By drawing on the experiences of producers, journalists, editors, and media managers in the field, in-depth interviews further served as an additional tool, offering a deeper understanding of the challenges and limitations encountered by women journalists in the media industry.

7. Key Research Findings and Discussions

The study documented a significant gender imbalance within the journalistic workforce across the three media organizations, with males constituting the majority. EBC employs 68.5% male journalists, followed by FBC at 64.5%, and Walta Media and Communication Corporate at 58.3%. This is consistent with global trends; the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ, 2019) notes that women are often underrepresented in media organizations worldwide, contributing to a male-dominated narrative in journalism. Gender disparity not only limits women's voices in media but also perpetuates stereotypes and biases in reporting, which can have wider societal implications, including reinforcing traditional gender roles and perceptions (UNESCO, 2021).

The age distribution reveals a concentration of female journalists in the 26-35 age brackets, while there are significantly lower representations among both younger (18-25) and older (36-50) cohorts. This finding is echoed in the literature showing that while many young women enter the profession, they often face systemic barriers that impede their career longevity, leading to a decline of female journalists in mid-life (Chambers, 2020). Moreover, McGregor (2019) emphasizes that woman journalists often juggle workplace demands with family responsibilities, contributing to career interruptions that lead to attrition in older age groups.

The study indicates that a majority of female journalists hold at least a bachelor's degree, with 80.2% achieving this level of education. This is a positive indicator of professional preparedness; however, the lack of representation of lower educational qualifications suggests barriers to entry for those without advanced degrees. Baker et al. (2018) argue that while education is essential, it is not sufficient to equalize opportunities in journalism, particularly given the additional challenges women face in accessing mentorship and networks that can enhance their career prospects.

The findings indicate that women primarily occupy roles as reporters (32.6%), with fewer in senior positions such as editors (8.1%) and senior producers (9.3%). This disparity highlights the "glass ceiling" effect that restricts women's advancement to leadership roles, a phenomenon documented in several studies. The International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF, 2020) asserts that women continue to be underrepresented in top editorial positions due to cultural and

structural barriers that favor male candidates for leadership roles. The experiences shared by respondents suggest that promotional decisions are often influenced by gender biases, leading to frustration among capable female journalists who feel overlooked.

The mixed perceptions regarding workplace culture are troubling. While 36% of journalists describe their organizations' cultures as "Excellent," nearly 29% characterize them as "Poor" or "Very Poor" concerning gender equality. This dichotomy suggests that the progress made varies significantly by organization or department. According to Hess & O'Pray (2018), fostering an inclusive culture is critical for the retention and satisfaction of female employees, yet existing systemic issues often lead to discontent and reduced professional aspirations.

The prevalence of gender-based discrimination faced by nearly 46.5% of respondents is alarming. These experiences range from being overlooked for promotions to encountering derogatory comments. Research indicates that such discrimination is not isolated to Ethiopian media but reflects a broader global phenomenon where women in journalism frequently confront hostile work environments (Shultz & Tam, 2021). The impact of this discrimination not only affects women's career advancement but also has detrimental effects on their mental health and job satisfaction (IFJ, 2020). The responses from interviewees highlight the urgent need for media organizations to adopt clear policies and procedures to combat gender-based discrimination and create a safer working environment.

To address these challenges, organizations must implement comprehensive and gender-sensitive policies that promote equity in hiring and advancement. Strategies may include establishing mentorship programs specifically aimed at supporting female journalists, enhancing training on gender issues, and developing robust mechanisms to address harassment and discrimination. Kram (1985) highlights the critical role mentorship plays in facilitating gender equity by providing women with guidance and empowerment in their careers. Furthermore, McKinsey & Company (2020) found that organizations with diverse leadership teams not only perform better financially but also create more equitable work environments.

The study highlights the need for addressing gender disparities in the media sector, including measures to promote gender equality, increase diversity, and provide support for women's career

advancement. The findings suggest that there is a need for organizational cultures that prioritize inclusivity, respect, and support for women journalists to thrive in their careers.

In conclusion, while this study reveals some encouraging trends regarding the qualifications and engagement of women journalists in Ethiopia, substantial barriers remain. Addressing these issues will require systemic change within media organizations, prioritizing diversity and inclusion while actively working to eliminate discrimination and bias. Only by fostering an equitable environment can the media sector in Ethiopia begin to reflect the diversity of perspectives necessary for a healthy democracy and informed public discourse.

8. The Researcher's Conclusions and Recommendations

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and limitations faced by women journalists in Ethiopian media organizations, specifically within EBC, FBC, and Walta Media and Communication Corporate. The findings highlight the persistence of gender disparities and systemic barriers that hinder women's participation and advancement in the media sector. The study reveals that women face significant challenges in accessing senior positions, experiencing gender-based discrimination, and navigating a culture that is often hostile to their professional aspirations.

The results of this study have important implications for policymakers, media organizations, and individuals working to promote gender equality in the media sector. Firstly, the findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to address the gender imbalance in media organizations, including measures to promote diversity and inclusion, provide mentorship and training programs, and combat gender-based discrimination. Secondly, the study highlights the importance of organizational culture and leadership in fostering an inclusive work environment that supports the growth and development of female journalists.

In conclusion, this study donates to our understanding of the complex and multifaceted challenges facing women journalists in Ethiopia. The findings provide a foundation for further research on gender equality in the media sector, as well as inform policies and practices aimed at promoting a more equitable and diverse media landscape. Ultimately, it is essential that media

organizations prioritize the recruitment, retention, and advancement of female journalists to ensure a more inclusive and representative media sector that reflects the diversity of society.

Recommendations

- Develop targeted initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion: Media organizations should establish programs aimed at recruiting and retaining female journalists, including mentorship initiatives, training programs, and internship opportunities.
- Implement policies to combat gender-based discrimination: Organizations should develop clear policies and procedures to address gender-based discrimination, including reporting mechanisms, training programs for employees, and consequences for violators.
- Foster an inclusive organizational culture: Media organizations should prioritize creating a culture that values diversity, inclusivity, and respect for all employees, including women journalists.
- Provide opportunities for career advancement: Organizations should provide opportunities for female journalists to advance their careers through training programs, mentorship initiatives, and promotions.
- Monitor and evaluate progress: Media organizations should regularly monitor and evaluate their progress in promoting gender equality and diversity, using data to inform policy changes and improvements.

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