

Journalists' perception on aggressions suffered in times of covid-19

Percepção dos jornalistas sobre agressões sofridas em tempos da covid-19

Percepción de los periodistas sobre agresiones sufridas en tiempos de covid-19

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ABSTRACT

This is a study with a qualitative approach that aimed to analyze, from the theoretical framework of Socioanalytical Institutional Analysis, the discourse of journalists about the experience of violence in their work process during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the help of a news panel, we carried out a projective interview with ten journalists, and the participants were chosen with the snowball technique. The results pointed out that the violence happened through approaches in the streets, most of the time in the form of verbal attacks by supporters of the current federal government (2019-2022), which caused the journalists psychological suffering and difficulty in developing their work activities. After the pandemic is over it is necessary that violence against journalists remain on the agenda and that it opens new perspectives for future lines of research that can improve protection protocols for communication professionals.

Keywords: Journalism; Violence; COVID-19; Health communication; Aggression.

RESUMO

Trata-se de um estudo de abordagem qualitativa que objetivou analisar, a partir do referencial teórico da Análise Institucional Socioanalítica, o discurso dos jornalistas sobre a experiência de violência no processo de trabalho deles durante a pandemia da covid-19. Foi realizada entrevista projetiva com dez jornalistas com o auxílio de um painel de notícias, e a escolha dos participantes se deu por técnica de bola de neve. Os resultados apontaram que a violência aconteceu mediante abordagens nas ruas, na maioria das vezes sob a forma de agressões verbais proferidas por apoiadores do atual governo federal (2019-2022), o que

causou nos jornalistas sofrimento psicológico e dificultou o desenvolvimento das atividades laborais. Faz-se necessário, após a pandemia, que a violência contra os jornalistas permaneça em pauta e que isso abra novas perspectivas para futuras linhas de pesquisa que possam aprimorar os protocolos de proteção aos profissionais da comunicação.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo; Violência; Agressão; Covid-19; Comunicação em saúde.

RESUMEN

Se trata de un estudio con enfoque cualitativo que tuvo como objetivo analizar, desde el marco teórico del Análisis Socioanalítico Institucional, el discurso de periodistas sobre la experiencia de la violencia en su proceso de trabajo durante la pandemia de la covid-19. Se realizó una entrevista proyectiva a diez periodistas con la ayuda de un panel de noticias, y la elección de los participantes se hizo mediante la técnica de la bola de nieve. A partir de esto, los resultados señalaron que la violencia se dio por abordajes en las calles, la mayoría de las veces en forma de agresiones verbales por parte de simpatizantes del actual gobierno federal (2019-2022), provocando sufrimiento psicológico y dificultad en el desarrollo de actividades laborales por parte de los periodistas. Es necesario que la violencia contra los periodistas permanezca en la agenda tras la pandemia y abra nuevas perspectivas para futuras líneas de investigación que puedan mejorar los protocolos de protección de los profesionales de la comunicación.

Palabras clave: Periodismo; Violencia; Covid-19; Comunicación en salud; Agresión.

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INTRODUCTION

Journalism is deemed to be one of the institutions required for the functioning of society; therefore, it is a fundamental activity in the process of consolidating the democratic project. For example, it is through journalistic activity that public transparency is stimulated, and acts linked to the exercise of powers are publicised (RIOS; BRONOSKY, 2020).

In addition, during journalists' application of communicative practices, the right to information has been considered a fundamental human right (ARAÚJO, 1992) and a mediating field that enables all other rights (EMERICH *et al.*, 2016) – given that the information is relevant to the construction of citizenship and characteristic of contemporary journalistic performance, within a mediatized society. In this way, citizens have the right to receive the information required for their everyday lives, and journalism is one of the forms of expressing this right (EMERICH *et al.*, 2016).

In the context of COVID-19, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued the first alert on 31 December 2019, after Chinese authorities reported cases of a mysterious pneumonia in Wuhan city. On March 11, 2020, the WHO characterized the situation as a pandemic. Since then, COVID-19 has become part of the daily lives of nations, and most information about the disease has been provided by the press. In contrast, newsrooms have changed completely with strict security measures implemented. As the number of professionals working in person decreased, some went to the streets and exposed themselves to the virus. They lived with the fear of contamination and possible consequences including death from the disease. Others faced the difficulties generated by home offices and social isolation (OLIVEIRA; GADINI, 2020).

Therefore, journalism has played an important role in circulating precise information that is in the public interest. It has become an object of studies and theories and is getting ever closer to peoples' dialogue. If science shows, for example, that distancing and social isolation are appropriate strategies for combatting the disease caused by the coronavirus, journalism broadens the scope of this plan, providing access to information, among other matters (COUTINHO, 2020).

In 2020, for example, according to information released by the National Federation of Journalists (Fenaj), from a global perspective journalism has partially restored its credibility, showing itself to be indispensable for democratic societies. Journalists also gained more professional recognition. However, distinct negative features could be noted in Brazil, as it was the year in which many journalists risked their lives battling the virus (many died) and they suffered additional violence for doing their job.

In that same year, 428 episodes of violence were recorded, 105.77% more than in 2019. Discrediting the press, as in 2019, was the most common act of violence. The 152 cases represented 35.51% of the total (FENAJ, 2021). According to The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021), the COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges for journalists' safety and exacerbated existing ones. They faced increasing harassment, psychological strain, trauma, and an increased risk of contracting the virus. According to the Press Emblem Campaign (PEC, 2022), an organization which aims to monitor violence against journalists, at least 846 journalists died worldwide after having contracted the disease, between March 2020 and November 2021. Brazil was the country with the most victims, with a total of 111 deaths.

Violence against journalists is a global phenomenon. Waisbord (2020) argues the journalists who are more likely to be attacked fall into specific categories defined by visible markers such as: gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion. Women covering topics such as politics, law, economics, sport, women's rights, gender, and feminism are more likely to become targets of violence, especially on online platforms (POSETTI *et al.*, 2020). Asian American journalists, for example, experienced ethnic prejudice during the COVID-19 pandemic (MCGEE, 2021). Shah *et al.* (2021) explored the challenges COVID-19 posed for jour-

nalists in Pakistan and concluded that the pandemic has increased disparities and security risks in Pakistani journalism as well as exposing flaws in the country's journalistic practices. Osmann, Selva and Feinstein (2021) argue that journalists covering the pandemic are experiencing levels of anxiety and depression similar to those seen in healthcare workers. In Latin America, a similar study (FRUTOS; SANJURJO, 2022) concluded that when considering both emotional and labour factors, precariousness of work was the main repercussion of the pandemic crisis for journalists. This was also a consequence of the economic recession in some countries.

Added to this scenario is the fact that the pandemic has exacerbated the existing obstacles to freedom of press, not only in authoritarian states, but also in democracies. Several governments around the world used the pandemic crisis as a pretext to impose restrictions, to attack and silence critical journalism (PAPADOPOULOU; MANIOU, 2021).

It is worth noting that global journalism faced the additional challenge of combatting disinformation and narratives contrary to science and health guidelines. This sustained background enhanced the violence suffered by journalists amid the COVID-19 pandemic, intensified, above all, by the rapid and uncontrolled dissemination of unfounded information conveyed on social platforms – a phenomenon called infopandemic (FLORES, 2020). Furthermore, in Brazil, the federal government (2019-2022) has supported a negationist narrative about the effects of COVID-19 and increasingly clashed with journalistic bodies to discredit adequate actions to combat the pandemic, such as mass testing, social distancing, and vaccines. Consequently, there has been a significant increase in attacks on journalists and a degradation of freedom of expression in the country (FENAJ, 2020; ASSOCIAÇÃO BRASILEIRA DE IMPRENSA, 2020). Among the strategies of the current president of Brazil (2019-2022), denounced by different entities supporting communication professionals, are verbal aggression and the discrediting of journalists' content.

From a social point of view, violence against journalists ends up attacking the ethical principle of the citizen who has the right to information. If attacks on journalism increase, consequently, the quality of information and society's access to it decrease. Violence, in any context, evokes fear in the individual, which makes the person feel cornered. They get sick in diverse ways. For some their quality of life is destroyed while for others their existence becomes impossible (MINAYO; ASSIS, 2017).

Thus, considering the increase in violence suffered by journalists and the serious social and individual consequences of this phenomenon, this study aims to analyse, from the theoretical framework of Socioanalytical Institutional Analysis, the discourse of journalists about the experience of violence in their work process during the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study in which ten journalists were interviewed about violence suffered in the course of their work during the COVID-19 pandemic, in compliance with the following inclusion criteria: 1) have a degree in journalism; 2) work as a street reporter on a television news broadcast; and 3) have completed at least three reports on the street about the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study is part of a larger research project which sought to investigate beyond the experience of violence, to include the interrelations and the potential of the journalists' working process throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. A news panel, a projective interview and the records of a field diary prepared by the researchers themselves were used to produce the material.

The panel was used for the projective interview because this technique, according to Goldenberg (2009), uses visual resources to stimulate the responses of the researched subjects.

To create the panel, researchers chose, one by one, all the articles from the Google search tool in the news tab. Seven news items in total were chosen at random in a space that was 90 cm wide by 120 cm high.

The topics discussed in the articles were: 1) Politicians “mock” journalists for working during the COVID-19 pandemic (LINDNER, 2020); 2) Mental and physical health of reporters during the COVID-19 pandemic (LEWIS, 2020); 3) Blocking access to the Planalto Palace stairs, forcing journalists to crowd together (FERRO, 2020); 4) Journalist who died of COVID-19 accused the television station of neglecting the topic (CAIXETA, 2020); 5) An ex-reporter from a television station suffers from burnout syndrome (CATRACA LIVRE, 2019); 6) The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) emphasizes the importance of journalists’ safety in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2020); and 7) A reporter is assaulted when showing crowding at a bank queue during the night in Manaus-Amazonas (FOCO AMAZÔNICO, 2020).

According to Lourau (1993), the field diary is a form of writing beyond the text that allows the reconstitution of the researcher’s subjective history and the production of one’s own reflection on the act of writing. This instrument provides knowledge of the daily experience of the field to be studied and a better understanding of the production of intellectual life.

The choice of participants took place at random, between May and September 2020, with the following process: 1) the website of a television station, identified in this study as station A was accessed by researchers; 2) videos about COVID-19 in the search tool bar of station A’s website were searched for; and 3) the journalist who made the most recent video published at the time of the search was selected and contacted. That is, the professional who was reporting in the most recent video posted on the website was the first participant in the study.

Thus, the researchers sent an invitation, the Informed Consent Form (ICF) and clarifications about the study objectives to the reporters’ e-mail. Upon acceptance by the participant, the informed consent form was signed, scanned, and sent to the researchers’ e-mail. Then, the interview was scheduled at the time established by the participant.

The projective interview had a maximum duration of 60 minutes and took place through the Google Meet communication platform, a tool that allows video chat and instant messaging. For the study, the researchers used a voice call, so that a more powerful internet network was not needed, thus facilitating the virtual meeting. The interviews were recorded with the aid of an audio recorder. The news panel was presented to the study participant at the time of the interview.

The snowball technique was applied, whereby upon completing the interview the study participant indicated another journalist to participate in the research. The snowball technique is based on the identification of an individual who is invited to nominate a colleague, another professional, who, in turn, will nominate another, and so on, until informational redundancy is reached – the point at which it is perceived that information is saturated. From that moment on, there is no justification for the inclusion of new participants (ALVES-MAZZOTTI; GEWANDSZNAJDER, 1999).

Subsequently there were transcripts of the interviews carried out with each journalist and, together with the notes from the field diary, the detailed reading of all the material. The *corpus* formed by the set of journalists’ testimonies about violence was analysed according to the Socioanalytical Institutional Analysis (socioanalysis) theoretical-methodological framework. The objective was to follow the threads that arose during the interviews with the study participants, which lead to a common denominator synthesised by the title “Violence suffered by journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic: notes”.

Socioanalysis was proposed in 1970 by René Lourau within Institutional Analysis. He defines socioanalysis as “a method of intervention in a situation that consists of analysing the relationships that the multiple parties in the social game maintain with the manifest and hidden system of institutions” (HESS, 2004, p. 23).

Institutions arise as logical decision trees that establish human activities, pointing out what is indifferent, allowed and prohibited. Institutions comprise a movement that generates (instituting) an outcome (instituted) and a process (institutionalization). For the regulatory function of the institution to be carried out in a concrete way, institutions materialize in organizations or establishments (BAREMBLITT, 2012) such as the media, for example.

The study was carried out with the assent of the Research Ethics Committee at the Federal University of the Jequitinhonha and Mucuri Valleys. To maintain confidentiality, each subject was denominated by cardinal numbers, and the name of the stations, states and municipalities by letters of the alphabet.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Study participants' profile

Ten journalists participated, of which only two were female. The age of the group ranged between 27 and 38 years. Five participants declared themselves to be mixed race, four white and one indigenous. Catholicism was the most common faith with five subjects. Six participants resided in the Southeast, which was the most common location. Two participants resided in the North, one in the South and one in the Midwest.

Regarding professional aspects, time spent working in the field of journalism varied between four and ten years. The employment relationship with the current broadcaster varied between one and nine years. In terms of coverage of their reports, state coverage matters prevailed.

Violence suffered by journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic: notes

Work-related violence is a voluntary attitude of an individual or group against another individual, which can cause psychological or physical damage, occurring in the work environment, or involving relationships established at work or in work-related activities. It can also be characterized as a form of negligence regarding working conditions; deprivation and violation of fundamental principles and labour and social security rights; and the omission of care, help and solidarity in the face of some misfortune, characterized by the banalisation of work-related death and illness (OLIVEIRA; NUNES, 2008).

Fenaj categorised acts of violence towards journalists as follows: murders; arrests/detentions; attacks; violence against union organizations; censorship; restrictions on freedom of expression by judicial means; impediments to professional practice; verbal aggressions; threats/intimidation; and physical aggression (FENAJ, 2020).

A study carried out by Parreira and Ghizoni (2021), with the objective of analysing accounts of pleasure and suffering experienced at work by a group of journalists from Tocantins, pointed out that these professionals lived in an environment of harassment, threats and violence. Disrespect for the professional was part of the work routine.

When talking about work-related violence, the journalists interviewed mentioned that it occurs when approached on the street, most often in the form of verbal aggression, as shown in the following statements:

Aggression really increased for us on the street, we hardly do the "live broadcast" on the street, we look to do more inside the TV station. (Journalist 02)

Wow, verbal aggression, many times. Since the beginning of the pandemic, it has become chaotic for me on the street. I have lost count of how many verbal attacks I have suffered during these four months of the pandemic. An attempted physical attack on me only failed because the wife of the guy who was going

to attack me, held him back. I had a colleague who was doing a report here in the centre of municipality A, who suffered a physical attack, where he was pushed. I think verbal aggression sometimes hurts as much as if it were physical aggression, you know? Because they end up affecting you as a human being and you as a professional, undermining what you're doing, being questioned about if what you're doing is really the right thing. (Journalist 03)

[...] and then we go to the street, we interview, and we are harassed. (Journalist 05)

We were almost attacked, physically, in a report I was doing. The cameraman couldn't take so much verbal aggression anymore and ended up responding. The young man got out of the car and wanted to attack us. (Journalist 09)

Verbal aggression, according to previous statements, is configured as a transgression of verbal rules that humiliates, degrades, or otherwise indicates a lack of respect for the dignity and worth of an individual (INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF NURSES *et al.*, 2005). It is considered one of the subdivisions of the psychological violence that occurs through the intentional use of power against an individual or collective to control actions, behaviours, or decisions. It can result in the development of physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social suffering of the subject (VILELA, 2009).

The psychological suffering caused by verbal aggression and work overload during the COVID-19 pandemic are mentioned by the journalists interviewed as seen in excerpts from the following testimonies:

[...] we've been talking a lot about mental health during the pandemic in all professions, and, with journalism, given the fact you're on the front line, with these aggressions [...] you end up being the most psychologically shaken and everything else. There are people who sometimes end up getting more "stressed out". Above all journalism is a bit stressful, you do it live. There are days when we are broadcasting live 6 times, I say 8 minutes, 10 minutes live, 15 minutes live, and that's for you to talk 15 minutes live about a pandemic. (Journalist 08)

[...] and suddenly, one day, when I hear someone cursing in the street, a person calling me [derogatory name of the TV station] and shouting behind me, I start to feel a very strong pain and I realize that this is stress. I sometimes start mixing up my words on air and I'm afraid to go live to do something natural that I used to do with my "eyes closed". And how do you behave in front of a radical being, who is cursing you about things that are not real, a person who starts to dismiss you without even knowing your name, just because of a microphone flag? (Journalist 04)

Socioanalysis argues the consequences of violence trigger anti-productive processes (an anti-production). This is in line with the testimonies of journalists 04 and 08. Natural and social productive powers and their forces are turned against themselves, leading them to processes of repetition or self-destruction (BAREMBLITT, 2012). An example is when the violent experience generates psychological consequences that prevent journalists from carrying out their work with more ease and pleasure.

Furthermore, verbal aggressions are a source of as much suffering as physical aggressions, due to their demeaning content and because the worker never knows if they will progress to physical violence. On the other hand, they bring additional damage due to their traumatic potency, the feeling of impotence and the suffering they imply (LANCMAN *et al.*, 2007). Examples can be seen in the testimonies of Journalists 03 and 06:

We feel it on the streets, not with physical aggression, but with a lot of verbal aggression and that somehow ends up messing a little with our mental state and we question our work a little, if we are doing a decent job or not. [...] I think verbal aggression, sometimes hurts as much as if it were physical aggression, you know? Because they end up affecting you as a human being and you as a professional, putting you in a position of questioning what you're doing, being challenged about if what you are doing is really the right thing. (Journalist 03)

[...] during this report I was doing, I was harassed several times, they interfered with our work when I was going to record, especially when I appeared with the company's microphone. It was one of the days that I stopped to rethink my profession, to think if I was really willing to do that. (Journalist 06)

Lancman *et al.* (2007) argue that the intentions of those who verbally attack can be similar to those who attack physically; to pester, criticize their projects, affect them, symbolically kill them and as such replace physical attacks. This situation is aggravated by the fact that aggressions and their consequences are disregarded and/or omitted from the definitions of accidents and work-related illnesses, as per Brazilian legislation (GOMEZ; THEDIM-COSTA, 1999). Assaults are only reported as work accidents when there are serious bodily injuries or when they cause temporary or permanent disability.

As such, underreporting of cases of violence at work can mask data, preventing the implementation of prevention policies and care for victims of aggression. In the case of verbal aggression, the situation can be even more serious, as cases are not usually reported, there is no evidence, there is a risk that it will be considered banal and without major consequences for the victim (LANCMAN *et al.*, 2007).

Fenaj (2021), in its report on violence, pointed out that, despite the significant increase in cases of verbal attacks on journalists in 2020, when compared to 2019 (the year in which there were almost 18% more cases, compared to 2020), there is probably underreporting, as many professionals do not even report the attacks.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that journalists' work routines are determined by a complex production process that begins with the perception, selection, and transformation of an event (raw material) that will result in a product – the news (TRAQUINA, 2004). The intensification of work demands during a pandemic, together with the experience of violence, directly impacts the journalist's productive daily life, the quality of the final product and, particularly, their quality of life. Above all it forces them to put their lives at risk, providing coverage in environments linked to the disease, such as hospitals, cemeteries and crowded public spaces (LUBIANCO, 2020).

Thereby, the greater the frequency of manifestations of violence against journalists, the more journalism will have its role limited by operational factors such as not being able to obtain certain important information for the constitution of the news. This may result in inaccuracy and/or distortion of facts.

Likewise, if the journalist cannot work with the necessary autonomy to question who and what should be questioned and to offer critical interpretations about the facts (RIOS; BRONOSKY, 2020), people may no longer have the necessary information available for decision-making, which can directly compromise the right to information and democracy.

In Mexico a study investigating the consequences of violence on the transparency of information surveyed 93 journalists. The authors pointed out that the main impact of aggression in journalism was self-censorship. As a result of a threat or attack, journalists were forced to eliminate certain information from their articles or, even worse, not to disclose something that could put them at risk (GONZÁLEZ; DÍAZ CERVERÓ; BARREDO-IBÁÑEZ, 2021).

Based on these considerations, Rios and Bronosky (2020) argue that, when journalism is a victim of violence, it can be said that society is also a victim, since it is through journalistic work, for example, that data transparency is stimulated, and demands are made for the actions of government officials to be brought to the public domain. It is also through journalistic work that people are able to understand the world around them (beyond their tangible horizons), understand the relationships established in society and form a basis for their own decisions.

It should be noted that current incidents of violence against journalists in Brazil are associated with disruptive political polarization, the entry of new actors who feel authorized to attack journalists and the significant context of mediatization in society, which expands direct contact between the public and the journalist (RIOS; BRONOSKY, 2020). In this regard, the journalists interviewed gave the following statements:

[...] but considering broadcaster A's relationship, with the presidency, with the federal government (2019-2022), we suffer a lot on the street with this issue of provocation [...] many interviewees citing [pejorative name of the TV station] get in the way of live broadcasts. (Journalist 01)

I believe it must be something related to the federal government (2019-2022). There is hate speech present in this, in relation to the press, especially in the mainstream media, which generates a reflection in society. If there is a speech by an authority or a politician saying "ah, this is the press, the press does that, the press is making it up, it's lying", the next day we hear things on the street. So, it's a thermometer, you see a speech by one of these authorities, the next day there's a situation on the street where you hear verbal aggression, something abusive in relation to the press. (Journalist 08)

Yes, it (aggression) intensified, yes, after the pandemic, mainly because of the political situation that we are experiencing. Unfortunately, this is the reality, as people who are in favour of the government (2019-2022) tend to be against us. So, when we are reporting, they shout [pejorative name of the TV station], and that stuck in peoples' minds, there are people who I think speak and don't even know what they're talking about and still say "ah, film me here", and people even put stickers saying this in cars, people pass with stickers cursing us. (Journalist 09)

The violence implemented by political authorities, as mentioned, revolves around the understanding of power exercised by them. From the socioanalytical perspective it is configured as a set of diversified resources with increasing degrees of violence, designed to impose the will of a social segment and its supporters, on others – for example, journalists.

According to Fenaj (2021), in 2020 there was an increase in violence against journalists and the press in general, with the current president of the republic (2019-2022) being identified as one of the main aggressors. He was responsible for 40.89% (n = 175) of the attacks, with 145 generic attacks, generalized to journalists and media outlets, 26 were cases of verbal aggression, one case was a direct threat to journalists, another was a threat to a television station, and two were attacks on Fenaj. In addition, this stance served as an incentive for supporters and staff to adopt violence against journalists as a practice.

A study carried out by Silva, Araújo and Oliveira (2021) with journalists from TV Cabo Branco, an affiliate of Rede Globo in João Pessoa (PB), also pointed to current national political polarization and specifically attacks carried out by local authorities as one of the factors that negatively impacted communication professionals' ability to develop their work. It was highlighted that the lack of organized government action

to solve the pandemic triggered a political fight, turning the press into an enemy blamed for spreading information about a lethal disease that many chose to ignore, with serious consequences for the population.

It is also worth mentioning a study carried out by Tuzzo and Temer (2021) that analysed journalistic articles involving aggression against women journalists. The research confirmed repeated incidents that did not end with the aggression itself but continued with comments from groups of supporters of the current president of the republic (2019-2022) on social networks. This, in the authors' view, is the result of a polarized society, which demonstrates that the relationship between politics and journalism in Brazil is getting more tense.

In addition to the political and socioeconomic contexts currently experienced in Brazil, new possibilities of technological communication have facilitated practices of violence against journalists, for example using social networks. Considering this, it appears that, in addition to accumulating new operational pressures within the scope of production, journalism professionals still need to seek additional means and protection strategies to carry out their professional activity safely (RIOS; BRONOSKY, 2020).

The systematization of goals (such as avoiding situations of violence), manoeuvres, viable alternatives, and necessary advances for the establishment of an intervention can be considered a strategy in Socioanalysis. In this regard, journalists presented the following arguments:

It's a company guideline, when someone starts to verbally attack us, we have to leave, because we don't know if this will develop into physical aggression. (Journalist 07)

[...] because of this [the aggression], the location of cars is no longer mapped, we no longer have identification, our identification is only on the microphone and on the camera. (Journalist 09)

There will be attacks, but then, regarding precautions, the company has given its full support for these precautions. (Journalist 10)

However, the strategies implemented by journalistic companies to reduce the violent episodes suffered by journalists still have little impact due to the complexity of the issue. According to the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists (2013), media companies need to establish security measures for journalists, including but not limited to: health care and life insurance, facilitation of safety training courses, access to social security and adequate remuneration for both full-time employees and freelancers (UNESCO, 2013).

In the macro-political context, it is necessary to think about strategies to combat violence with the creation of a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, both in conflict situations and in non-conflict situations, with the enhancement of actions that raise awareness among the public about the importance of journalists' safety and the fight against impunity (UNESCO, 2013). Brazil is one of the twelve countries in the world where perpetrators of attacks on the press often move on without being held accountable for their actions (ASSOCIAÇÃO BRASILEIRA DE IMPRENSA, 2021).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Journalists play a key role in communicating pandemics and public health emergencies, as was the case, for example, with SARS, H1N1, dengue and zika viruses. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a new challenge for journalists. The plurality of political and scientific responses, political polarization, denialism, and anti-science discourses directly affected the professional practice and safety of journalists.

Given this scenario, this study sought to understand the violence suffered by Brazilian journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic.

By listening to the experience of journalists who worked during the pandemic, it was possible to highlight the violence suffered on the streets, mainly in the form of physical and verbal aggression that caused psychological distress, work overload, and triggered anti-productive processes.

The underreporting of violence experienced by journalists is also noteworthy and points to the urgent need for media companies to establish security measures for journalists, particularly in terms of offering training to deal with conflict situations as well as offering psychological support to alleviate emotional distress.

An additional fact to be highlighted is that the pandemic crisis has added new dimensions to press freedom, characterized by the actions of the state and other authorities that seem to have used the pandemic as a pretext to silence and attack journalism and some communication companies. In Brazil, the current president of the republic (2019-2022) was singled out by journalists as one of the main aggressors, one of the promoters of attacks and debasement in relation to the informative role of the media, in addition to implementing measures that violate the right of access to information. In this way, the current Brazilian government also violates freedom of expression, which is fundamental for the practice of journalism in democratic societies.

It is hoped that this study will contribute to ensuring that violence against journalists and freedom of expression remain on the agenda after the end of the pandemic and open new perspectives for future lines of research that can improve protocols for the protection of journalists, whether they be freelancers or connected to public, private or community media.

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