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Problems Of Women Journalists In The Philippines

By

Liza B Tan
PROBLEMS OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS

IN THE PHILIPPINES

Most problems (if not all) of women journalists in my country all boil down to one cause: Their being women.

To the point of being accused of taking this report far to the edge of sexism, I firmly believe that chauvinism is still highly prevalent in a Third World country like the Philippines.

Sexual oppression persists in the rural areas, more so in the concrete jungle. Ever present in the Filipinos' way of living, politics, academe, sports, trade and even in the "glamor" business. Journalism? Yes!

Since I am not in the newspaper business as a reporter (I am a junior deskman assigned at the Business section of a morning daily), I can only write about this topic from a third person's point of view.

I interviewed several women journalists employed at the Manila Times and most of their answers to this query, "What are the problems encountered by Filipina journalists?" are all attributable to their being a member of the so-called "weaker" sex.

One female correspondent lamented the fact that women
journalists' range of possible assignments are limited or curtailed because of their superior's (mostly men) notion that women are at best assigned to beats which employ less rough-and-tumble.

Female correspondents are usually assigned to beats like entertainment, health, travel and tourism, the Malacañang Palace, city halls, education and foreign affairs. The defense, police, crime, courts (legal), sports, labor and investigative beats almost always land on men's laps.

Rarely have women like TV reporter Jessica Soho figure in a story which ran on all banners of local newspapers. (Soho covered the recently concluded military seige in a Constabulary camp in Zamboanga in Mindanao.)

"It would have been alright if they're truly deserving of such assignments. But for women's frailty to be given as an excuse for not granting a requested assignment is damn insulting," said the correspondent.

Some editors out of concern for newshens think they are doing the women a favor but most highly competent women writers resent this.

This resentment is more deeply felt by veteran female writers who, when applying for aposition in a new publishing firm, is assigned to such "feminine" beats to test her mettle for a "start".

Another dilemma faced by female reporters is the "myth" that women are easily driven by their emotions and are therefore incapable of responsible journalism. In fact, such "feminine" trait is considered the most
is considered the most basic (and therefore the most important) attribute that must be present in every reporter, male or female. Sensitivity to the public's interests, or need to know is the primary root of journalism.

And lastly, aside from the common problems of reporters, men and women alike, (like employer's conflict of interest, the usual bribes, "butchering" of stories and censorship by the advertiser), a common complaint, if not the top complaint, of female writers is sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment is also evident in almost all businesses. Whether verbal or outright sexual maneuvers, women in the newsroom and out on an assignment fall victims to such "petty" crimes.

Cases may range from conversations with sexual overtones, touching to outright asking for sexual favors by a superior in exchange for a promotion.

There have been a lot of reported cases of sexual harassment but to no avail. Such complaints (if it ever reaches top management level) are treated with indifference or plainly dismissed or worse, settled "amicably" with a mere I'm-sorry-It-won't-happen-again declaration.

Such are the problems encountered by women journalists in my country. Whether it is convincing an editor of one's exceptional abilities or turning down firmly a boss' 'invitations', women are truly strained to make a stand and be taken seriously for it.