

of Huddersfield, asked journalists why there were not enough women in the field and found aspects of the modern media climate could be hindering progress.

Professor Suzanne Franks (City) and Deirdre O'Neill (Huddersfield) published their findings in the US journal *Media Report to Women* after their previous study – conducted after the 2012 Olympic Games – showed there had been little improvement in the past decade.

The researchers interviewed top female journalists writing for UK national newspapers – including the *Guardian*, *The Sun*, *The Times*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Mail on Sunday* – and questioned them on their experiences.

Many reported that sexism was not an issue for them within modern newsrooms, with one interviewee saying there were now "fewer dinosaurs". However, it was found that most believe there are still major issues that make it difficult for women, including problems that have arisen in more recent years.

One of these issues is an increase in competition for jobs caused by shrinking newsrooms, at both national and regional publications. It was also felt that women were targets of sexist abuse online and that, in an industry where public profile and reader interactivity are increasingly important, this could put off young journalists.

Issues highlighted by interviewees included:

- Print lags behind broadcasting on progress in increasing the number of women
- The decline of both regional and national papers has increased competition for jobs
- Family life and unsociable hours disrupt careers and affect the

- roles women can take on
- Young and aspiring journalists lack role-models in [sports reporting](#)
 - Misogynist attitudes have decreased but still exist
 - Online criticism of men focuses on sporting issues, criticism of women relates to gender
 - Grass roots sports participation is lower for women than men
 - Prevalence of male-dominated football in sports news can reduce opportunities for women
 - The largely male audience of sport is linked to low numbers of female journalists
 - There is a wider lack of coverage of women's sport, where there is still severe imbalance.

The researchers suggest possible ways to address the situation, such as: employers becoming more proactive in their recruitment of women to sports writing roles and more flexible with working patterns; and universities, schools and journalists working together to promote sports journalism to young women.

Professor Suzanne Franks, Head of the Department of Journalism, said: "The number of women working on the sports desks of UK national newspapers has not improved over recent decades and this research reveals some of the reasons why.

"The workplace culture for women in sports writing appears to have now changed for the better, but it is by no means a misogynist-free environment and women feel they have to prove themselves more than men to be accepted. There are many long-standing factors, such as family commitments, but this study highlights recent issues that appear to be hampering progress in improving this imbalance.

"Our previous study following the 2012 Olympic Games showed that in

the UK, articles by [women](#) made up a maximum of 3 per cent of content on national sports pages. Looking ahead, none of the participants in our most recent study were optimistic about any significant change in numbers in the near future, concluding that it will take years before we see real progress."

More information: S. Franks et al. Women reporting sport: Still a mans game?, *Journalism* (2014). [DOI: 10.1177/1464884914561573](https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884914561573)

A sporting chance for women? Gender imbalance on the sports desks of UK national newspapers. openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/13609

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