

# Gender Disparity and Challenges for Women Journalists of Television: A Study of Odia Regional TV Channels

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**Abstract:** Within four decades the number of television channels in Odisha with linguistic medium of broadcast Odia has reached 20. But the initial two decades were solely dominated by the public broadcaster Doordarshan. In the beginning of the new millennium there was a visible momentum in the rising popularity of television channels in the linguistic and geographical territory of Odisha. After the launching of ETV Odia, Odisha's first private satellite channel a new trend was started. It was the beginning of a new era from all perspectives. A few women journalists started working in ETV Odia. Then the trend took a new shape. Now in all news channels of Odisha, a sizable number of women journalists are working. They play almost all kind of roles in the channels in different capacities. Someone is working in television means, working in 24x7 modes forever. So they are also working in shifts. In this paper the researcher tries to find out the status of women journalists working in different news channels of Odisha. Their professional challenges, involvement in the news making process and importance in the channel. In this study, the researcher makes a survey by using a questionnaire to more than 50 women journalists of the state. Along with this the researcher talks to different senior women journalists who left television in different circumstances and the who's who of the channels to get into the subject more deeply. The findings are something that compels all to think about the issue of gender disparity. Women journalists feel harassed and sidelined only because they are female.

**Key Words:** Gender disparity, Challenges of Woman Journalist, Technical difficulties, Odia television channels, Workplace challenges

## I. INTRODUCTION:

Gone are the days of most of the professional fields were male dominated. Now in almost all sectors women are playing a vital role. They are no more confined to the domestic chores, rather they are the decision makers and driving force in various sectors. Similar status is there in mass media in general and television industry in particular. Earlier the field of journalism and news rooms as well as reporting fields were completely occupied by male journalists. But the trend has changed. There are now a sizable number of women journalists working in television. Starting from field reporting to news casting, panel discussions to bulletin production, handling camera and other technical equipment to lead the channel in every section of television news channels women have created their own niche for themselves. They leave an indelible mark in the profession and become torchbearer for others. Most of the private satellite channels came to existence only after mid-nineties of the last century. But the proliferation or mushrooming of channels took place only in the new millennium. This change was not limited to the national or international level, but also it was distinctly visible at the regional level. Television is only four decades old in Odisha. And the television journalism is three decades old. Till 2002 Doordarshan Odia was the only player in the television market in Odia television. After launching of ETV Odia, a new trend started in television journalism. Now there are almost 20 different channels functioning in the state of Odisha and broadcast their content in Odia language. In last two decades women's participation in journalism also seen a sea change. The trend was set by hardly 10 women journalists in 2002 in ETV Odia. Now the number of women journalists has crossed 150 mark. Still the number is not as par with the male journalists. The researcher here tries to find out the status of women journalists working in different television channels of the state.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To understand the status of women journalists working in different news channels of Odisha.
2. To find out the problems and challenges faced by women journalists working in different news channels of Odisha.
3. To identify the gender issues and disparities in the workplace of different regional Odia news channels.
4. To understand the different roles played by women journalists in various news channels of Odisha.

## III. HYPOTHESES:

1. Regional Odia TV News channels have created avenues for the women journalists of Odisha.
2. There is no existence of any gender disparity in the television channels of Odisha so far as work assignment, responsibility and pay perks are concerned.
3. The women journalists working in various regional Odia news channels do not feel working in television is challenging.

## IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The researcher has undertaken a questionnaire based survey of women journalists of Odisha working in various news channels of the state. There are around 170 women journalists working in different television channels of the state. But the researcher has taken sample size of 50 and selected the sample from all news channels randomly. Inclusion of both open ended and close ended questions in the questionnaire helped in both quantitative and qualitative analysis of data. The researcher also did interviews of some of the Editors and top management of different Odia television channels to find out their human resource management practice for women journalists.

## V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

It is a kind of orthodox mind-set that, women cannot perform as par with men. Time and again this idea is proved wrong. With rising literacy, mass education, societal changes it has been observed that, women are working in all fields and giving their best. So far as journalism in general and television journalism in particular is concerned, women are in significant positions in almost all developed and developing nations. The world has seen the performance of women journalist in popular news networks like BBC, CNN, ABC, Indian networks like Zee Media, News18, NDTV, SUN TVs and ETV networks. The similar things have been observed in different regional language television channels. Everywhere women journalists are a major part of the team.

There has been a number of studies conducted throughout the world to ascertain the status of women journalists working in different platforms, different socio-political backgrounds and functioning in various societal conditions.

(Bhardwaj, D. 2014) in his study Status of working women journalists in India, a study of Delhi NCR reveals that, the working environment for female journalists is not very encouraging. Majority of the women journalists face problems while reporting in public places due to the indifferent attitude of the general public. The organisation where these women journalists work also do not provide adequate facility to commute. Nirbhaya case in Delhi adversely affected on prospect of women joining the journalism profession.

(Singh, N. 2016) in her study Analysing status of women journalists in Indian TV News Channels narrates that, There are still some issues like social security, physical appearance which are affecting women journalists' progressive approach. The positive responses towards the gender angle at the time of beat allocation and coverage deployment shows that positive and daring attitude of women journalists is turning the air it to a positive way.

Pakistani female journalists have fewer opportunities for training than men do in this largely male dominated field; women sexual harassment/discrimination and unfair pay have become a matter of a grave concern in media organizations. Not only this, they are publicly harassed, teased and abused in the conservative society (Hussain, MS. 2013).

### The journey so far:

Till the beginning of the year 2002, Doordarshan was the only television news source for the people of Odisha in their mother language Odia. But the practice in Doordarshan as it continues today also that the news readers in most of the regional channels are basically part timers or casual news readers. A person from any other professional back-ground can become a news reader there. The process of news reading just a mechanical one that means simply reading the teleprompter. News reader presents the lines which are already written by some news desk people like editors, bulletin producers or news editors. There is no such evidence that any woman with journalistic background or having any journalism degree opted for news reading in Doordarshan (DD-Odia) prior to 2002. But the trend changed after launching of ETV Odia on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2002. For the first time the channel recruited 8 (eight) women journalists for its news desk. Out of them one was the Bureau Chief stationed at Bhubaneswar, three were News Anchors, three Copy Editors in the desk and last one was a Panel Producer for the live bulletin production in the PCR (Production Control Room) stationed at the News Centre, Ramoji Film City, Hyderabad. For the first time women from Odisha ventured out of their home state to work in the field of Television Journalism. These all women journalists were Post-Graduates in Journalism and Mass Communication. This was not the end, as ETV Odia was an infotainment channel, so for its entertainment division it also recruited six women employees with professional journalism degree. Some of them have left the field after working for more than a decade and others are still working in television. In true sense these women journalist are the trendsetters for other aspiring women journalists.

In subsequent years a number of women journalists joined ETV Odia. Some of them as anchor and reporters became face of the channel. A sense of serious professionalism was clearly visible from their style of work and functioning. Their role was not confined to any one field of television journalism. Rather they have worked in almost all sections of the television station. Starting from Copy Editing to graphic designing, News anchoring to Bulletin production, handling PCR to other technical equipment like online switcher/vision mixer and audio console, handling camera to field reporting everything they do. In last two decades the number of Odia channels has reached almost 20. Out of which 8 are news channels.

The inspiring and success story of ETV Odia encouraged the launch of OTV, another private satellite channel in 2006. Initially it was also an infotainment channel. But later it converted to a 24x7 News channel. Prior to becoming a satellite channel, OTV was a cable channel and its operations were confined to the twin city of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack only. The success saga of OTV added fillip to the lunch of multiple channels in the state. Below mentioned are the list of channels which have started their operation in the state after 2006.

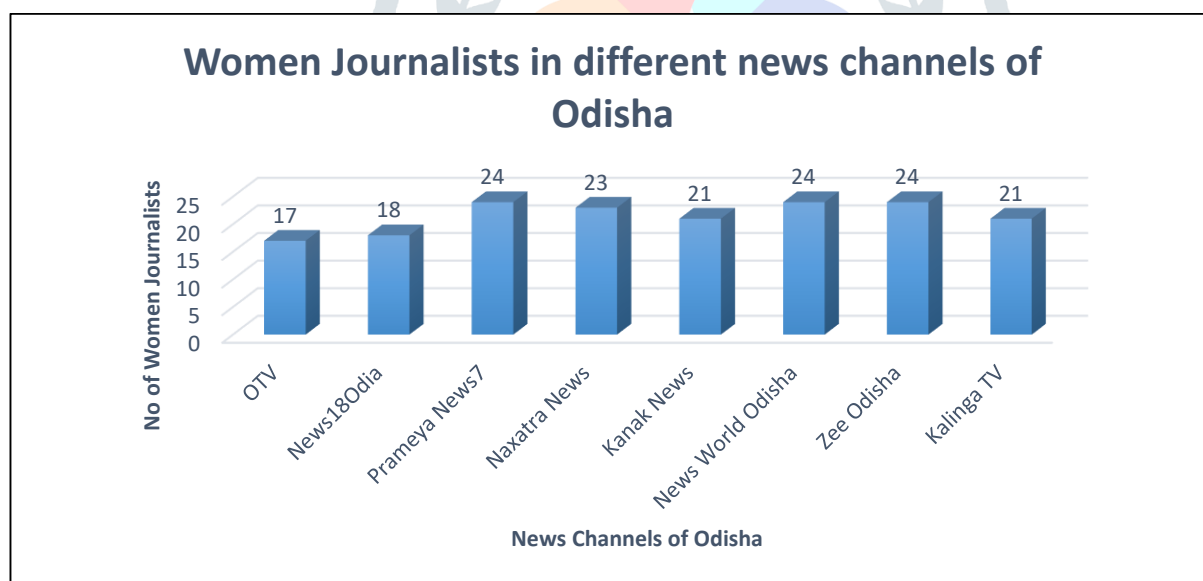
1. Naxatra News (24x7 News Channel)
2. Kanak TV (24x7 News Channel)
3. Kamyab TV (Infotainment Channel)
4. Sarthak TV/Zee Sarthak (GEC)
5. Taranga TV (GEC)
6. Lakshya TV (GEC)
7. Taranga Music (Music Channel)
8. Prarthana TV (Devotional Programme Channel)
9. MBC TV (Infotainment Channel)
10. STV Samachar (2011 to 2013)
11. Zee Kalinga News/ Zee Odisha (24x7 News Channel)
12. Focus Odisha TV (24x7 News Channel)
13. News World Odisha (24x7 News Channel)
14. ETV News Odia (24x7 News Channel)

15. News18 Odia (24x7 News Channel)
16. ColorsOdia (GEC)
17. Alankar TV (GEC)
18. Prameya News7 (24x7 News Channel)
19. Kalinga TV (24x7 News Channel)
20. Mu Odisha TV (GEC)

In the above mentioned 8 news channels (presently functioning) the number of women journalists is 172. They are now working in almost all sections of different channels. The cinematography or videography work which was once confined to male members only are now shared by female cinematographers. Similarly in field reporting also women are actively taking part in the process. They are now doing technical and non-technical work without any hesitation. In this process of women participation in television journalism we can say there is a paradigm shift. The stereotypes have been changed and also the perception of women working in media.

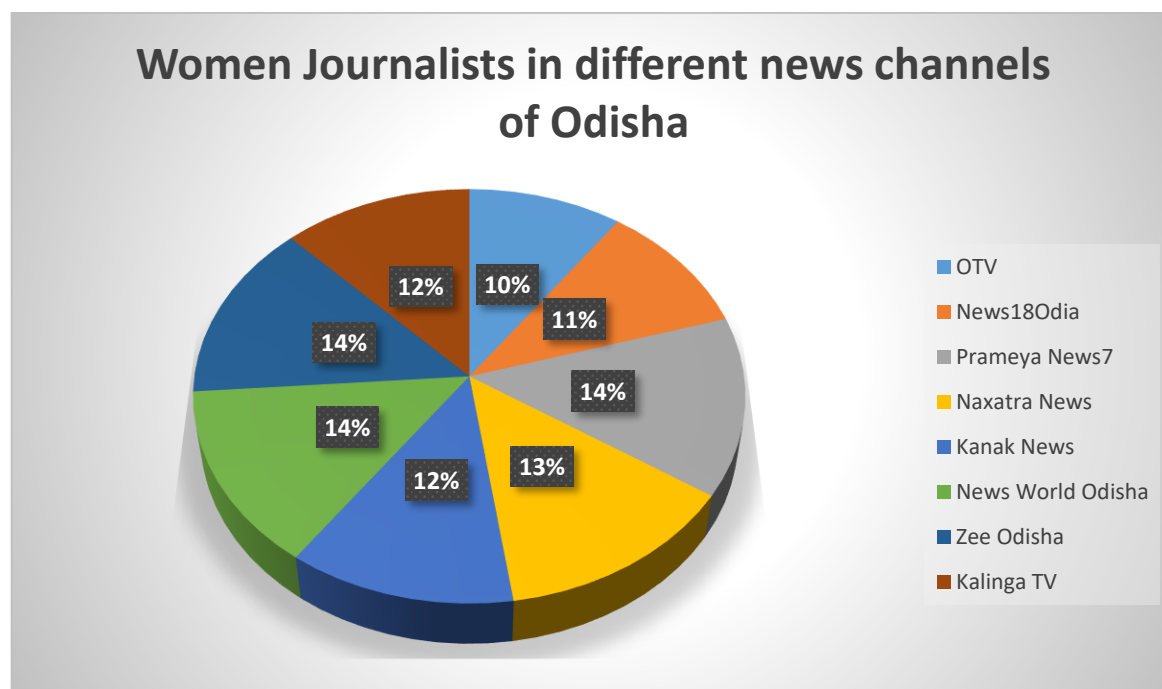
## VI. DATA ANALYSIS:

The researcher has taken a sample size of 50 which include representatives from all news channels of Odisha as well as those who left television for different reasons. Not only this, the researcher has also tried to get feedback from women journalists working in different sections of television. The respondents' designations include News Anchor, Assistant Producer, Associate Producer, Bulletin Producer, Copy Editor, Senior Producer, Senior Copy Editor, Production Executive, Video Editor, Graphics Designer, Panel Producer, Reporter and Bureau Chief. Basing on the feedback of these women journalists on questionnaire based survey the data are analysed here.

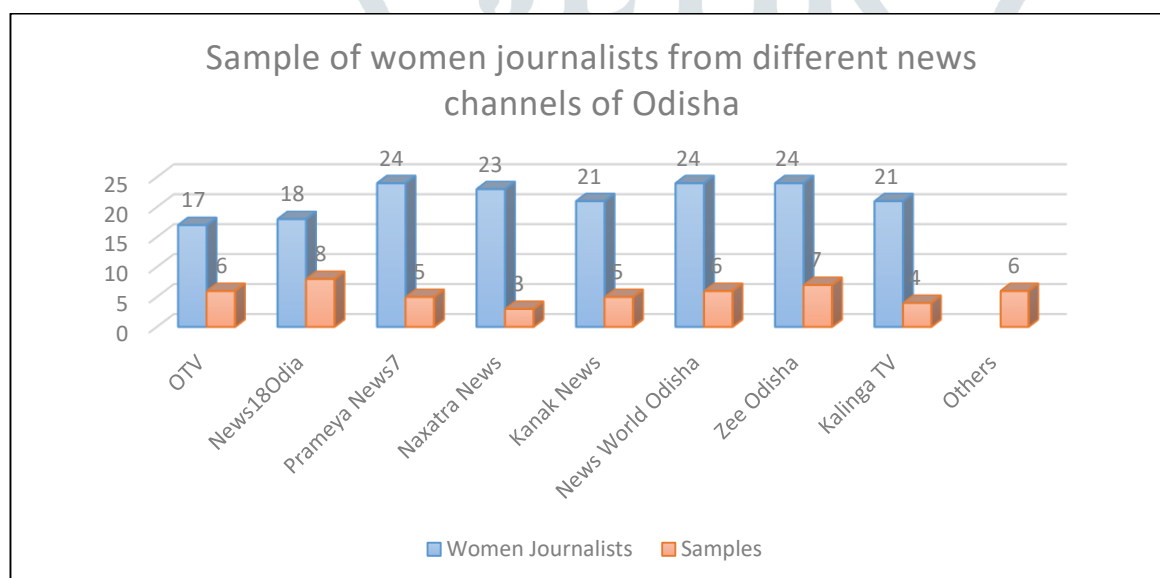


(Figure-1: Women journalists in different news channels of Odisha)

In 8 different news channels of Odisha there are 172 women journalists who have got employment. Prameya News7, News World Odisha and Zee Odisha have highest 24 women journalists each. Next Naxatra News channel has 23 women journalists and Kalinga TV and Kanak News have 21 women journalists each. News18 Odia has 18 and OTV has 17 women journalists (Figure-1). So far as the share of women journalists are concerned (Figure-2) Prameya News7, News World Odisha and Zee Odisha have highest 14% each, Naxatra News channels has 13% and Kalinga TV and Kanak News have 12% each. News18 Odia has 11% and OTV has 10% women journalists of all news channels.

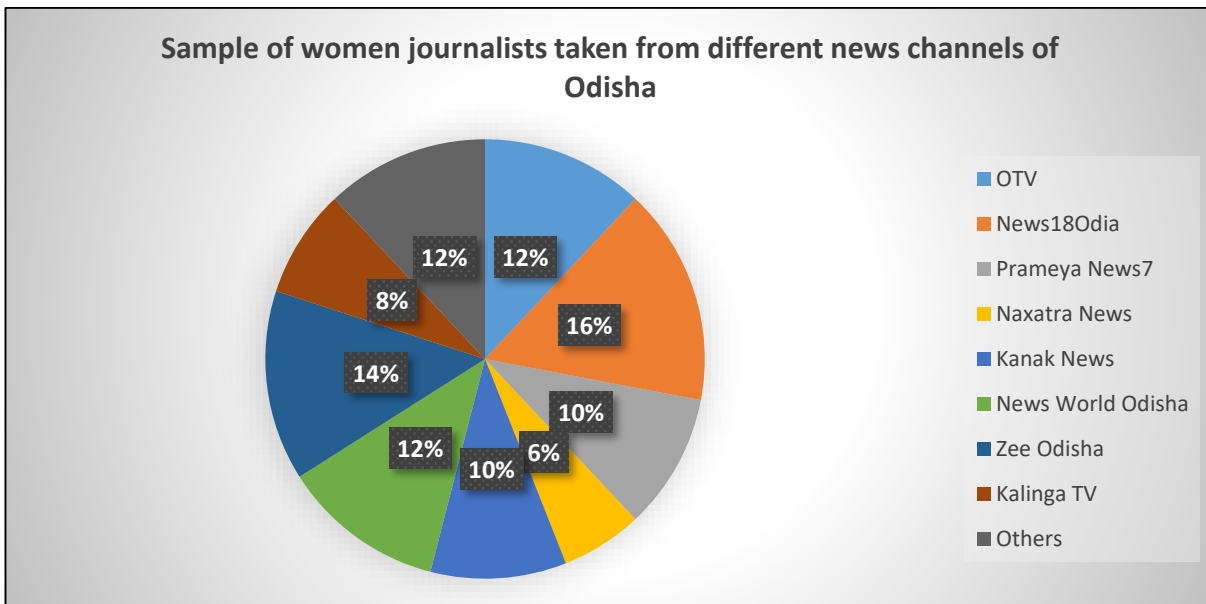


(Figure-2: Share of women journalists in different news channels of Odisha)

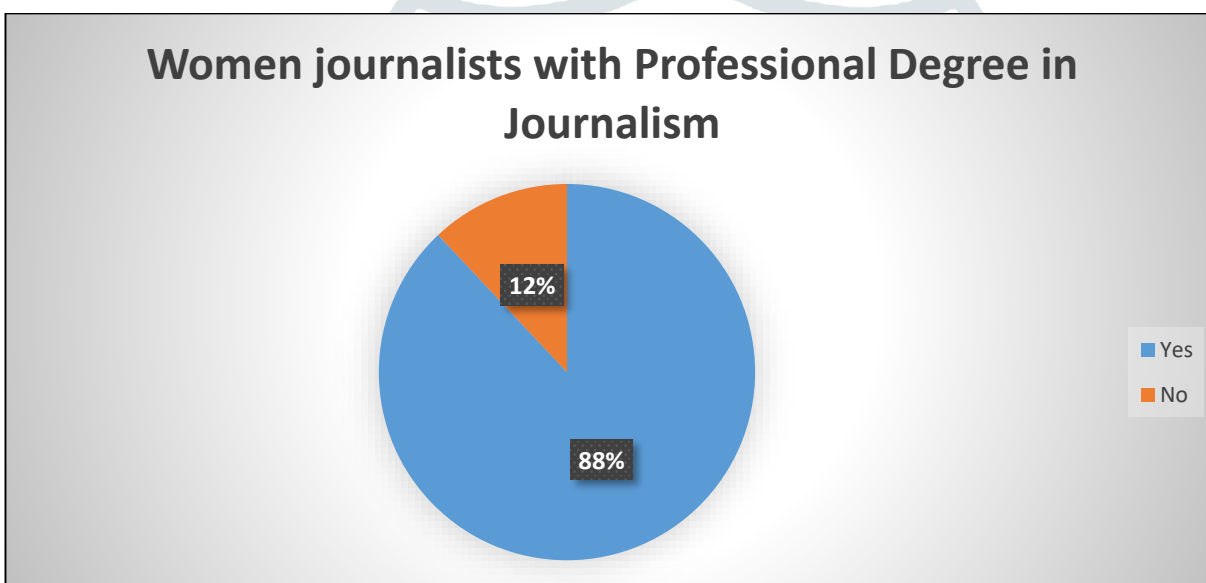


(Figure-3: Sample of Women journalists taken for the study)

The researcher has taken a total sample of 50 women journalists for this study. The (Figure-3) represents the number of samples taken from different news channels and share of the sample is concerned (Figure-4) the researcher has taken 16% from News18 Odia, 14% from Zee Odisha, 12% each from OTV and News World Odisha, 10% each from Kanak News and Prameya News7, 8% from Kalinga TV and 6% from Naxatra News channel. Along with this the researcher has taken 12% respondents from “others” category that means the respondents are women journalists those who have left television for other profession or engagement.

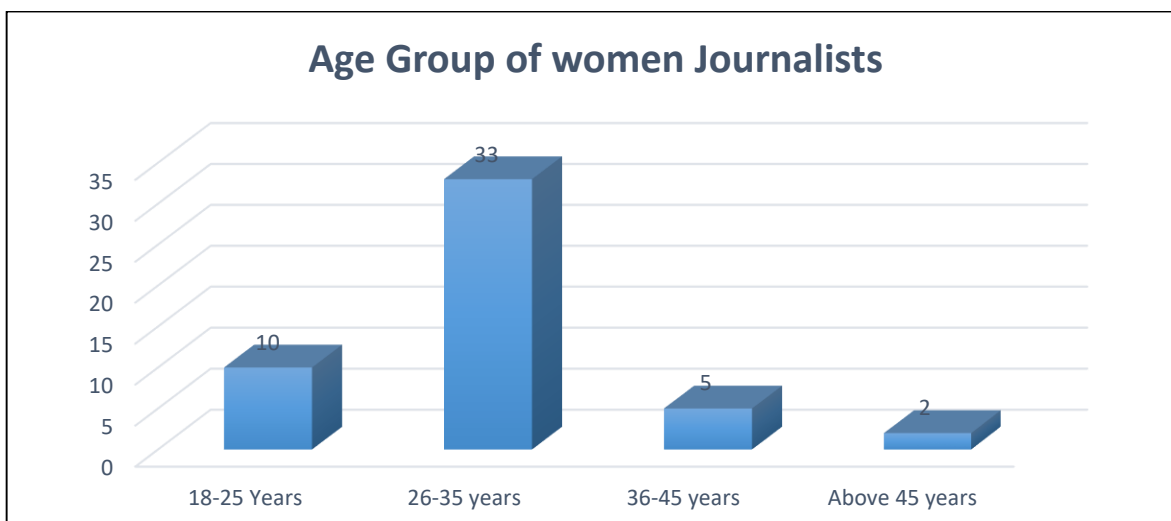


(Figure-4: Share of Sample of Women journalists taken for the study)



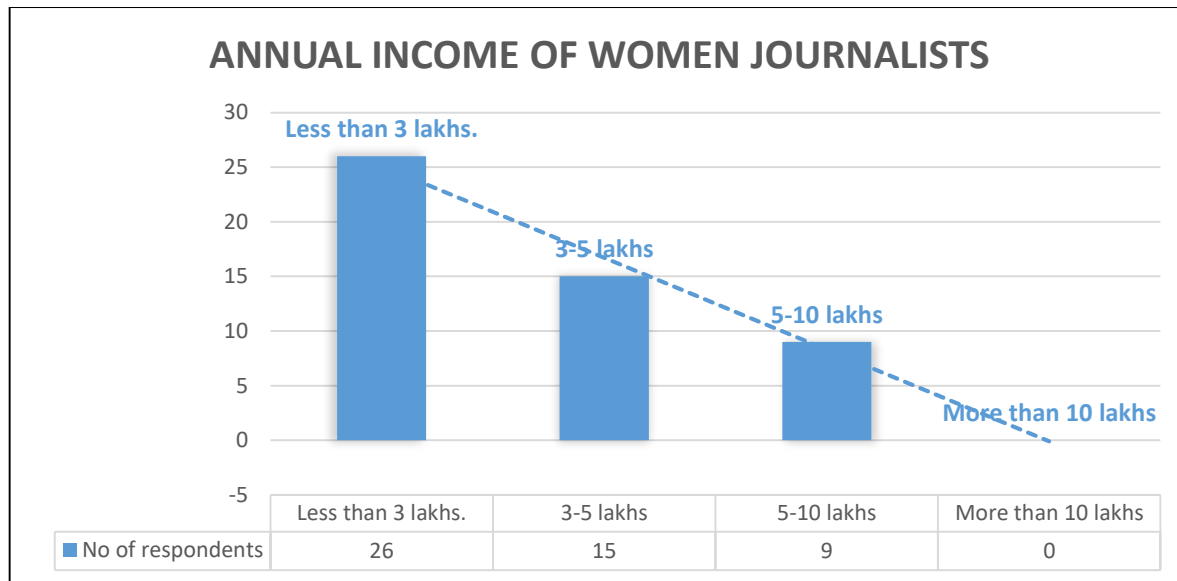
(Figure-5: Women journalists with professional journalism degree)

It is a matter of satisfaction that (Figure-5) 88% of total respondents are having a professional degree in journalism and after that learning only they entered into the profession, whereas 12% do not have professional journalism degree, but they are working in television. Those who are not having degree in journalism, they are mostly working as cinematographer/camera person, video editor or graphic designers.



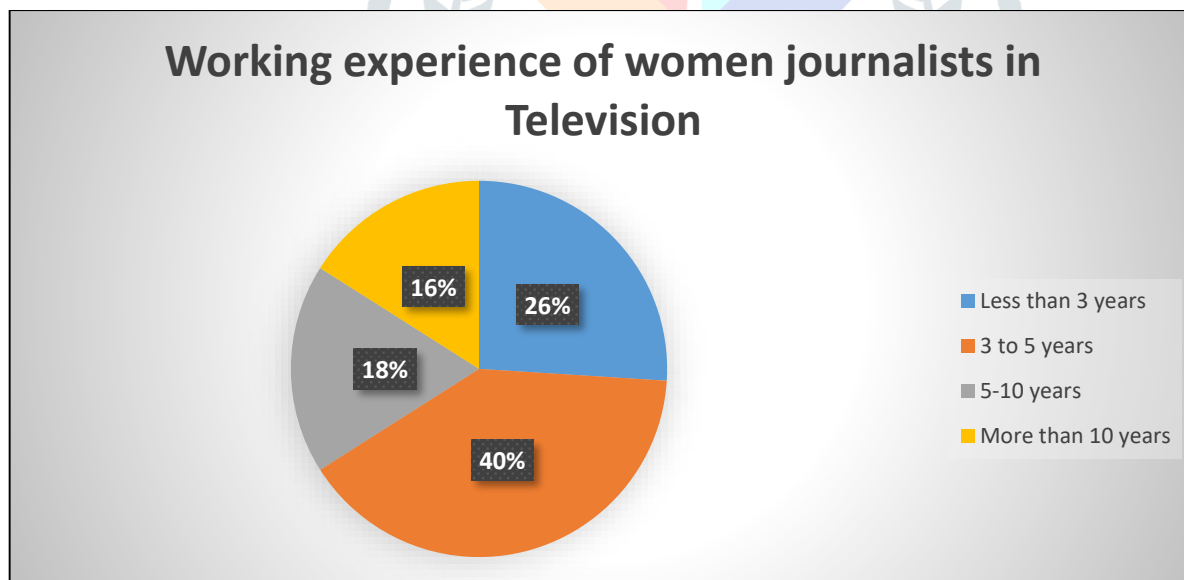
(Figure-6: Age group of women journalists)

Out of total 50 respondents 33 women journalists are from 26-35 years age group. Their percentage is 66%. (Figure-6) Similarly youngest women journalists are from the the age group 18-25 years and their number is 10 and share is 20%. In 36-45 years age group there are 5 respondents and share is 10% and the number in above 45 years age group is only 2 which is 4% of the total respondents. It indicates that there are very few women who work in television after attaining 45 years of age.



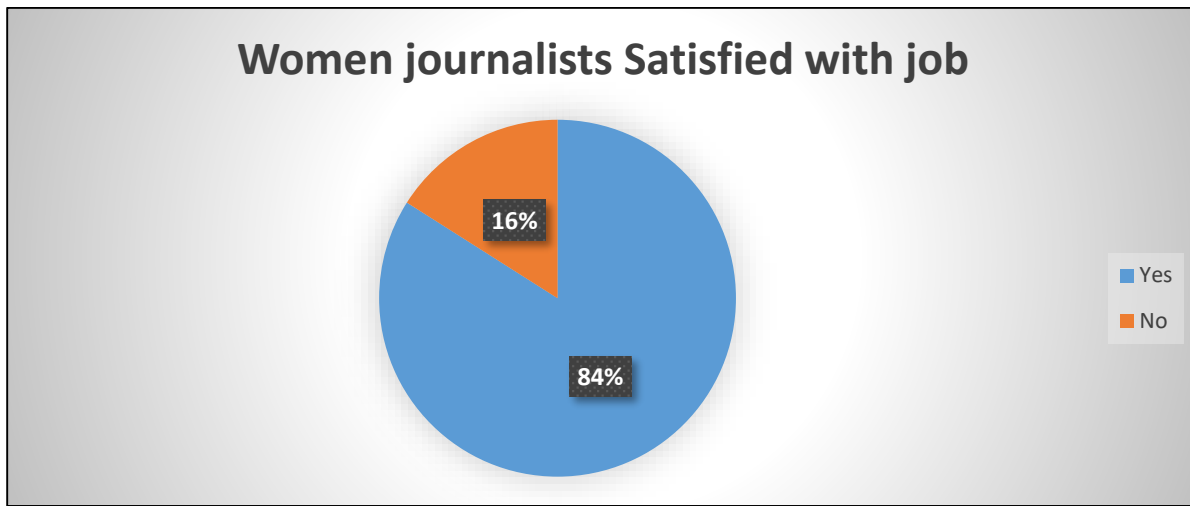
(Figure-7: Annual income of Women journalists taken for the study)

The (Figure-7) clearly shows that maximum respondents get less than 3 lakh rupees annual salary. Their number is 26 and share is 52%. The second highest women journalists get 3-5 lakhs rupees annual pay and their number is 15 and share is 30%. In the 5-10 lakhs annual income category only 18% women journalists are there. Most important point is that, there is not a single respondent whose annual pay package is more than 10 lakhs rupees.



(Figure-8: Working experience of Women journalists taken for the study)

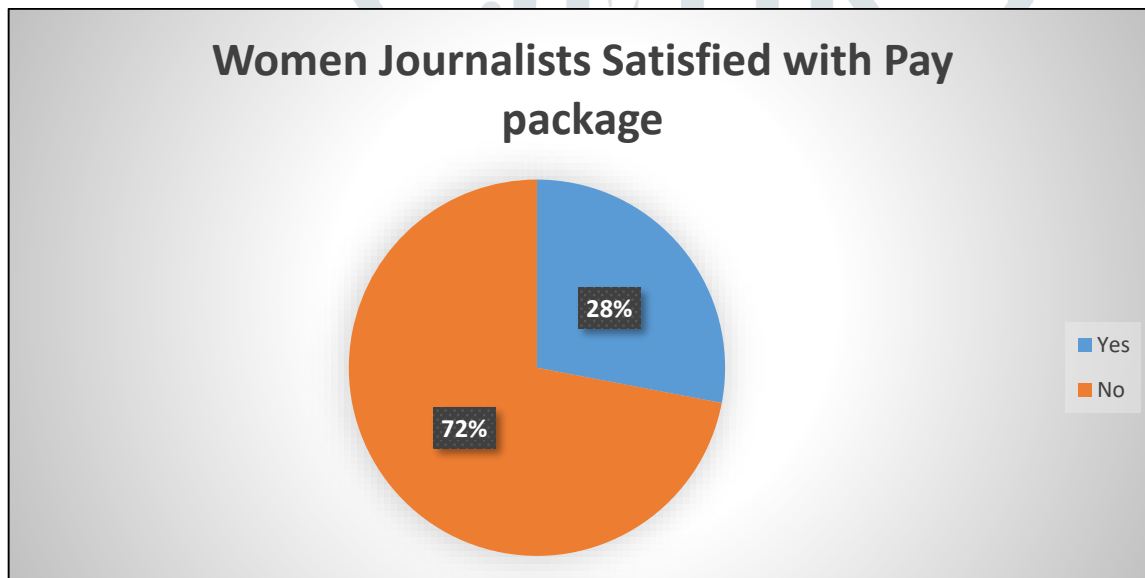
Off course the annual pay package varies from one journalists to the other, but so far as the working experience of women journalists are taken into consideration (Figure-8), the 26% of respondents are having less than 3 years working experience. 40% respondents have 3-5 years of experience. 18% of them have worked for 5-10 years in television. 16% of respondents are having more than 10 years of working experience in television.



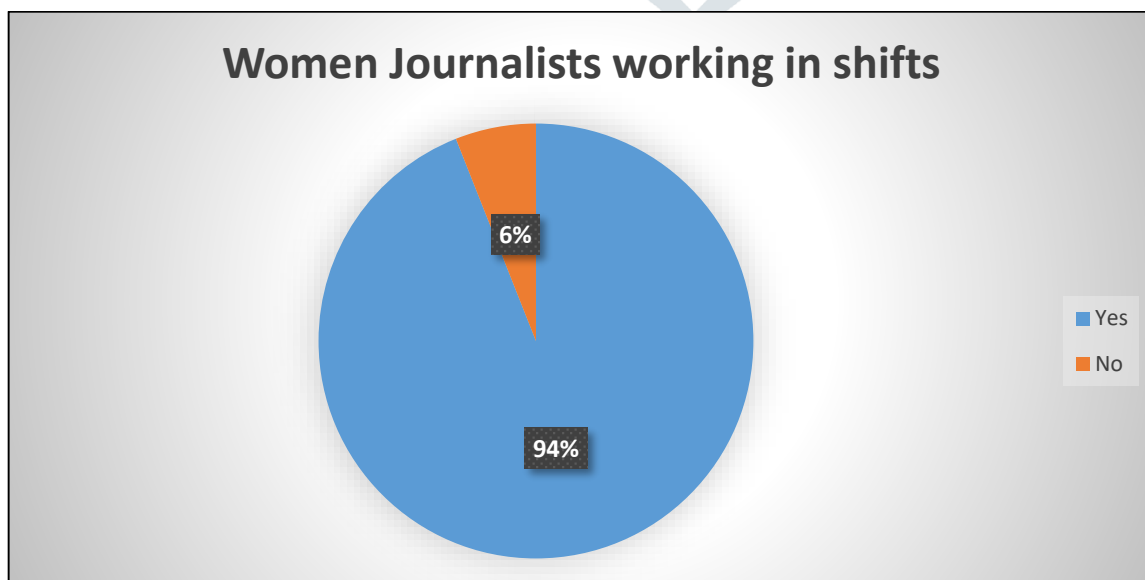
(Figure-9: Job

satisfaction of Women journalists)

As the women journalists are asked about their job satisfaction in television journalism (Figure-9) majority of them said yes, they are satisfied with their job. 84% respondents are satisfied and 16% respondents are not satisfied with their job in television. But so far as satisfaction with the pay package is concerned (Figure-10), almost of 3/4<sup>th</sup> of them are completely dissatisfied with the annual pay package. 72% respondents say, they are not satisfied with their salary whereas 28% women journalists are satisfied with their annual pay package.



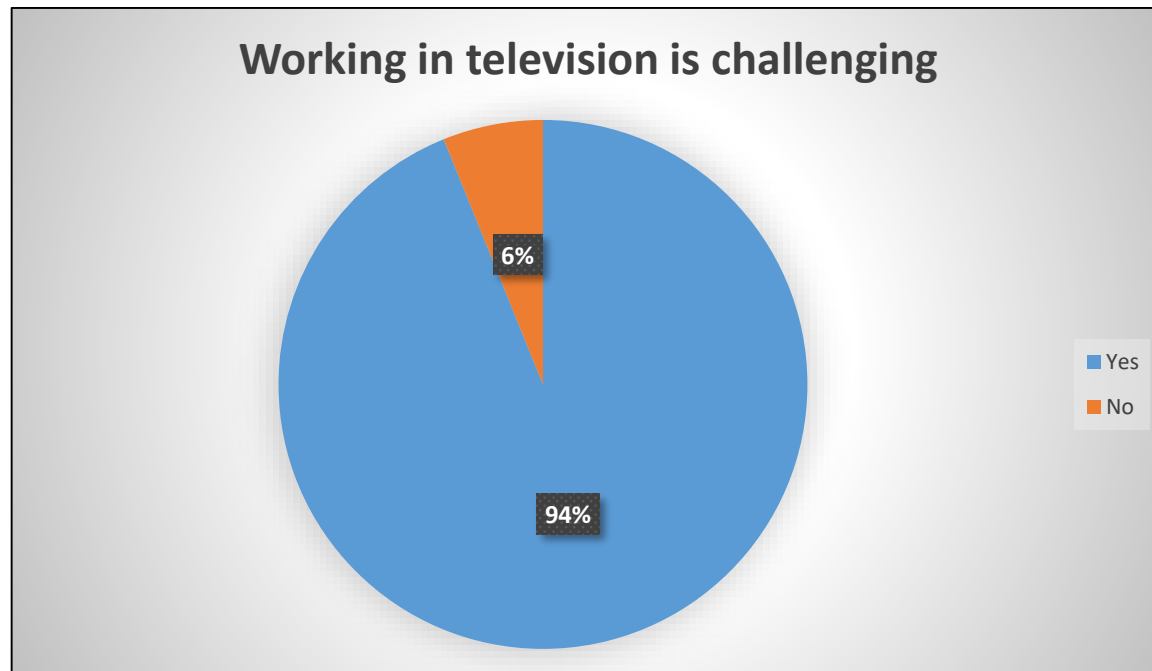
(Figure-10: Satisfaction of Women journalists on the basis of pay perks)



(Figure-11: Women journalists working in shifts)

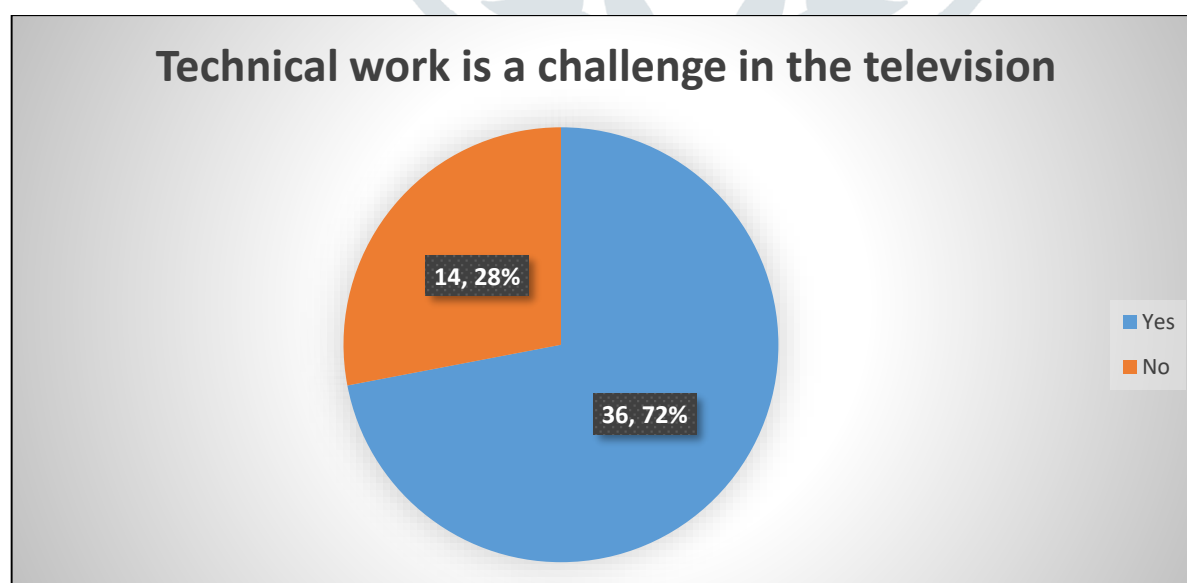


Television news channels operate in 24x7 modes. So it is the need of the profession for the journalists to work in round the clock shifts. Basically channels design their shifts into 3 basic shifts with 8 and half hours each. 30 minutes are overlapping in the transition for smooth handover of information, work assignment and pending projects to the next shifts. In this study the researcher tried to know (Figure-11) whether the women journalists of Odisha work in shifts. And the answer is yes, 94% of women journalists are working in shifts. Only a negligible percentage i.e. 6% of them is not working in shifts, means their working timing is fixed.



(Figure-12: Women journalists feel working in television is challenging)

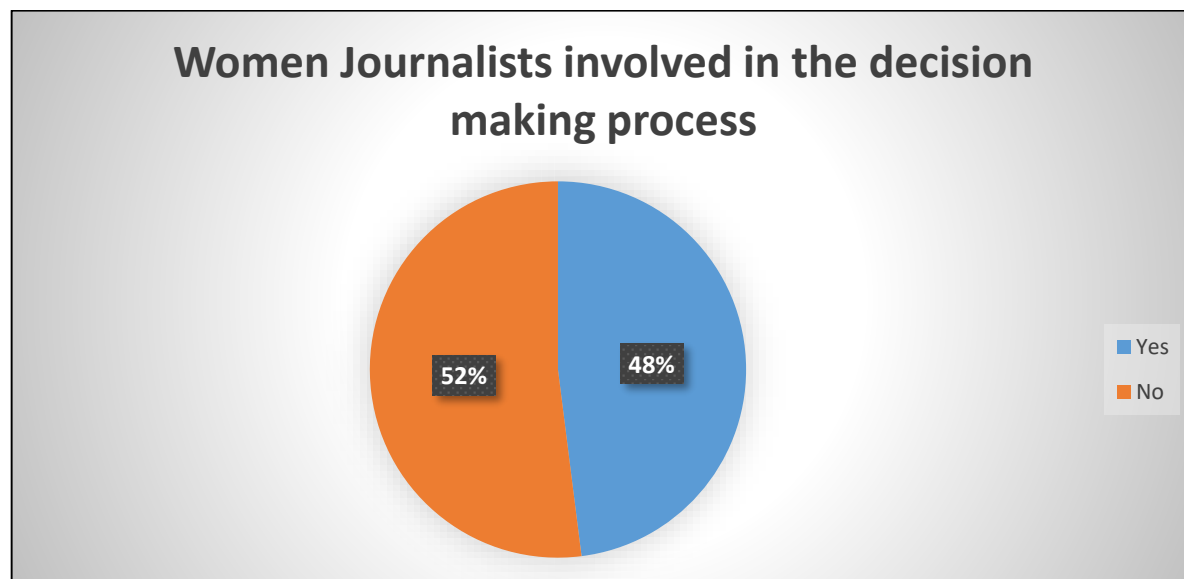
The most important thing is that, (Figure-12) a majority of respondents whose share is 94% say that, working in television is challenging. Whereas 6% respondents feel that working in television is not challenging. On the other hand, (Figure-13) out of the total respondents 72% say, technical work is a challenge in television. But, 28% percent respondents feel technical work in television is not challenging.



(Figure-13: Women journalists feel technical work in television is a challenge)

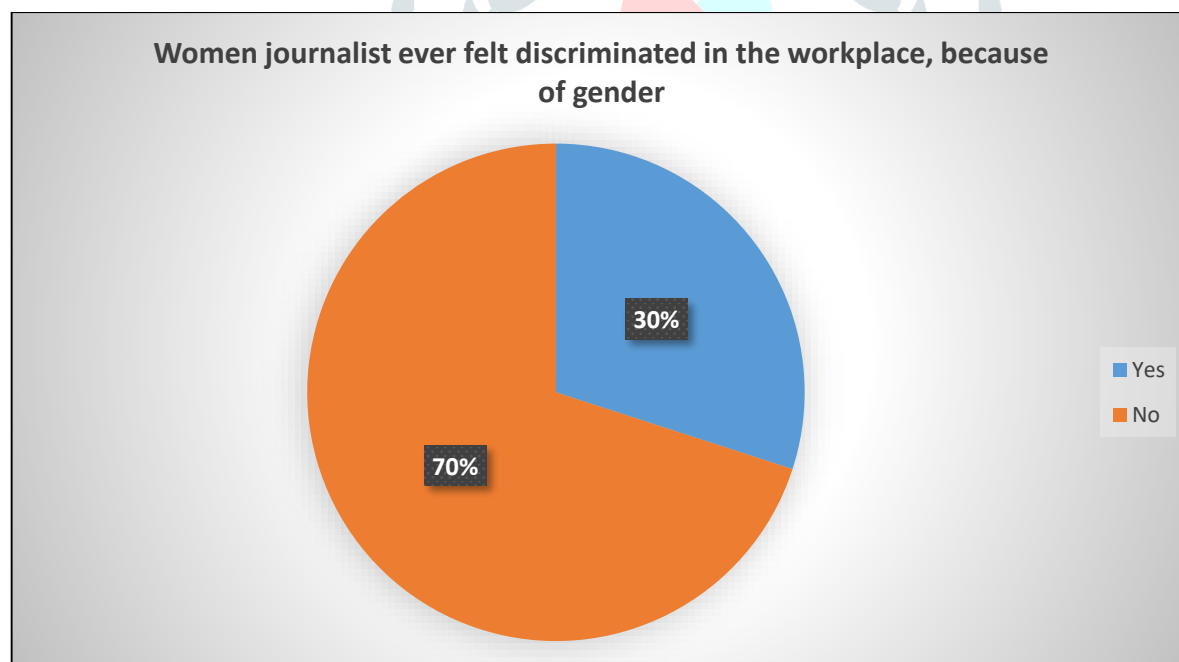
When working in the newsroom, it is always crucial for the journalist to take instant decisions in television, because every second is a deadline in television. Whereas in the decision making process whether the women journalists are given their due share or are they involved, the answer is almost 50/50.

(Figure-14) It is found from this study that, 48% respondents are involved in decision making process. On the other side there are 52% respondents who are never a part of decision making process.



(Figure-14: Women journalists involved in the decision making process)

The most crucial part of this study is the finding of gender discrimination in the news channels. (Figure-15) Though 70% of respondents say, they are never discriminated in the workplace because of their gender, but 30% of respondents say, yes, they felt discriminated in the workplace because they are women.



(Figure-15: Women journalists feel discriminated for their gender)

In the open-ended question the researcher tried to know the opinion of women journalists working in television about what challenges they are facing in their work place. The answers are quite interesting. Under the conditions of anonymity, the respondents have shared their feelings. The researcher puts some selected opinions here.

### The challenges faced by women journalists:

Here are some of the quoted opinions of women journalists about their challenges in the workplace.

One respondent says, "As a producer the total bulletin is my responsibility. Sometimes there is no new news. And I have to make my bulletin interesting. So how to pack old wine in a new bottle and make the bulletin more attractive is a challenge." Another respondent says, "I have faced many challenges in my working period. The biggest challenge is handling the breaking news, particularly, when a number of stories land at a time that becomes difficult to carry in the bulletin."

One interesting opinion of a respondent is, "In my work as a bulletin producer I'm passionate about helping my team members. The toughest challenge is working with patient under work pressure. Over the past 5 years, I have learnt lots of thing and it is going to continue. Learning new things is always a challenge for me. But with my sincere efforts, hard works I make them look easy and simpler. In my job everyday writing a variety of Package is a big challenge." Another respondent feels that, "This is a challenging job, but not getting an off day when needed is a big challenge." One respondent says, "Leg pulling, Less cooperation in workplace is a challenge; Salary is the biggest cause of dissatisfaction."

A woman reporter says, "Working in the scorching heat in the field is always tough." Another reporter says, "I still feel women are not given what they deserve, in terms of job profile or salary as compared to men. Especially when it comes to political news women involvement is very less." A woman reporter opined that, "I love challenges, but sometimes it is hard to report public agitation. Safety is another major concern for women."

Women newscasters or anchors give a different opinion. One news anchor says, "Sometimes you have to be very careful while delivering. To be confident of what you speak, whom to speak, when to speak very keenly." Another anchor says, "You may be very talented but, it is very tough to prove yourself just because you are a woman journalist. Everybody thinks that girls are just glamour face, nothing else." Some others say, "Media persons are not given proper freedom of speech." Similarly one opined that, "Poor equipment or old equipment that are used in a live show, which often leads to on air blunders." Another newscaster opined that, "When you have breaking news and you are in live and all of a sudden you need to elaborate that for hours and hours. And don't get a scope for preparation. That is challenging." For some newscasters time management is a challenge. One says that, "There are challenges in every field. In media there is intense competition in the industry to be the best. Those who can rise to the challenge will progress. The main challenge is always ready for first news delivery. We want to give correct and worthy news in right time." Another says, "We do not get off on holidays and festivals. One these days we work more. It is really tough." Some women journalists feel that, managing different kind of people is always a challenge.

One women journalist opined that, "We face different type of discrimination on the basis of physical appearance, age, during pregnancy and motherhood etc. Female journalists face unreasonable treatment, harassment by male colleagues and job insecurity as the common reason that makes them to give up the profession. There is no promotion and career advancement also." For some odd working hours is a hindrance on the path.

"Most of the time people think women don't work perfectly. They think that women can't handle things as men do. It is quite often that women are not allowed to the decision making groups and they are also not allowed to participate in official meetings. Most of the time people use wrong words, comments for a woman. Even women face molestation, mental n physical torture in the workplace. There are lots of things women face even I face being a woman" opined one woman journalist of a news channel. In a similar fashion replied another woman journalist from another channel that, "Challenges are many, but most important hindrance is the preoccupied thought of employer, that you are a woman. In most of the cases only beautiful female colleagues are preferred."

A woman journalist from a channel says that, "The most challenging part of a woman journalist is continuing the work. Direct or indirect form of informal and indecent behaviour in work place breaks the mental peace. No appreciation makes the employee less creative. The low pay package gradually kills the passion too. The worst thing in the work place for me is indecent behaviour of colleagues or manager. That gets really hard to take in mind and face them on a regular basis."

### **The reason behind leaving Television journalism:**

On the other hand the researcher took 6 women journalists who left television journalism for various reasons. It was necessary to know their opinion about the challenges they faced during their engagement with television and to know the reasons that made them quit television journalism.

The first well known woman journalist of Odia television journalism left television and joined politics. Now she is the spokesperson of a leading political party of the state of Odisha. She says that, "For social service I left television. It was always my passion to work in television. I have enjoyed working there for decades."

One of the senior most newscaster who worked for more than 12 years in television left the regular job and working as a freelancer. She says, "I was appointed as the Anchor Head of the news channel. My position and responsibility was only on papers. I was not allowed to take any decision on anchors and even not allowed to make the anchor's roster. It was done by HR."

Another woman journalist who worked more than 6 years in television desk and field is now an administrator in Government of Odisha. She says, "Under constant pressure of meeting the deadline, to keep the sap of innovation and creativity oozing every time, maintaining work life balance particularly for working mothers was a challenge. This was the personal reason of me leaving television journalism."

Another woman journalist opined that, "Leaving a job for a new opportunity is very common. But, motherhood is a big deal. The day I found out I was going to become a mom, I quit my job."

One lady reporter who left television and now leading her life as a house wife says that, "My personal life hampered, so I decided to leave television journalism for my family issues. I had to give time to my family. It was difficult for a work life balance."

### **Channel Authorities' Remarks:**

In order to get the feedback from the channel authorities the researched talked to some of the Editors and senior editorial members of different news channels. Most of them say that, as per the channel's HR policy, the safety of women journalists/employees is always the priority. There is no such discrimination of women in any occasion or platform. Rather they (women journalists) get more freedom and support from the management. Along with maternity leaves all other facilities are provided to them. So far as leadership assignment is concerned, there are women journalists who take proactive part in the channel activities and are given higher responsibilities. But yes, there are some women journalists who are not good at technical skills. That is the reason they feel shy and keep themselves alienated. This is not the end; we provide late night pick-up and dropping facilities to women employees. We have designated committees and cells to address POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) related complaints.

## **VII. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION:**

No women journalist working in television is getting more than 10 lakhs annual payment. This might be the reason that, not a single women journalist leading any of the Odia news channels in the state of Odisha. The researcher has verified and cross-checked with the channel authorities of different news channels of the state and found that not a single woman journalist in the state is having designation of Editor or Editor-in-Chief in Odisha. Even if 16% of respondents (women journalists) are having more than 10 years of experience, their pay perk is not more than 10 lakhs annually.

In this study it has been found that, majority of women journalists feel working in television is challenging and more than 70% feel that technical work in television is a challenge. This could be the reason of the women journalists not getting more salaries as they expect. Similarly power always comes with responsibility and accountability. It has been found in this study that, Less than 50% women journalists are involved in decision making process, so they may not be in a condition to take responsibility.

Findings of this study fulfil all the objectives of the study. The educational, economic status, working experience and professional status of women journalists working in television are clearly visible from the data. The problems and challenges they face are clear. Similarly what kind of role they play in a television news channel is also evident from their designations and responsibilities. It has also been found that, there exists the gender discrimination in the news channels of Odisha.

In last two decades the number of women journalists working in television has increased from 8 to 172. This clearly proves that, these rising number of channels have created avenues for the women journalists of the state. Thus the first hypothesis is proved true. The number of news channels reached from 1 to 8. On the other hand the number of women journalists has increased 21 times. But as the researcher has presumed in the second hypothesis that, there does not exist any gender discrimination in the television news channels. It is proved false. Though the percentage is 30 only who say they felt discriminated in the work place because they are women. This is definitely a serious issue, because media advocates for gender equality in the society and country. But if it is not practiced in media itself, then it is a paradox. Besides this, the researcher presumed that, women journalists do not feel working in television challenging. It is proved completely false. Because 94% of women journalist respondents feel working in television is challenging.

So it can be concluded that there should be proper mechanism to arrest the issues of gender discrimination in the workplace for the women journalists in television. Issues like workplace harassment, inappropriate behaviour must be addressed. There should be special orientation for skill development of women journalists. This will help in eradicating the fear of women journalists about the technical challenges in television. Channel authorities should device mechanism to address any kind of disparity in pay perks, promotions and capacity building of women journalists. As the television market is not saturated in India and almost 50% of the rural market is yet to be discovered by television channels, it is obvious that, there will be demand for television for next few decades. So, there is always enough opportunities for woman journalists. Just they have to make themselves well equipped and skilled to be a part of television journalism industry. With personal interest, proactive approach and good skill sets they can gauge new heights.

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