

Women in Journalism

The Situation in Iceland

Valgerður Jóhannsdóttir

Abstract

More and more women have entered journalism in the last 20-30 years and they outnumber men in journalism education by far. Women are though still under 40% of members of the two Icelandic union of journalists and few women hold top positions in media organisations. Media companies were badly hit in the financial crash in 2008 and many journalists lost their job. No research has been done on the effect this has had on women and men in journalism, but data from the membership registration of the journalist unions indicates that proportionally more women than men were laid off or left the profession in the years after the crash.

Keywords: gender, journalism, news, women journalists, Icelandic media

Introduktion

More and more women have entered journalism in the last 20-30 years, and they outnumber men in journalism education by far. Still, however, women account for less than 40% of the members of the two Icelandic journalists unions, and few women hold top positions in media organisations. Media companies were badly hit during the financial crisis in 2008 and many journalists lost their job. No research has been done on the effect of this on women and men in journalism, but data from the membership registration of the journalist unions seems to indicate that proportionally more women than men were laid off or left the profession in the years after the crash. The number of women entering the journalism profession seems to have plateaued after continuous growth in the past decades, but there are also positive signs as the heads of the biggest media companies have pledged to prioritise equality in their media.

The Icelandic news media landscape is characterised by more diversity than might be expected in a country of 320,000 inhabitants. Behind this diversity, however, is a fragile situation. Like in other Western countries, the traditional media sector in Iceland has gone through big changes since the turn of the century. The digital revolution has had profound effects, commercialisation has increased, competition is tougher and media ownership more concentrated (Karlsson 2009). Traditional media consumption has been on the decline for many years, measured in average viewing of evening TV news and average reading of daily newspapers. In addition, media companies were badly hit during the unprecedented financial crisis in 2008, when for example around one-third of all journalists were laid off. The four biggest news media companies are RÚV, the national

public broadcasting company, with two radio channels, one television channel and a website; the 365 Media conglomerate, which runs several television and radio channels, a free newspaper and a news site; Árvakur, publisher of the daily paper *Morgunblaðið* and the most read online news site in the country; and Vefpressan, which runs several websites and recently acquired the tabloid *DV*. There are several local papers and news websites, but local media has always been weak in Iceland (Harðarson 2008). News sites, independent of the old, traditional media, also play an increasingly prominent part in the provision of daily news. Journalists working in private media are members of the Union of Icelandic Journalists (Blaðamannafélag Íslands, BÍ), and news journalists at RÚV belong to the Society of Broadcast Journalists (Félag fréttamanna, FF).

Gender and Media

Research on gender and media in Iceland is rather limited and somewhat fragmented, not least when it comes to gender in journalism. To date, most of the research has focused on the portrayal of women and men in media content. This article focuses on those who work as journalists, and will only give a brief overview of the research on gender in media content.

The first research on gender representation in the media was presented in 1990 (Jónsdóttir 1990). The findings showed that in the first five years of Icelandic TV news, no women were ever interviewed. They slowly started to appear in 1970, and in 1986 women accounted for 13% of those interviewed in the TV news.

In 2001 the Committee on Women and Media (Nefnd um konur og fjölmiðla) appointed by the Ministry of Culture published a report on the gender situation in Icelandic media. The main findings were that women were grossly underrepresented in all kinds of media content, TV programmes, films, articles, advertisements and news (Nefnd um konur og fjölmiðla 2001). This was also the case in 2009 when Iceland participated for the first time in the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP). As part of this project, news in the main news media was monitored and analysed on 9 November 2009 using the methodology provided by the GMMP study (Global Media Monitoring Project 2010). Women accounted for 28 per cent of all news subjects, which was above the overall average in the study of 24 per cent but lower than in the other Nordic countries (Árnadóttir, Jóhannsdóttir & Einarsdóttir 2010).

The 2001 report noted that “the 30/70 rule” persisted throughout all media and media content. Women were almost never more than 30 per cent of those producing media content or the subjects of or sources in media content (Nefnd um konur og fjölmiðla 2001). Today more than a decade later, little has changed. The latest example can be found in a report by the MediaWatch Company for the Association of Women Business Leaders in Iceland (Félag kvenna ívatvinnurekstri), published in December 2013. The report looked at women and men interviewed in broadcast news and current affairs programmes from February 2009 to August 2013. Over 100 000 people were interviewed and 30 per cent of them were women. Women were more likely to appear in current affairs programmes than in news. Over the almost five year period, their share grew from 30 to 35 per cent in programmes yet was 26-28 per cent in the news (Félag kvenna ívatvinnurekstri, n.d.).

Women and Men as Journalists

Women journalists were rare in Icelandic media until the late 20th century. An article in a popular weekly magazine in 1962 presented short interviews with all eight women working as journalists in Iceland at the time. The article said that the journalism profession had obviously become popular among women, since a few years earlier only two had worked as journalists (Blaðakonur ákÍsland 1962). The number grew, albeit slowly, and twenty years later a quarter – in total 64 – of all members of the two journalist unions were women (Hagstofa Íslands, n.d.).

The research on gender and journalism is even more limited than that on gender portrayal in the media, yet the 2001 report also presented findings from a survey among journalists (Nefnd um konur og fjölmiðla 2010). It is the only survey so far among journalist focusing on gender issues, apart from one by the Union of Icelandic Journalist, which included a couple of questions about the role of journalists in promoting gender equality (Guðmundsson 2009). According to the 2001 report, one-third of those working as journalists in 2001 were women. As the response rate of male journalists was very low (27 %), it was not possible to draw any conclusion from their answers. The response rate for women (65 %) was sufficient, however. According to the survey, the average woman journalist was 30-39 years old (43 %) and had worked as a journalist for 5-10 years (39 %). Most were married or in a relationship (75 %) and had 2-3 children (66 %). The report also said 60 % of women journalists believed they were worse off in the newsroom than their male counterparts, while 28 per cent believed there was gender equality in their newsrooms. The survey also revealed that two-thirds of the women (62 %) believed that their work practice and approach to subjects differed from men. They also mentioned difference in style and topic interest and that women and men tackle problems differently (Nefnd um konur og fjölmiðla 2001).

Almost a decade later, the GMMP study showed that 33 per cent of the news in Icelandic news media was reported by women, compared with just over half in Sweden, 40 per cent in Finland and 30 per cent in Norway and Denmark (Árnadóttir et al. 2010). The average in the GMMP study was 37 per cent (Global Media Monitoring Project 2010). Research has consistently shown that women are less likely to cover so-called hard news, stories about politics, economics and crime (Global Media Monitoring Project 2005), but this did not seem to be the case in Iceland. For example, of all the stories women reported around 50 per cent were economic news, but a third of all the stories men reported were economic news. There did not seem to be a gender difference in stories on social and legal issues or crime stories, but women were slightly less likely to report on politics. Women were almost absent in sports reporting, which came as no surprise as this area has always been dominated by men (Árnadóttir et al. 2010)

In a survey by the Union of Icelandic Journalists conducted in 2007, almost 6 out of 10 journalists agreed with the statement that journalists should make an effort to report equally much about men and women. Women journalists were far more likely to agree with this statement (78% vs. 46% for their male colleagues). Nearly 40 per cent of the male journalists disagreed with the statement, but only 10 per cent of the women did. Eighteen per cent of the women, but only 8 per cent of the men, said they always tried to balance the ratio of women and men interviewed. One-third of the male journalists, but only 18 per cent of their female counterparts, said they never gave it a thought (Guðmundsson 2009). According to the GMMP study, the global trend in the

past 10 years has been that stories by women reporters have more women news subjects than stories by male reporters. Twenty-eight per cent of news subjects were women in stories by women reporters, compared with 22 per cent in stories written or presented by men (WACC 2010). In the GMMP study, however, women reporters in the Icelandic news media were not more likely than male reporters to have women news subjects (Árnadóttir et al. 2010).

Iceland also takes part in an international research project called the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS), and in 2012 a survey was conducted among journalists in the news media. Guðbjörg Hildur Kolbeins has published an article on the preliminary findings of the survey, showing that 65 per cent of the journalists in the news media are men and 35 per cent women. The average male news journalist is 42 years old and has worked as a journalist for 14 years. His female counterpart is 36 years old and has been a journalist for 8 years (Kolbeins 2012).

Women More Likely to Have a University Degree

According to the 2001 report and later surveys, women journalists in Iceland are well educated and more likely to have a university degree than their male colleagues. In 2001, 72 per cent had a university degree (Nefnd um konur og fjölmiðla 2001). In the WJS survey, over 80 per cent of the women journalists and 61 per cent of the men had a university degree, and women were twice as likely to have a master's degree (Kolbeins 2012). A survey by the Union of Icelandic Journalists in 2013 showed that around 60 per cent of the male and 76 per cent of the female journalists had a university degree. One in three women but only one in five men had a master's degree (Guðmundsson 2013). Like in other Nordic countries, women outnumber men in journalism education in Iceland. A survey in 2012 (part of the Nordic journalism student study, Hovdabrekka) showed that 63 per cent of all undergraduate students in media studies at the University of Akureyri and 71 per cent of all master's students in journalism at the University of Iceland were women (Jóhannsdóttir & Guðmundsson 2013).

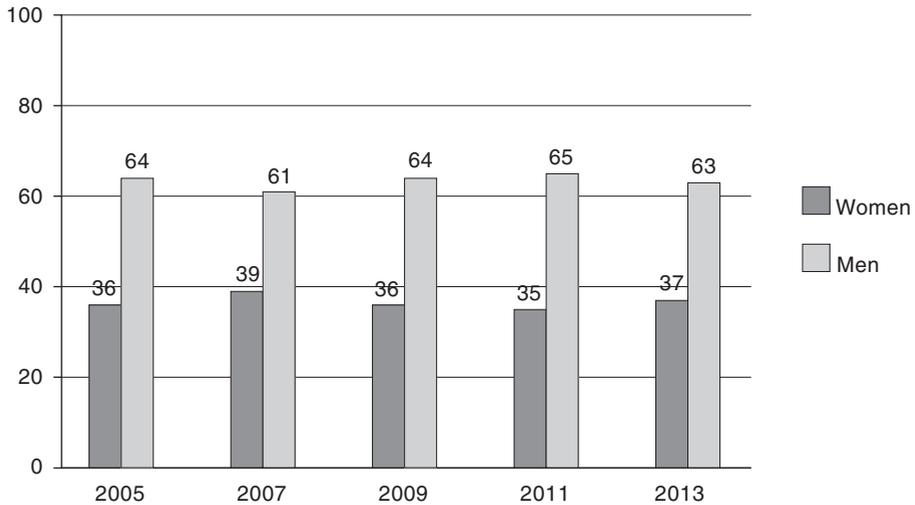
Changes After the Financial Crisis in 2008

In the years leading up to the financial crisis in 2008, a lot of money went into the media industry, and the number of publications and outlets grew considerably. At the peak in 2006-2007, Iceland had five national daily newspapers, three TV stations delivering news (one 24/7), and a number of news websites and weeklies. Yet in 2008, media companies were badly hit by the financial crisis and many journalists lost their job (Jóhannsdóttir 2013). Data from the membership registries of the journalists unions indicates that proportionally more women than men were laid off or left the profession in the years after the crash.

In both the GMMP and the WJS study, there is a focus on news but not on women and men working in journalism in general. It is not straightforward to say how many journalists there are in Iceland. Not all journalists are members of the two journalists unions and not all members are journalists. Journalists working in the private media are in the Union of Icelandic Journalists (Blaðamannafélag Íslands, BÍ), and news journalists at RÚV belong to the Society of Broadcast Journalists (Félag fréttamanna, FF). Statistic

Iceland has collected data on membership in BÍ since 1980 and in FF since 1985. Not all members in BÍ are journalists; there are also former journalists who have changed professions as well as public relation and information officers. As membership records are also available via BÍ's website with names and current employment, this article makes use of those records rather than those from Statistics Iceland. Figure 1 shows the gender ratio of members employed with a media company 2005-2013.

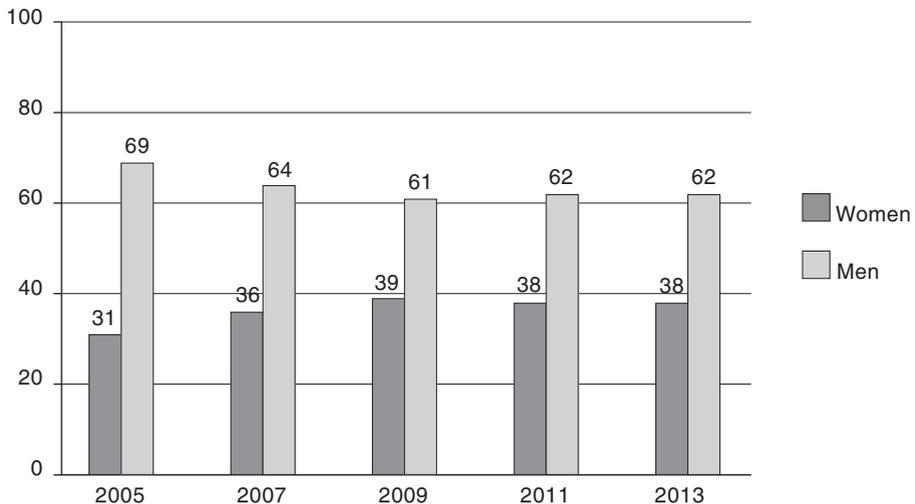
Figure 1. Members of BÍ – the Union of Icelandic Journalists by year and gender



Source: Blaðamannafélag Íslands, n.d.).

As mentioned above, journalists in the public media are in the Society of Broadcast Journalists (Félag fréttamanna, FF), but only those working in the news department of RÚV. As seen in Figure 2, the gender development has been similar to that of BÍ.

Figure 2. Members of the the Society of Broadcast Journalists by year and gender



Source: Statistics Iceland, nd).

It is worth noting that there is little difference between public and private media when it comes to the gender ratio. Iceland seems to differ from many other countries in this respect. In for example Sweden, women have the strongest representation in public service broadcasting and the popular press (EIGE 2013). It is also interesting to see that in both Icelandic unions, the number of women journalists grew until 2007 and 2009, respectively, and then the growth stops. The peak is a little later in the public broadcasting company, where massive layoffs started later. Research is needed to explain the reasons for this setback. The data does not allow us to say whether women were laid off in proportionally greater numbers than men or whether more women chose to leave their job after the crash in 2008.

Journalists at RÚV not working with news belong to other unions, and no gender data is available for them. The author did however obtain data from RÚV's director of human resources in June 2014 and according to this information, 57 per cent of those working in news and programme making were men and 43 per cent were women. This indicates that there are proportionally more women working as journalists in non-news departments. The technical side of the production is almost entirely a man's world – only 11 of 78 technicians, or 12.5 per cent, are women.

Women in Decision-making in Media Organisations

In the 2001 report, the Committee on Women and Media noted that although very little information was available on gender ratios in decision-making positions in the media sector, it seemed that despite the growing number of women entering journalism, they had not made it to the top. Far more men than women occupied leadership positions (Nefnd um konur og fjölmiðla 2001). Whether the situation has changed since then is difficult to say. The data is no more available now than it was a decade and a half ago. According to the Media Act 2011, media companies are obliged to report to the Media Commission, an independent administrative committee under the Minister of Education, Science and Culture, about gender portrayal in the content produced as well as the number of women and men employed and their positions (Law no.38, 2011). The Media Commission is also required by law to publish a report on the media market, including the gender situation. The law was passed in 2011 but no report has yet been published. Little information is therefore publicly available about women's positions in the media industry or their share in decision-making. This year, though, there has been some improvement. A new director was appointed at RÚV in March 2014. He is a man like all his predecessors but has declared that gender equality will be a priority within the company (Olgeirsson 2014). Shortly after his appointment, changes were made in the eight-man board of executives and for the first time ever there are now equal numbers of men and women. The biggest media company, 365 Media, also has a new director (from July 2014), and he has said that it will be a priority to recruit more women journalists (Viðskiptablaðið 2014). A woman has been appointed head of the company's news department (holding the title of publisher). The main owner and chairperson of 365 Media is also a woman. Very few women have held the position of newspaper editor, but this year a woman was appointed one of two editors of *DV*, Iceland's only tabloid newspaper, and the newly appointed deputy editor of the online news site *Kjarninn* is also a woman. The two editors of *Morgunblaðið*, Iceland's oldest newspaper, as well

as the chair of the board are all men, as are eight of 13 leaders in the editorial office, according to information the author received from the director of human resources in August 2014. The publisher and editor of the business paper *Viðskiptablaðið* are men, as are the the publisher and editor of *Fréttatíminn*, a weekly free newspaper. The publisher of *Birtingur*, the biggest magazine company, is a man, but the editors of seven of the eight magazines it publishes are women. Most of the magazines are what is commonly categorised as women's magazines.

Conclusion

Women still have a long way to go before gender equality is reached in Icelandic media, both in the content produced and among those who work in the industry. There is no reason to think that women are less interested than men in working as a journalist, as demonstrated for example by the fact that they outnumber men in journalism education. Journalism education has proved to be women's way into the profession in many countries and, as mentioned, far more women than men have a degree in journalism in Iceland. However, the history of journalism education in Iceland is short, and this may help explain why women journalists are proportionally fewer in Iceland than in most other Nordic countries. Yet the roots of the situation are probably deeper and not specific to the media sector. Women have outnumbered men at Icelandic universities since 1984, but they are still a minority in positions of power in both the private and the public sector (Einarsdóttir 2010). For example, the proportion of women in Althingi, the Icelandic parliament, and the government did not become comparable to that in the other Nordic countries until 2009, when it reached 40 per cent (Einarsdóttir and Hjartardóttir 2009). It is worrying to see that the number of women entering the journalism profession seems to have plateaued after continuous growth in the past decades, but there are also positive signs as the heads of the biggest media companies have pledged to prioritise equality in their media.

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