
THE DANGERS OF SPORTS JOURNALISM



AARHUS
UNIVERSITY

KIRSTEN SPARRE RESEARCH CONFERENCE ON THE
SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS



MY RESEARCH INTEREST

In 2005, I heard Filippos Syrigos, a sports editor and investigative journalist from Greece, tell the story of how he was attacked and stabbed in the back four times by unknown assailants because of his journalism

Since then I have met many courageous journalists who have been threatened on their life, safety or livelihoods because of their journalism about sports

Yet the safety of sports journalists has never been of particular interest to academic researchers or media freedom organisations

So is there a problem – or is it just the company I keep?

IS THERE A PROBLEM?

Exploratory research to identify

- Types of threats against the media freedom and personal safety of sports journalists
- Who are (reported to be) behind the threats?
- Based on 78 incidents reported between 2010 and 2016
 - websites from media freedom organisations (eg. Mapping Media Freedom, Committee to Protect Journalists)
 - organisations concerned with sports journalism
 - news media



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Sports Journalists' Association (SJA). The header includes the SJA logo and navigation links: Home, News, Contact us, About us, Membership, Sports Journalism Awards, Sports Awards, Training, Links, and Other bodies. A large banner image features a football player in a blue helmet and red jersey. The main headline reads "Azerbaijani football writer dies after vicious assault". Below the headline, there is a sub-headline "Sports journalist colleagues in Azerbaijan are in shock after the death of a sportswriter following an attack by men alleged to be supporters of a football club, one of whose players the reporter had criticised on Facebook." The article text begins with "Sportswriter Rasim Aliyev wrote that he did not want someone 'so immoral' to represent his country, after Azerbaijani international striker Javid Huseynov waved a Turkish flag at home supporters during a Europa League match in Cyprus between his club side, Gabala FK, and Apollon." A video player shows a screen shot of an interview with Rasim Aliyev in a hospital bed. The video caption reads: "On August 8, 2015, reporter Rasim Aliyev was attacked by the relatives of Javid Huseynov, a player of football club Gabala." The article continues: "According to local media reports, Aliyev was later lured to meeting a man who claimed to be a relative of Huseynov. When he arrived at the rendezvous in the Sabail district of Baku, the journalist was assaulted by six men who left him with four broken ribs. He died through internal bleeding." The article concludes: "Aliyev was a freelancer who was working for the ann.az news website. In the hours before his death, he gave an interview from his hospital bed in which he said that Huseynov and his relatives had telephoned him and invited him to drink tea with them to resolve the matter."

THE VIOLATIONS

- ▶ Where: 35 countries, six continents, all types of political regimes = it happens everywhere
- ▶ Which sports: 50 incidents out of 78 related to football (soccer)

▼ ● Type	0
● Abduction	2
● Arrest	1
● Assault	8
● Attack – physical	15
● Banned from confere...	2
● Damage to property	1
● Denied accreditation	1
● Detention	8
● Digital – death, viole...	5
● Digital – sexual	4
● Killed	4
● Legal pressure	7
● Seizure of passport	1
● Sexual advances	1
● Threats	13
● Verbal assault	4

Denial of visa, threats, detention, imprisonment, torture - mainly in relation to mega-events



Attacks, threats of death or violence, digital hate speech – mainly against female sports journalists



Verbal and physical assaults, sexual abuse of female sports journalists



Legal pressure



Banning from press conferences, legal pressure, physical attacks, killings

TIP OF THE ICEBERG

1. Several reports mention that this is not the first incident of this type
2. Lack of appropriate reporting mechanisms/failure to recognise the problem
3. Journalism is a poor monitoring mechanism due to many levels of gatekeeping
4. Searches only done in English

[https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/11/rangers-journalists-intimidation](#)

International journalism body calls for action over threats and intimidation of journalists covering Rangers crisis

Arrested for reporting on Qatar's World Cup labourers

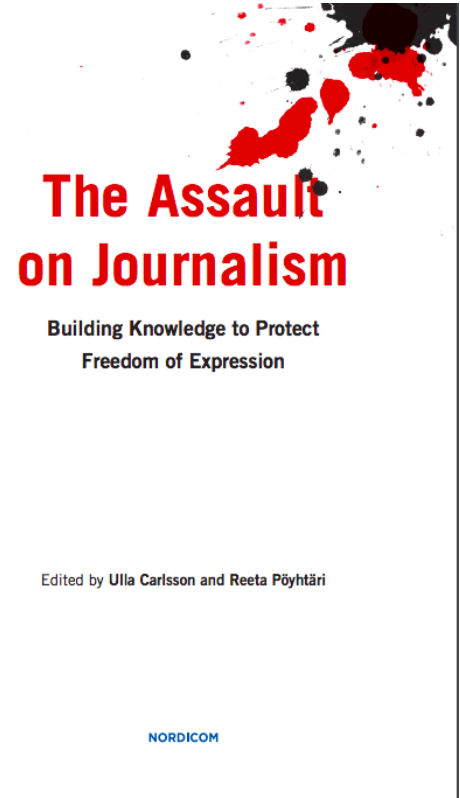
SOME CONCLUSIONS

- Not just a whistleblower issue: All sports journalists whether they cover sports on an everyday basis or are investigative journalists are potentially at risk.
- Many of the perpetrators are new faces in the discussions about safety for journalists and may require new approaches from media freedom organisations

APR 13

Al-Shabaab is executing Somali journalists for the crime of reporting on sports

Bulgaria: Attacker sprays substance in sports journalist's face



QUESTIONS TO MOVE ON TO

- What are the causes? Are any of these causes specific to the field of sport?
- What effects do violations have on the practice of sports journalism?
- How do we address the problems? Does the field of sport require different or new approaches to protecting journalists?
- Who should address the problems?

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EFJ

European
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Journalists

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Torino, 26/01/2017 10:00

Italy/Italia: Football fans launch petition to have s...

Reggio nell'Emilia, 24/01/2017 11:24

Sweden: Journalist receives letter containing deat...

Stockholm, 20/11/2016 12:00

Sweden: Journalist receives a hand written death ...

Karlstad, 24/10/2016 14:00

Spain: Legia supporters threaten La Sexta camer...

Madrid, 18/10/2016 18:30

Spain: Prisa sues El Confidencial for 8.2 million eu...

Calle Gran Vía, 17/10/2016 10:05

Greece: Journalists repeatedly menaced during fo...

Karaiskaki Stadium, 07/10/2016 22:20

Russia/Россия: Police detain journalist investigati...

Санкт-Петербург, 18/09/2016 18:00

Italy/Italia: Football team prevents reporters from...

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