

# **2021 Survey of Taiwan media workers' labor rights and the impact of mis/disinformation**

**Executed by : The Association of Taiwan Journalists (ATJ)**

**Sponsored by : International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)**

**Report Released in Year : 2022**

## **1. 2021 Survey on the Rights of Taiwan's Journalists**

### **(a) Execution Details**

Sponsored by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the Association of Taiwan Journalists (ATJ) executed the survey project in December 2021 through an online questionnaire survey on the Rights of Taiwan's Journalists in 2021. The ATJ has spread the news through the member newsletters of the ATJ and the Taiwan Journalist Union and the ATJ's Facebook Fanpage, online journalists groups, various media unions and newsletters, inviting media workers to fill out the online survey, which especially focused on whether the work rights were rightfully protected during the worst COVID-19 outbreak in Taiwan in May 2021. The secondary theme of the survey is "the impact of mis/disinformation on Taiwan's media workers." This is expected to outline the challenges faced by front-line reporters when they encounter false information as they prepare for the emerging global issue.

The questionnaire filling period was from December 27, 2021 to February 8, 2022, and a total of 78 questionnaires were recovered, an increase of 24% over the previous year.

### **(b) Design of Questionnaire**

This questionnaire was revised based on the previous year's "2020 Taiwan Journalists' Rights Survey", focusing on the manifestation of labor issues under the pandemic, and adding information about the impact of mis/disinformation on journalism.

There were 26 questions in the final questionnaire: among them, there are eight questions for the respondents' basic information (including media type, seniority, etc.), and a total of 10 questions for the media workers' rights and labor awareness evaluation in the past year; there were eight questions about the impact of mis/disinformation on journalism.

## **(c) Analysis of survey results**

### **1. Basic Information**

A total of 78 respondents answered this questionnaire.

Respondents were divided by age groups: including: 12 people aged between 20-29 (15.3%), 23 people aged between 30-39 (29.4%), 18 people aged between 40-49 (23%), 21 people aged between 50-59 (26.9%), 3 people aged between 60-69 (3.8%), and 1 person over 70 years old (1.2%).

By gender, there were 29 females (37.1%) and 49 males (62.8%).

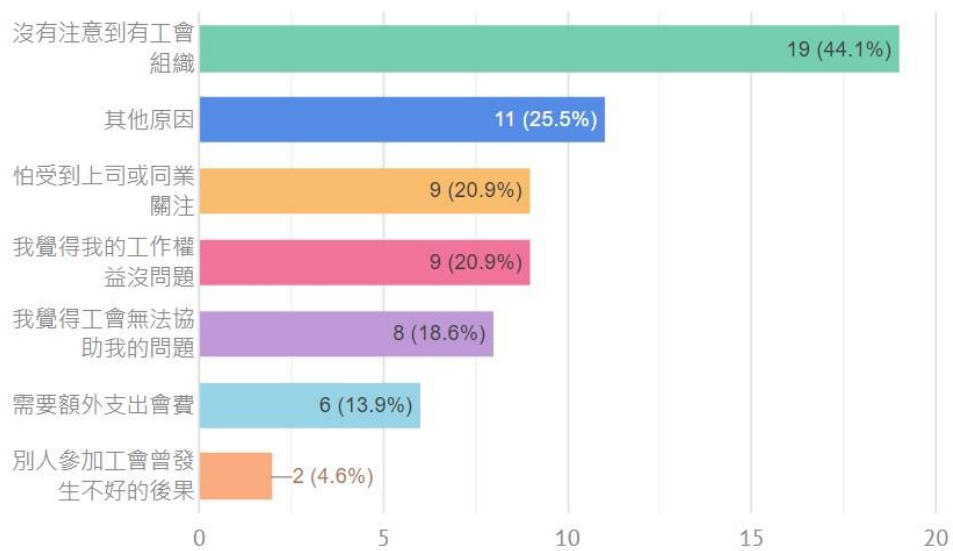
According to the type of media they mainly serve, the respondents are 31 people (39.7%) for TV stations, 23 people (29.4%) for online media, eight people (10.2%) for various media, four people for newspapers (5.1%), and four people for radio stations, four people for magazines (5.1%), two people for social media (2.5%), and two people for advocacy media (2.5%).

According to the nature of their current positions in media organizations, the respondents are 37 (47.4%) from large commercial media, 13 (16.6%) from public media, 11 (14.1%) from small commercial media, 9 (11.5%) from non-profit media, 8 others (10.2%).

Divided by job title and positions, the respondents are 25 journalists (32%), 12 audio-visual or engineering technicians (15.3%), 11 photojournalists (14.1%), ten reporting or editing department supervisors (12.8%), independent five reporters (6.4%), four editors (5.1%), two producers (2.5%), one anchor (1.2%), and eight others (10.2%).

According to the total number of years of work in the media industry, there are 31 people (39.7%) for more than 20 years, 17 people (21.7%) for more than 10 years but less than 20 years, 15 people (19.2%) for 0 to 4 years, and 15 people (19.2%) for more than 5 years but less than 11 years.

According to whether they are members of media trade unions (such as journalists associations, enterprise trade unions, professional trade unions), there are 53 members (68%) who have participated in media trade unions, and 25 members (32%) who have not attended in media trade unions. The influencing factors for not joining a trade union were mainly: 19 people (44.1%) did not notice the existence of a trade union organization, 11 people (25.5%) for other reasons, 9 people (20.9%) who were afraid of drawing attention from their supervisors or peers, and 9 people (20.9%) felt that their work equity is satisfactory.



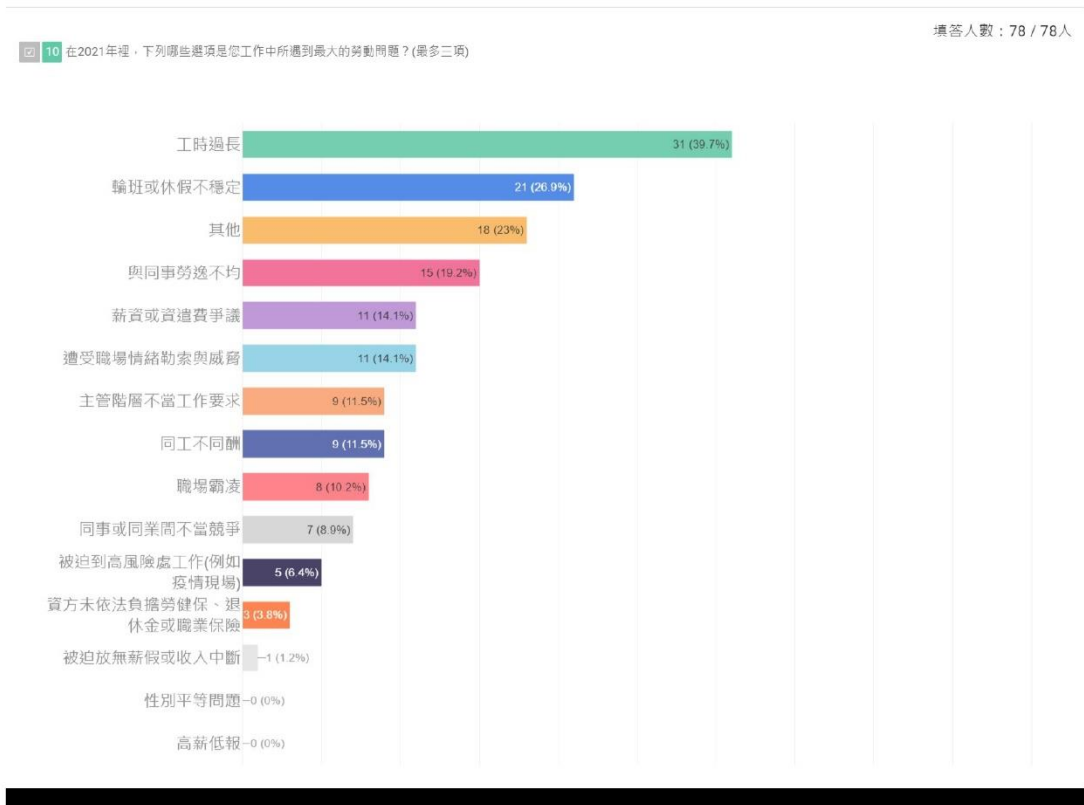
**Figure 1: If you are not in a union, what are the factors that affect you?**

## 2. Labor Issues of Taiwanese media workers in 2021



**Figure 1: The biggest threats to respondents at work in 2021**

In the past year, the biggest threats that news media workers encountered in their work (choose up to three items) were, respectively, "Misinformation and disinformation" accounting for 43.5%, "Influence and pressure from business" 28.2%, "Reports subject to control or content censorship" 20.5%, "Job instability or unemployment" 19.2%, "Pressure from media bosses" 19.2%, "Pressure from government agencies" 17.9%, and "Wage reduction" accounted for 12.8%. The remaining threats below 10% are "legal threat", "harassment or personal safety compromise", "doxing or public humiliation", "surveillance or digital attack", and "other". Fortunately, there are also a large number of respondents who believe that "I have not encountered any threats" (accounting for 21.7%).



**Figure 2: The biggest labor problems the respondents encountered at work in 2021**

In the past year, the most significant labor problems encountered by news media workers at work (choose up to three items), respectively, were "Excessive working hours" accounting for 39.7%, "Unstable works schedule accounting for 26.9% ", "Uneven workload" accounting for 19.2%, "Disputes over salary or severance pay" accounting for 14.1%, "Emotional blackmail and threats in the workplace" accounting for 14.1%, "Inappropriate work requirements from supervisors" accounting for 11.5%, "Unequal pay for equal work" accounting for 11.5%, and "Workplace bullying" accounting for 10.2%. The remaining threats, which account for less than 10%, include "improper competition among colleagues or peers", "Forced to work in high-risk locations (such as the epidemic sites)", "The employer fails to pay labor health insurance, pension or occupational insurance according to law", "Forced unpaid leave or interruption of income", etc.

Regarding labor issues encountered in 2021, the following issues were reflected in the free and open fill-in section.

Regarding the promotion and salary adjustment system, the respondents said: "The salary adjustment system is not well-established, the performance appraisal review is not transparent, and the photographic equipment and computer equipment are outdated, which in turn affects work efficiency and broadcast quality." "Without a comprehensive career path, it becomes a necessary evil to constantly changing companies to get a salary bump, which is putting the cart before the horse.", "The remuneration for independent workers has remained unchanged for decades, how can there be a strong flame without firewood?", "I hope the salary of media reporters can be higher."

In terms of the impact of the pandemic (including working hours), the respondents said: "Due to the pandemic, the number of cases available has decreased.", "The company's news department has not been listed as a priority target for vaccination due to administrative negligence.", "During the outbreak, the number of confirmed cases continued to rise. Even we were off-duty, the company kept asking, so we had to look at our phones at all times, worrying if we missed out on the latest development. Although it was after work, we were very nervous before going to bed. It is a common case for everyone. I don't have complaints but just frustration." In terms of information and public opinion, the respondents said: "I was publicly abused by the anonymous Internet army (Facebook Fan Pages, PTT, Instagram), and I hope the management can allocate a budget to help reporters to file lawsuits.", "I am distraught that cyber warriors exercise spin control."

### **3. Pandemic risks faced by Taiwanese media workers in 2021**

Taiwan faced the worst COVID-19 outbreak, which started in May 2021. To understand whether this situation significantly impacted media workers' personal safety and working environment, we formulated five related questions in this questionnaire, hoping to reflect the reality of media workers affected by the pandemic.



**Figure 3: Arrangements that employers made for work safety during the peak of the pandemic in Taiwan from May 2021**

What arrangements did employers make for media workers' safety from May 2021, at the peak of the pandemic in Taiwan? "Split operation" accounted for the highest at 61.5%, followed by "Work from home" accounted for 47.4%, "Offer protective equipment during interviews," "Arranging for vaccination as soon as possible" accounted for 26.9%, "Not forcing reporting at high-risk areas" accounted for 17.9%, and "Paid vaccination leaves" accounted for 16.6%. The remaining factors that are accounted for below 10% are "Employer did not enhance work safety for me during the pandemic," "Offer paid leave when quarantine or self-health management was required or the flexibility to take leaves (Not affect performance appraisal)," "Others," "Employers paid for related expenses during work-related quarantine." It is worth noting that 8.9% of the respondents still believed that "the employer did not improve my work safety during the pandemic."





**Figure 4: During the peak period of the COVID-19 outbreak in Taiwan from May 2021, how were the labor rights and interests of respondents affected?**

Overall, how do respondents think their labor rights and interests have been affected during the peak period of the pandemic in Taiwan, which started in May 2021? It is gratifying that many respondents believe that "my work rights are not affected by the pandemic" 37 people (47.4%), followed by "I must enter high-risk places" (23%), "Shift is disrupted" (19.2%), "Longer working hours" (15.3%), "Extra work" (14.1%), "Promotion or salary increase affected" (11.5%), the options that accounted for less than 10% were "Other," "Self-censorship during reporting for fear of violating epidemic regulations," "Restricted by supervisors when reporting due to the impact of epidemic-related regulations," "Appeals/petitions/pleads at work are put on hold."



**Figure 5: During the peak period of the pandemic in Taiwan from May 2021, what work rights and interests were affected by the vaccination of respondents?**

Among the work rights and interests related to the pandemic, at the peak of the outbreak in Taiwan from May 2021, what work rights and interests did the respondents think were affected by the vaccination? The majority of respondents believed that "My job risk is not high, and I do not need to be vaccinated right away" 26 people (33.3%), followed by "The government did not arrange for me to be vaccinated in time, so I must face work risks" (19.2%), "After the first dose of the vaccine was administered, the second dose of the vaccine was delayed due to various factors" (19.2%), "Other" (17.9%), "The government did not arrange for me to be vaccinated in time, so that I have to face work risks" (12.8%), "The media I work for is not on the vaccination list, so I have to face work risks" (10.2%), the options that account for less than 10% are "I feel sick because of the vaccination, but I was unable to take a leave of absence for vaccines," "My employer forces me to be vaccinated; otherwise it would affect my right to work," "My employer arranges for me to be vaccinated, but I cannot choose a vaccine brand," etc.

As far as the respondents know, how many colleagues, whether they know in person or not, were infected (or died from the disease) in 2021 at work. Most of the respondents answered "within five people" (73 people, 93.5%), and some believed that "5-10 people" were infected at work. (5 people, 6.4%).

Regarding the labor problems encountered during the peak of the COVID outbreak in 2021, the free and open fill-in section reflects the following issues. In terms of pandemic risk, the respondents said: "We should be concerned about the environment of front-line media workers and the support of protective equipment," "There is no SOP for media workers to deal with infection, although there is no doubt about the disinfection after catching COVID, they continue to return to where they work after disinfection." and so on.

In terms of vaccination, the respondents said: "The first dose of the vaccine happened after a company colleague was suspected of being infected and died, and the government agency then included the front-line news reporters on the priority list. After the recommended interval, we were told to book the second dose by ourselves" "The government's vaccine categories are not comprehensive. For example, front-line reporters have vaccines, but backend office staff have to wait until half a year later. But they also come into contact with program guests and many visitors in and out of the TV station," "Upon the request of Taiwan Media Workers Union, the Ministry of Culture (print and online media) and the NCC (electronic media) finally notified the media companies to make a list for front-line workers to get vaccination first." It is a pity that the union's recommendations were not adopted in March, and media workers did not receive the vaccine until July, causing many unnecessary risks and even casualties."

In other aspects related to the epidemic, the respondents said: "The bigger problem caused by the pandemic is that various ministries would restrict the interviews of reporters (especially independent reporters), such as closing the press room or allowing online interviews only," "When we want to give advice to or have questions for the Central Epidemic Command Center, but our supervisors think we

are to cause trouble for the center, and ask us to keep our comments to ourselves" and so on.

#### **4. Subjective evaluation of self and employer labor rights**

Among the 78 respondents to this questionnaire, more than half (53 people, 67.9%) are members of the media union. The questionnaire also investigates the respondents' self-labor and employers' evaluation of labor awareness in the eyes of the respondents, the highest being 10 points, the lowest being 0 points.

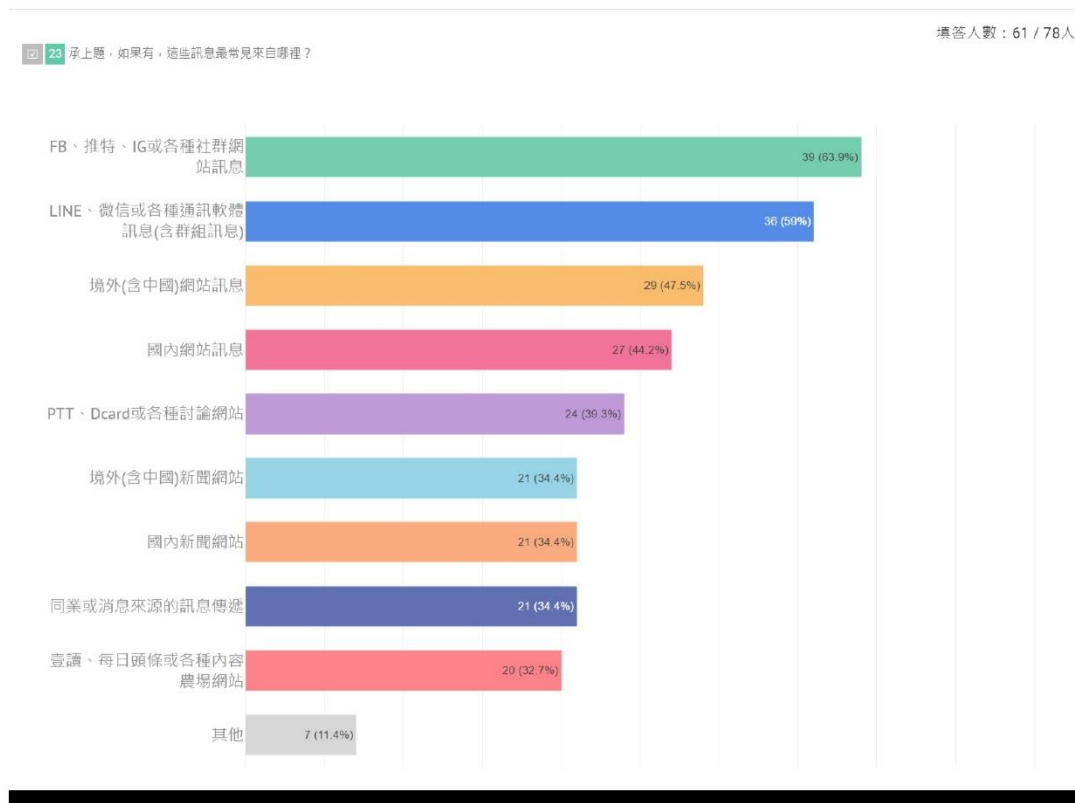
The results of the survey are: the mode of "score of self-labor rights awareness" is 8, and the mode of "score of employer's awareness of labor rights" is 5

#### **5. Press Freedom Interference and Influence of Disinformation**

The sub-theme of this questionnaire is the impact of false information on the field of news work. Fortunately, in the question "Have you ever been improperly interfered by your government in your news work in 2021?", most respondents answered: "No" (53 respondents, 67.9%), followed by "unclear" (13 respondents, 16.6%) and "Yes" (12 respondents, 15.3%), which is roughly in line with the international ranking of Taiwan's Press Freedom Index.

When answering the question "Have you ever experienced improper interference in your journalism by a foreign government in 2021", most respondents answered "No" (67 respondents, 85.8%), followed by "Unclear" (8 respondents, 10.2%), "Yes" (3, 3.8%), respondents who believed that foreign governments interfered with news reports thought that these foreign governments were referring to China (two people) and the United States (one person).

When answering the question "In 2021, have mis/disinformation ever led to misunderstanding at work, or you have to spend more time tracking and verifying?", the majority of respondents answered "yes" (50 respondents, 64.1%), followed by "No" (20 respondents, 25.6.2%) and "Unclear" (8 respondents, 10.2%), it is obvious that the verification of false information has caused more interference to the news work than before.



**Figure 6: Where do common misinformation come from?**

Regarding the most common source channels for receiving false and misleading messages, the top three channels are "Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or various social networking sites" (63.9%), "LINE, WeChat or various communication software messages (including chatroom groups)" information" (59%), "overseas (including China) website information" (47.5%), the others are "domestic website information," "PTT, Dcard or various discussion websites," "overseas (including China) news website," "Domestic News Websites," "Information from peers or news sources," "Read01, KKnews or various content farm websites", "Others," etc.

In terms of the fact-checking methods, most respondents use "search engines such as Google to search for keywords or search for pictures by image" (61.5%), "contact the person concerned or related persons for verification" (60.2%), "ask the people around you or peers" (48.7) to verify the information, followed by "checking the source of information (such as foreign websites)," "checking reports from websites such as the Fact-Check Center, MyGoPen, Cofacts, etc.," "contacting various report sources," "other" etc.

In the part of foreign information intervention, the question "In 2021, do you think that false and misleading information from abroad (including China) will affect news work?" The highest score (most significant impact) is 10, and the lowest (lowest impact) is zero. The mode is 2. In other words, the effect is not far-reaching, or one can say that disinformation on social media has little impact on professional media workers.

The free and open fill-in section reflects the following issues regarding misinformation and news verification. Regarding the implementation of fact-checking, the respondents believed that: "There is a huge amount of news, insufficient manpower, and it is difficult to carry out fact-checking," "There are too many content farm articles from unknown sources in Taiwan. Without the premise of verification, such articles are often cited by Internet media outlets, so much so that two wrongs make it right."

In terms of building a sense of trust, the respondents believed: "The goal of false information circulating in chat groups is to cost people time and effort to verify and clarify. Otherwise, such information can disrupt society. It requires the state and the public to build trust in media organizations consciously. For media organizations and workers, they must acknowledge the fact that they are front-line fighters against disinformation and must take their work seriously."

Regarding government-related issues, respondents believed that "the government often sends incorrect messages", "the Central Epidemic Command Center has a good relationship with colleagues, and when I was waiting for a reply (or verification), it has already answered my colleagues."

#### **(d) Summary: Rights Advocacy Actions and Strategic Recommendations**

##### **1. Long labor hours in media work need to be improved and given attention**

Regardless of the impact of the pandemic, media workers generally have long working hours or unstable shifts. During the peak period of the local COVID

outbreak, many reporters responsible for reporting the epidemic have a heavier workload. They are on standby almost 24 hours a day and never have a moment of downtime. It takes a toll on physical and mental health in the long run. The professional performance of media workers who work too long will also be affected. In terms of public interests over the long run, media workers can provide better news quality to society if they have a good working environment. We recommend that the NCC consider front-line workers' labor environment when renewing TV channel licenses. Don't let business influence journalists' freedom to report

## **2. Don't let business influence journalists' freedom to report**

For a long time, the freedom of news reporting in Taiwan has been suppressed because of commercial (advertising) influence, including political parties and local governments. Therefore, various news media have a strong ideology, are not trusted by the public, and are constantly criticized. In this questionnaire survey, many respondents from the media industry believe that "influence and pressure from business" is a significant threat to media work. Media employers should promote the signing and implementation of the "Newsroom Convention" so that journalists can report the news with better autonomy.

## **3. The impact of mis/disinformation on media work cannot be ignored**

The questionnaire shows that media workers believe that "misinformation or disinformation" is a significant threat to media work. The channels of such false information are diverse, varied, mixed with truth and lies, and it isn't easy to distinguish between positions and facts. Today's fast delivery makes journalism work challenging. Journalists are often under time pressure. When the information is not fully verified, the professionalism of their work performance is compromised. Therefore, it is an urgent and essential task for the media industry to alleviate the pressure on the labor force and increase the professional ability of workers to identify false information. Build public and government respect and trust in the media

#### **4. Build public and government respect and trust in the media**

Taiwan's government agencies, the public, and the media have failed to establish mutual trust for a long time. The public sector lacks awareness of reporters' autonomy in reporting news. Commercial interests strain media outlets, which cannot implement press freedom, and the public cannot trust media reporters. This situation has caused a vicious cycle. Media workers have low self-esteem because the public does not respect their profession. We call on the government to revise relevant laws and regulations on disclosing commercial interests regarding news reporting. We urge media employers to focus on improving the media labor environment. The public should recognize and support good news quality through media literacy education. Together, the joint efforts could rebuild the motivation of media workers to practice news ethics.