

“A Double-Edged Sword:” Revealing the COVID-19 Pandemic’s Disproportionate  
Impacts on the Productivity of Women Print Journalists through Mixed-Methods  
Research

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## ABSTRACT

“A Double-Edged Sword”: Revealing the COVID-19 Pandemic’s Disproportionate Impacts on the Productivity of Women Print Journalists through Mixed-Methods Research

Clara Gepner

In 2020, surveys revealed the COVID-19 pandemic was increasing gender inequalities among different professions, including journalists and academics. There was therefore a need to examine the first wave’s impact on Canadian reporters. The aim of this study was to determine whether women and precariously employed journalists were unequally affected and, if so, to help prevent negative effects on them in the event of a future crisis. This mixed methods project used an explanatory sequential design. Quantitative data on productivity was measured by comparing the number of by-lines published by journalists in three daily francophone publications between March 1 and May 31, 2020, to the same period in 2019. Six semi-directed qualitative interviews with journalists picked from the quantitative sample were then conducted. Analyzed through thematic analysis, they explored the hypotheses formulated to explain the changes in productivity discovered and served to contextualize the quantitative results. Overall, journalists in the sample were slightly more productive than the previous year. The increase was driven by women, whose productivity increased by 7% (men’s decreased by 3%), and by staff, whose publication rate increased by 9% (precarious journalists’ decreased by 33%). Women staff’s productivity increased more than men’s while that of women precarious journalists decreased more. Based on these findings, we argue that women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Staff women likely experienced more pressure to produce because of the gendered division of beats, and therefore published more, while precariously employed women lost more work than men and likely experienced more financial insecurity.

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## Introduction

Journalists' lives were turned upside down by the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, their jobs often involved going into the field to witness events in person and interview people, and then returning to the office where they would work in the newsroom, an open space with other journalists. The pandemic forced many of them to work from home, conducting interviews on the phone or by videoconference, and most went from daily collaboration to little interaction with their colleagues. Others were forced to take risks by going into the field to provide first-hand accounts of the crisis.

An early-pandemic survey by the International Federation of Journalists [IFJ] (2020c) revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic increased gender inequalities in journalism worldwide. In Canada, 80% of female respondents reported an increase in stress and anxiety caused by the lack of childcare, likely due to school and daycare closures, and by concern over loss of work or income (Unifor, 2020b). Worldwide, over half of the respondents said there was an increase in gender inequalities in the industry; Sixty-two percent said this had devastating consequences on their work-life balance, 46% on their work responsibilities, and 27% on their salaries (IFJ, 2020c).

These increasing inequalities could be rooted in several pre-existing factors. Before the pandemic, women throughout the world bore the brunt of unpaid work, such as childcare and housework (Lungumbu & Butterly, 2020). As a Statistics Canada survey has revealed, this has only increased with the school and daycare closures caused by COVID-19 lockdown measures in Canada: women living with their men partners took up more parental responsibilities — particularly the added task of homeschooling— since the pandemic, especially if they lost their jobs or were working from home (Leclerc, 2020). A variety of pre-existing labour conditions in



journalism could also explain the findings of the IFJ survey: women journalists are more likely to have lower salaries, more precarious jobs (such as freelancing), and experience systemic inequality, discrimination, gender segregation, and harassment on the field (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2019; McKercher, 2009; Robinson, 2008; Smith, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2018a; Young & Beale, 2013).

Before the pandemic, these factors, among others, were leading women with successful journalism careers to leave the field at an alarming rate (Everbach & Flournoy, 2007; Smith, 2015). With the pandemic turning back the clock on gender equality worldwide, it has become particularly important to determine whether women journalists have been differentially affected by public health measures and the media closures and layoffs caused by the rapid decline of advertising revenues (Ashton-Beaucage, 2020; Bendali, 2020; J-Source, 2020; Lacroix & Carignan, 2020b; Lewis, 2020; Wechsler, 2021). If the pandemic has increased the rate at which women are pushed out of journalism, or has reduced their productivity in significant ways, the quality of the news and the strength of Canadian democracy stand to diminish even further. Ultimately, the people who work on the news affect what becomes news, and particularly, whose stories are told. If the majority of newsrooms are dominated by white men who decide what is newsworthy (Willman, 2020), the news is likely not reflecting the diversity and complexity of Canadian society (Franks, 2013, p. 6; Smith, 2015, p. 15).

In the context of a pandemic which has increased gender inequalities in Canada and worldwide, it is particularly important that a variety of perspectives are represented in the news. Already, the impact of the lack of diversity in media is being seen in the lack of coverage of women and gender inequality, and the lack of female experts in the news (Carr, 2020; Mulcahey, 2020). Despite seeing some improvements from previous years, the Global Media Monitoring Project [GMMP] (2021) found that on monitoring day in September 2020, women accounted for

only 31% of news subjects, a four-per-cent increase from the 2015 results but only a one-per-cent increase from 2010. If the pandemic continues to impact women journalists more than men, this effect will likely only worsen. It is therefore essential to reveal the pandemic's potentially gendered impacts on journalists in Canada so that media managers and owners faced with this information have no choice but to take action to prevent further inequality. As Tracy Everbach and Craig Flournoy (2007) write, "It is crucial that both journalism educators and newsroom managers understand why women leave newsrooms so they can find ways to retain them" (p. 53).

It is also important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the crisis news media have been undergoing in recent years and, according to some, has accelerated the death of print journalism (Wechsler, 2021). As news providers lost even more advertising revenues due to the closure of local businesses and the shutdown of the culture industry, it is likely that the most vulnerable and precariously employed journalists —freelancers and supernumerary journalists—suffered the brunt of the economic impact as their hours and contracts were reduced (Chiarito, 2021; Giroux, 2020; IFJ, 2020a; Libert et al., 2021). The pandemic and "infodemic" have made clearer than ever the need for reliable and verified information while making working conditions more precarious and more likely to lead journalists to leave the field due to burnout (Lacroix & Carignan, 2020a; Libert et al., 2021; Wechsler, 2021). As media closures and budget cuts are increasing and representing "lost opportunities for young, diverse media workers" (Wechsler, 2021, para. 8), it is essential to ensure that diverse voices are represented in the news by determining the impact the pandemic has had on newsmakers and ensuring that the most vulnerable are protected from further damage.

### Statement of Purpose

As the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic is still recent, few academic studies have measured its impact on journalists throughout the world, let alone in Québec and Canada. Those

that have, such as the IFJ's survey on *COVID-19 and Women Journalists* and the International Center for Journalists [ICFJ] and Tow Center for Digital Journalism's *Journalism & the Pandemic* report, have used voluntary surveys to explore the effects of the pandemic on individual journalists. These surveys have not specifically focused on Canadian women journalists, nor have they quantitatively measured the pandemic's impact on them. A qualitative study on Québec journalists has revealed that the pandemic has amplified pressure on them by increasing their workload significantly and pushing them to work faster while taking more risks on the field and limiting their access to sources (Lacroix & Carignan, 2020a), but this impact was not measured quantitatively. The minimal existing quantitative data on the subject combined with the lack of recent quantitative "body counts" offering an updated vision of employment patterns in Canadian media means it is currently impossible to evaluate the potentially unequal impact of the pandemic on women journalists in Québec and Canada.

Similarly, projects that have kept track of media layoffs and closures have largely ignored or have been unable to quantify the pandemic's impact on freelancers, a particularly feminized group of journalists (Castillo, 2020; Langton, 2020; McCluskey, 2020; McKercher, 2009; Wechsler, 2021). The IFJ survey has, however, revealed that most freelance journalists have lost revenue or work opportunities and that the loss of resources and jobs and the longer hours have made proper coverage of the pandemic more difficult (International Federation of Journalists, 2020a), showing that measuring the pandemic's impact on journalists is essential to maintaining a high quality of news coverage.

To fill these gaps in the literature, there was a need for a mixed methods inquiry that specifically studied and quantified the impact of the pandemic on journalists in Québec and Canada and that considered pre-existing gender inequality and precarious labour conditions in Canadian journalism. This research-creation project therefore aims to examine the impact of the

first wave (March, April, and May 2020) of the COVID-19 pandemic on journalists, and more specifically, on francophone print journalists in Québec and Canada. This study focuses on a measurable characteristic, productivity, as a starting point towards understanding how journalists' work and lives were changed by the public health crisis and lockdown restrictions. The project also aims to discover whether certain journalists were differentially impacted depending on their gender or their pre-pandemic employment status.

The first goal of this study was to collect and create a quantitative dataset about the impact of the pandemic on journalists' productivity. The publication rate of print journalists at three francophone daily publications in Canada during the first three months of the pandemic in 2020 was compared to the same three-month period the year before, in 2019. The dataset was analyzed through a gender lens to determine whether the pandemic affected women journalists more than their men counterparts. The analysis also explored whether freelance journalists were impacted more than their staff counterparts and dug into gender differences within these subgroups as well. Once the dataset was analyzed, a qualitative analysis was conducted to explore the results of the quantitative analysis and to shed a light on the different factors that may have had an impact on the journalists' work and personal lives.

This project has the important effect of creating a much-needed quantitative dataset on the pandemic's impact on the productivity of journalists and attempts to provide a comprehensive picture of the current situation. Importantly, it provides journalism scholars and media managers concrete data on which to act to retain women and freelancers in journalism.

Although the productivity of journalists is a complex topic that may be influenced by a variety of factors at the individual, organizational, and societal levels, the quantitative and qualitative research components of this study attempted to begin to reveal these (Reese, 2019). This study aimed to explore the issue of inequity within the news media by looking at a single

measurable characteristic, productivity, but it is likely that the pandemic increased inequality in different ways. This exploratory project opens the door for further research into the gendered and unequal impact of the pandemic, as well as solutions to this potential problem. It also serves as an example of mixed methods research on structural inequality and discrimination in journalism.

### Research Questions

This project sought to answer the following research questions to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on francophone print journalists in Québec and Canada:

1. How was the productivity of journalists impacted during the first wave (March, April, and May 2020) of the pandemic?
2. Were women and precariously employed journalists impacted differently?
3. What were the lived experiences of journalists that may have influenced their productivity?

This project made use of a mixed methods research (MMR) approach and used an explanatory sequential design to answer these questions. First, a quantitative analysis was used to compare the productivity of journalists, measured by the number of articles with their by-line, in a sample of articles published across three francophone Québécois and Canadian daily publications (*Le Devoir*, *La Presse*, and *La Presse Canadienne*) in March, April, and May 2019 and in March, April, and May 2020. This quantitative analysis attempted to determine whether some journalists were more affected than others depending on their gender and employment status. The quantitative analysis revealed concrete impacts on productivity and a certain disparity between groups. These results informed the design of the qualitative analysis, which was conducted to explore the factors that may have been responsible for, or influenced, these disparities.

Based on the results of this project, I argue that women journalists were more impacted by the pandemic than their men counterparts. Among staff journalists, whose productivity during the first wave increased compared to the previous year, women's productivity increased more than men's. This is in part because of the feminization of beats like health and education, which put more pressure and responsibility on women to cover the pandemic's new developments and impacts. Productivity also significantly decreased compared to the previous year among precarious journalists because they were the first to be cut when the industry faced budget cuts. This led to the loss of contracts for freelancers and the reduction of hours for supernumerary journalists. Even among this group, women lost more opportunities, and likely revenue, than men.

Once the research portion of the project was completed, two outputs were produced to present the results to different audiences. The first one is a multimedia article, exploring and contextualizing the results for a general audience, which contains data visualizations as well as audio excerpts from the qualitative interviews. The second, the current academic report, presents the literature and theoretical background, a description of the methodology, and the results of the study to an academic audience.

## Literature review

### Women in Journalism

Women have worked in Canadian journalism since the 1800s. In those early days, women journalists were hired to write the "women's pages," where they wrote about "domestic concerns such as cooking, cleaning, and motherhood, reinforcing the private sphere as women's proper place" (Smith, 2015, p. 19). Women journalists were tasked with attracting female consumers for newspapers' advertisers and created "a specifically feminine form of news that would popularize

a gender identity for women readers within the existing newspaper or magazine” (Lang, 1999, p. 8). Though a few women covered hard news, such as politics, war, and business, most women journalists remained in soft news, writing about fashion and family life (Hunter, 2019).

As time passed, more women started working in newsrooms, first in newspapers and then in broadcasting in the mid-1900s. These journalists “faced many of the same struggles as women journalists continue to do today, particularly how to balance family expectations with a busy working life” (Hunter, 2019, p. 9). As Linda Kay (2012) writes, many of the women who had successful journalism careers during these times, including most of the women of the Canadian Women’s Press Club (CWPC), never married or did not have children.

Throughout the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women started to move from the women’s pages to the front pages. From 1975 to 1995, the proportion of women working in newsrooms increased, and the types of jobs they held also improved, moving up from jobs at the bottom of the newsroom hierarchy to positions with more power, like editor and managing editor (Robinson, 2008). Though there were still far more men working in journalism and in higher positions, much progress had been made since the days of the women’s pages.

Today, it appears there are still fewer women working in journalism than men, even among columnists (Byerly, 2011; El Azrak, 2018). However, according to the first diversity survey by the Canadian Association of Journalists [CAJ] (2021), conducted between November 2020 and July 2021, women comprise the majority across the mostly English-language newsrooms that responded. Importantly, many of the women contributing to parity are interns and part-time staff: while women represent 50.7% of full-time journalists, their proportion goes up to 61% of part-time employees and 64.9% of interns. The survey data also reveals that women journalists outnumber men at the supervisor level, and that visible minority or Indigenous women are more likely to hold a leadership role than their men counterparts. However, the validity of this

data is questionable for several reasons. First, the data provided by CBC and Radio-Canada falsely biases the results towards more diversity as they are federal employers who must respect several obligations and measures put into place over the years. The survey's data was also voluntarily submitted by leadership at 209 newsrooms, but 379 newsrooms did not respond, and no French-language media submitted data, which means that key data on many Canadian and Québec media is missing. Data on freelancers is also missing from the report, though it states that newsroom leaders who submitted data are in the process of collecting data on freelancers' diversity.

Most research on the news media in Canada shows that, though gender parity has mostly been achieved in lower-level jobs, women reach a “glass ceiling” at senior-level positions, beyond which they are underrepresented (Byerly, 2011; Rauhala & Lindgren, 2012). Though the number of women working in news around the world may have increased, “women journalists are still significantly underrepresented in older age groups, in decision-making positions and in prestigious news beats and media sectors” (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2019, p. 24). This has been found to be the same in Canadian media, where “men, not women, remain largely in decision-making positions” (Young & Beale, 2013, p. 110). Though few studies have specifically focused on the situation in Québec, a 2012 survey of unionized journalists did find that while women represented 46.2% of the 18-25 age group, that proportion decreased to 15.7% among journalists aged 55 and older (Bernier & Barber, 2012).

The Broadcasting Act has pushed television and radio news to “uphold the Canadian Multiculturalism and Equity Acts” and commit to “equitable gender representation and inclusion” (GMMP, 2015, p. 4). In spite of this, a 2005 study of TV news directors throughout Canada, including nine from Québec, found that of the news directors surveyed, women represented only about 21% while men represented almost 72% (Young & Beale, 2013).



In newspapers, which are largely self-regulated, the gender imbalance in higher positions is even worse (GMMP, 2015; Young & Beale, 2013). Indeed, there has still not been a woman editor-in-chief at Canada's largest national daily newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, and despite anecdotal evidence of women in the most senior positions at newspapers throughout the country, the most recent counts by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) still show a large discrepancy (Byerly, 2011). It is also important to note that according to Young and Beale (2013), "Certain kinds of women are more likely to succeed than others" (p. 116). In Québec, newswomen are "more likely to be single and/or childless than their male counterparts, suggesting that women have to work harder and longer, and according to different norms to get ahead" (Young & Beale, 2013, p. 116).

In Québec, women journalists have fared slightly better, with Lise Bissonnette running *Le Devoir* for close to a decade in the late 1990s and women like Senator Joan Fraser and Lucinda Chodan holding the position of editor-in-chief of the *Montreal Gazette*, Québec's largest English-language newspaper (Young & Beale, 2013).

Despite the anecdotal evidence of women in management positions and the general increase of women in the field, journalism is still organized around masculine values and "is characterized by a deeply rooted gender segregation" (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2019, p. 24). In Canada, women working in male-dominated newsrooms find that their progress is limited because they are outsiders who experience a "systemically reproduced inequality that ends the careers of many women who manage to enter the field" (Smith, 2015, p. 200).

Research has shown that the journalistic field is still horizontally segregated: there is a gender-specific divide in the assignment of stories (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2019; North, 2016). Women journalists are often pigeonholed into traditionally female soft news beats, like lifestyle, health, and education, and are less likely to be assigned high-profile stories than their

men peers (GMMP, 2015; Hong, 2013; North, 2016; Pulfer et al., 2020; Rauhala & Lindgren, 2012). Unfortunately, prestigious and influential hard news beats like politics, business, crime, and war reporting have a higher status, associated with the watchdog role of journalists, and therefore offer more opportunities for advancement and promotions (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2019; Geertsema-Sligh, 2018).

It is also important to note that studies like the 2011 IWMP report—which only surveyed 11 Canadian news organizations—which reveal a hard-won gender parity in newsrooms do not consider that there are more women than men in journalism schools (Smith, 2015; Wilkinson, 2020; York, 2017). That this ratio changes once women begin their careers suggests that women journalists leave the field at an alarming rate (Everbach & Flournoy, 2007; Hong, 2013; Rauhala & Lindgren, 2012). This has been referred to as the ‘revolving door’ effect, whereby the number of women in the field seems to stagnate, or even grow, as those that leave the field are replaced by young journalists out of school (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2019; Hardin et al., 2008).

Several factors seem to be influencing women journalists’ decisions to leave the field. A 2007 study on American journalists found that “women leave full-time news jobs because of a lack of opportunity, low salaries, lack of mentors, inflexible work schedules and differing perspectives on news from male-oriented newsrooms” (Everbach & Flournoy, 2007, p. 52). Similar results were found by Reinardy (2009), whose survey of 715 U.S. newspaper journalists showed that women felt overburdened at work and reported higher levels of exhaustion and lower levels of professional efficacy than their men counterparts. Additionally, they were not receiving sufficient organizational support when faced with “family and childcare issues, sexism, discrimination and the glass ceiling,” leading many of them to leave the field (Reinardy, 2009, p. 53).

Today, women journalists in Canada are still finding that there is little opportunity to rise in the ranks of management because of the ‘glass ceiling’ (Byerly, 2011). Power in news organizations currently rests with men – most media owners and top managers are men – which “creates a dynamic in which a high-achieving female journalist may secure a leadership role, only to find herself isolated as the sole woman in the boardroom” (Pulfer et al., 2020, p. 6). These “token” women are not “empowered to remake the table according to their own concerns, priorities, and interests” and often get pushed out of the profession, which leaves them unable to mentor other women who could join the ranks themselves (Pulfer et al., 2020, p. 6).

There is a clear gap between the income of women and men in the same positions. Data from the 2016 census reveals that in Québec, the average salary for a man journalist is more than \$5,000 higher than that of a woman (Statistics Canada, 2018b). Even more shockingly, the salary of a female journalist of a visible minority was on average less than half that of a non-visible minority male journalist (Statistics Canada, 2018c). The 2011 IWFM report showed this disparity was present at almost all occupational levels of the journalistic profession, from junior-level professionals, where the average high salary of women was almost \$14,000 less than that of men, all the way up to top-level management, where women’s average high salary was almost \$60,000 less than men’s (Byerly, 2011). This wage inequity is visible even though most women in journalism are more highly educated than men in the same position, and despite “the fact that more women work at larger news organizations, which pay better” (Robinson, 2008, as cited in Young & Beale, 2013, p. 116). Researchers in Australia have similarly found that while the proportion of women in the field has grown in the past decade, gender inequity has grown as “women journalists [are] getting younger and worse-paid just as men journalists are, on average, getting older and better-paid” (Dawson et al., 2021, p. 2).

Beyond these issues, the main difficulty women encounter as they get older and have families is the inflexibility of the profession. As Vivian Smith (2015) writes, “women journalists, especially those with children, say they find it increasingly difficult to perform the journalistic tasks expected of them, and more women than men say they are burned out” (p. 25). Indeed, the entrenched cultural inequities in male-dominated newsrooms make it difficult for women to balance work and family. In her book *Outsiders Still*, Smith (2015) recounts stories of women “madly juggling long hours with increasing family demands inside a culture that [offers] no flexibility” (p. 5). Women working within a newsroom culture hostile to women experience a lack of power to articulate their workplace needs, including more flexible hours to take care of their children and an on-site daycare, and generally feel that gender roles at work and at home are inevitable (Smith, 2015).

This lack of flexibility is reflected in the fact that few women journalists —especially those in the later stages of their careers and in management roles— have children, while those that do often have supportive stay-at-home partners who take on the majority of childcare responsibilities (Robinson, 2005; Smith, 2015). For most women in journalism, however, having a successful journalism career seems to imply making a choice not to have children. This is mainly because the journalistic culture is organized around a male norm of constant availability – journalists must often be available to work late and adapt to last-minute changes – which leads to difficulties in reconciling domestic and work responsibilities (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2019). Unlike their women counterparts, the majority of men journalists do have children and do not seem to face the same issues, likely because their partners take on the bulk of unpaid domestic work while they focus on their careers (Robinson, 2005). Most research on the issue agrees that the mental burden related to family constrains the development of journalists’ careers, particularly women’s (Le Cam et al., 2020).

Women in journalism are also faced with harassment and discrimination, both from people within the profession and from the public. Today, the newsroom remains a gendered space where women encounter varying levels of hostility from their men counterparts, ranging from sexual harassment and misconduct from individual colleagues to systemic inequality and discrimination related to gender, parenthood status, and age (Robinson, 2008; Smith, 2015; Young & Beale, 2013). In addition, it seems that the leadership and visibility of women journalists in the media, and now social media as well, “can serve as a lightning rod for evermore personalized attacks from both audiences and authorities” (Pulfer et al., 2020, p. 4). This harassment is often of a gendered nature and adds to the inequities of the field, which can lead women to leave the field out of exhaustion (Chen et al., 2018; Schallom, 2018).

All these factors push women out of full-time journalism. While some may become freelancers, either by choice or because it is the only way for them to continue reporting, many simply pivot towards careers in public relations or other fields that offer better working conditions (Antunovic et al., 2019; Everbach & Flournoy, 2007).

The overall result of women’s exodus from the news industry is less representation of the diverse voices and perspectives of society in the media, which has very real impacts on the news, particularly what – and whose – stories are told (Franks, 2013). One of the potential results of the lack of women in the field, especially in decision-making and editorial positions, is gendered news coverage. For example, “News reports about female politicians will often bring up the fact that they are also mothers, [...] implying that their political careers may interfere with their parenting responsibilities and vice versa” (Hunter, 2019, p. 19), while news reports on male politicians typically focus much less on their looks and personal lives (Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020).

Another potential impact of the lack of gender diversity in journalism is the low representation of women in news, particularly experts and women in positions of power. The GMMP (2015), showed that in one day in 2015, women were taken up as news subjects 27% of the time, and only 12% of the time in stories about politics and government. On that day, women were consulted as experts only 18% of the time. In another study, Canadian newspapers were found to quote female experts only 23.8% of the time (Kangourimollahajlou, 2017).

Today, little has changed: women experts are missing from COVID-19 coverage even though there are more women than men working in the health sciences (Carr, 2020). Indeed, a study on COVID-19 coverage in six different countries, including the USA and UK, has shown that in pandemic stories, “Men were four times more likely to be featured as experts and commentators,” while women were featured as the main protagonist in at most 30% of stories (Mulcahey, 2020, para. 16). Similarly, a study on the gender of COVID-19 experts in U.S. newspaper articles found that men academics outnumbered women by almost twofold, though they could not determine if this was “due to bias in the selection of newspaper sources, differential availability of women experts to participate in newspaper interviews, or a paucity of women with relevant expertise” (Fletcher et al., 2021, p. 1013). While the latest GMMP (2021) results show that on one day in 2020, women accounted for 31% of all news subjects (a one percent improvement from the 2010 results), there was a marked improvement from previous years’ results as women accounted for 43% of expert commentators.

Though some researchers have found this is not the case, the GMMP has shown that women journalists tend to include more female sources in their stories than male journalists (GMMP, 2015). Similarly, a 2008 report by the UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology and Cardiff University found that women journalists almost two times as likely to profile a woman scientist than their man counterparts (Kitzinger et al., 2008).

However, the main difference between men and women journalists appears to be the way they cover stories: for example, women covering stories of sexual assault tend to focus on the impact of the rape on the victim, while men covering those same stories focus on the impact of the rape charges on the perpetrator (El Azrak, 2018). Indeed, “more women [in the field], and especially more women in positions of power, may result in less masculinist reporting, for a uniquely female way of doing the news” (Goodyear-Grant, 2013, p. 115). As things are currently, however, women’s “impact in newsrooms seems muted” and it seems that “newsroom values may inhibit their efforts to assign, report and write what they want” (Rauhala & Lindgren, 2012, para. 25), which may be another reason why they leave the industry.

As Smith, Robinson, Young and Beale, and many other experts in the field write, though women today do not experience the same overt hostility as they did when they first entered the field in the 1800s, journalism is still characterized by gender stratification and systemic inequality that often push women to leave careers they love (Smith, 2015; Young & Beale, 2013). This lack of gender representation in the news industry means it does not currently reflect the diversity and complexity of Canadian society.

### Freelance Journalists

In Canada, as in the rest of the world, journalism has been undergoing a crisis as media companies have been faced with “changes in technologies, production practices, business models, consumer habits, and broader political economic conditions” (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 817). News organizations have progressively seen their advertising revenues disappear, absorbed by “Web giants,” news aggregators, and social media companies – like Facebook and Google – that do not pay taxes in Canada and offer preferential rates for ad placements (Confédération des syndicats nationaux-Fédération nationale des communications, 2019; Public Policy Forum, 2017).

Faced with these challenges, news organizations have been forced to close, merge, or restructure, and inevitably, cut costs by shrinking their workforces through mass layoffs and voluntary buyouts (Cohen et al., 2019; Public Policy Forum, 2017). In this context, full-time journalism jobs have become scarce, and journalists have been forced into precarious freelance positions, often at the same news organizations from which they were laid off (Cohen, 2017; Cohen et al., 2019). These journalists are left doing the same work as before but with less protection, benefits, and wages, meaning “that media companies benefit from turning full-time positions into precarious jobs, often offered to the laid-off journalist who has limited choice but to accept less secure terms of employment” (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 824). These practices of exploitation have increased over the past few decades, thereby shifting risks related to employment, and the protection against them, from employers to individual freelance journalists, who in Québec and Canada are not protected by labour laws and social programs available to most employees (D’Amours & Legault, 2013).

In this context of crisis, journalists are losing their jobs despite belonging to unions, which bring higher wages to their members but do not protect them from layoffs (Cohen et al., 2019). These journalists, who often become freelancers for lack of other options, lose their collective bargaining power because they are not allowed to unionize and therefore lose any control over the terms of their contracts (D’Amours & Legault, 2013). This is one of the reasons freelancers have lower wages. In addition, freelancers take on more individual risks – including loss of employment, income, protections, and benefits (D’Amours & Legault, 2013).

As Martine D’Amours (2014) details in her study of freelance journalists in Québec, the context within which journalists and freelancers work is impacted by three major factors: the concentration of media ownership, the implementation of digital technologies, and the diversification and fragmentation of content. The convergence of media, which allows the



reproduction of the same content across different platforms, and concentration of ownership have progressively led to fewer contracts and clients for freelancers (D'Amours, 2014). These factors, in addition to the “growing trend to have non-journalist contributors” and the fact that publications “make no commitment to give journalists any more work,” mean that freelancers often experience dry spells and risk having no income for prolonged periods of time (D'Amours & Legault, 2013, p. 96).

Historically, journalists have chosen to freelance because it allows them to remain independent. They can choose their own hours, choose the stories they want to write, and which publications they want to write for (Salamon, 2019). In fact, several studies have revealed that women in particular enjoy freelancing because of the freedom and flexibility it provides, which allows them to continue working while raising their children – something which is difficult to do with a full-time journalism job (Antunovic et al., 2019; Massey & Elmore, 2011).

Despite these benefits, however, freelance journalism is a precarious employment situation. Indeed, as Nicole Cohen (2017) writes, “most freelance writers in Canada and beyond earn low pay, experience insecurity, have limited social protections, and experience declining control over their work and working lives” (p. 2). Indeed, there is an imbalance of power in Canadian journalism: freelance journalists, stripped of their right to unionize, have very little individual bargaining power, while media corporations hold all the power (Cohen, 2017; D'Amours & Legault, 2013). Publishers set freelance rates and often demand that freelancers sign over their copyright, which “deprives them of income from publication on another platform” (D'Amours & Legault, 2013).

D'Amours (2014) writes that freelance rates in Québec have not really increased since the 1990s while their median income has stagnated, most freelancers have little social protection, and their individual power has overall decreased. Additionally, the quality of freelance journalists'

jobs is mediocre in terms of control over contractual terms, of remuneration, and of protection against risks; the only benefits appear to be the ability to decide on journalistic treatment and to control their working hours (D'Amours, 2014). As Marín-Sanchiz et al. (2021) write, freelancing is generally a precarious position in which “professionals are typically low paid, forced to work long hours, suffer instability, and lack general social benefits” (p. 4), and which is additionally characterized by “excessive flexibility, uncertainty regarding the future, and the need to rely on familial help” (p. 17). Despite this, many freelance writers express satisfaction with their jobs, although the happiest ones tend to hold “consolidated, stable positions with recurring assignments” (Marín-Sanchiz et al., 2021, p. 18).

As D'Amours (2019) explains, the workforce is being progressively divided into the few lucky enough to find a full-time job, and the more precarious, atypical jobs, such as freelancing, part-time, contractual, and supernumerary positions, all of which offer less stability and social protection. Though a new law in Québec protects workers whose status is being changed from staff to independent if their duties are otherwise unchanged, nothing stops employers from resorting to temporary workers to fulfill permanent needs of the company (D'Amours, 2019). Although the supernumerary journalist status, or “surnuméraire,” is more stable than freelancing in that the worker has one main contract, it is still a precarious position characterized by financial precarity, and little protection and power, as the number of hours granted from week to week are not guaranteed and the employer decides when they are needed or not (Lamoureux, 2021). D'Amours (2014) also notes that in print media, supernumerary journalists are often employed to replace permanent staff. A report on the crisis of news media in Québec (Brin & St-Pierre, 2013) confirms that there is an ongoing shift from permanent to precarious work, as the hiring of freelancers and supernumerary journalists has increased. The report specifically shows that this is the case at La Presse Canadienne, where the 25% increase in employees between 2008 and 2011

was largely due to the hiring of supernumerary journalists while permanent employees retired, representing a shift from permanent to precarious journalism jobs (Brin & St-Pierre, 2013).

As conditions in journalism worsen, more and more journalists are finding it impossible to find stable, full-time, long-term employment and are turning to freelancing as a last resort (Salamon, 2019). In Canada, these reluctant freelancers are mostly women, pushed out of newsrooms by systemic inequities, gender-based struggles, and discriminatory practices (Salamon, 2019). A recent study on Canadian journalists who lost their jobs revealed that more women than men were laid off, while more men took voluntary buyouts (Cohen et al., 2019). As Smith (2015) writes:

Freelancing is an unstable, powerless sort of intellectual piecework done mostly in Canada by women, while editorial work at the highest and best-paid levels of the daily newspaper business is still done mostly by men. Freelancers are emphatically outsiders, usually working from home. (p. 12)

Catherine McKercher (2009) emphasizes that “freelance writing is indeed women’s work” and explains that women work at the periphery of the news business: “This means the disparity in power between core and periphery is heightened by gender” (p. 371). In Canada, freelance jobs are mostly held by women journalists who have little control over their rates and have no guarantee that their clients will pay them (Salamon, 2019). In Québec, D’Amours (2014) found that though men and women are relatively balanced among freelancers (in 2014, women represented 52.3%), women freelancers tend to be younger and less well paid than their men counterparts, who are more likely to have medical and invalidity benefits.

Finally, freelance journalism is characterized by low wages: there is a significant wage gap between full-time work in a unionized newsroom and freelance journalism (McKercher, 2009). This only exacerbates the gender pay gap that exists among journalists. Beyond

D'Amours' findings, a survey by the Writers' Union of Canada (2015) revealed that a majority of freelance writers are women who only earn 55% of the income of men writers.

Overall, the ongoing shift from full-time, stable journalism jobs to increasingly precarious jobs —such as freelance, contract, supernumerary, and part-time— “demonstrates underlying precariousness in Canadian journalism” (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 817). This shift has predominantly affected women, who must work in precarious conditions with little protection from the risks of employment and income loss, illness, motherhood, and other crises that may arise (D'Amours & Legault, 2013). In Québec, news media are experiencing much the same crisis, and the overall tendency in the past decade has been a loss of revenues leading to a reduction in the number of journalists (Giroux, 2020). This is particularly important to take into consideration as we study the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, as the tendency is unlikely to have reversed, and several indicators enable researchers to determine that the crisis has indeed worsened the situation, particularly for print media.

### COVID-19: A Crisis Within a Crisis

Since January 2020, COVID-19 has swept through the world. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared a pandemic; the next day, the Québec government announced restrictions on public gatherings, closely followed by the closure of schools, daycares, and entertainment and recreational venues, and then all non-essential businesses (Bronca, 2020). This caused a sudden pause of the economy: most businesses were forced to close their doors for extended periods of time, leading them to furlough and even lay off their employees. Though most industries have been heavily impacted by the pandemic, the so-called “pink” sector, which relies on face-to-face interaction and in which employment is dominated by women, have taken the biggest hit, leading to an increase in gender inequality (The Economist, 2020).

A recent report by the Royal Bank of Canada revealed that between February and October 2020, more than 20,000 women left the workforce while three times more men started work, and this exodus seemed mostly due to young women between 20 and 24 years old, and between 35 and 39 years old quitting their jobs (La Presse Canadienne, 2020b). According to this same report, women with children under six years old represent two-thirds of this group even though they only represented 41% of the workforce before the pandemic (La Presse Canadienne, 2020b). Indeed, “The disproportionate burden of the disruption created by COVID-19 is being borne by women, especially those with young children and no other childcare options” (Shurchkov, 2020, para. 2). This disparity is in part due to the fact that, even before the pandemic, women disproportionately held the lowest paid, least valued jobs of the economy, and during crises, these are the first ones to go (Connley, 2020). As Brin and St-Pierre (2013) explain, in times of crisis, companies like news publications can more easily get rid of their temporary employees, such as supernumerary and freelance journalists, than their permanent employees.

Since three quarters of unpaid labour – especially childcare – throughout the world is performed by women and most of the caregiving infrastructure has been shut down by the pandemic, women have lost much of their flexibility to pick up extra shifts at work or even go to work at all (Connley, 2020; Lungumbu & Butterly, 2020). The mass exodus of women from the workforce could also be explained by the fact that women typically make less money for the same role than their men counterparts, which could be leading them to decide to leave their jobs to take care of their children (Gogoi, 2020).

Since the pandemic has seemingly impacted women more than men, several studies have sought to determine if this was the case among academics, a group bearing several similarities to journalists and whose field is riddled by gender inequalities. These studies measured the impact of the pandemic on their productivity and have revealed that women academics have published

less research as a result of the pandemic, while their men counterparts have been more productive than before (Frederickson, 2020a, 2020b; Isselbacher, 2020; Viglione, 2020; Vincent-Lamarre et al., 2020). The scientists behind these studies believe that this disparity is due, for the most part, to COVID-19 restrictions that have led to school and daycare closures. These have moved childcare and schooling from the paid, public sphere to the home, where women are likely to take on more of these responsibilities.

Traditional views on gender roles persist, leaving women to take on more housework and family care (Miller, 2020). This has increased with the pandemic because women also tend to have lower-paid jobs and more flexible hours, which allows them to take care of children while men tend to have to work at regular hours every day (Fazackerley, 2020). Additionally, even before the pandemic caused more women than men to lose their jobs, men scientists were “four times as likely as women to have spouses who work part-time or not at all” (Frederickson, 2020b, para. 8), and “female faculty with children spend considerably more time engaging in caregiving activities compared to their male counterparts” (Shurchkov, 2020, para. 10), which may explain the increase in men academics’ productivity while women’s productivity has sunk.

As women in many fields, particularly in “pink” sectors and among academics, have been affected differentially, it could be expected that this is the case among journalists as well. Indeed, many parallels can be drawn between the work of journalists and academics: they both spend much time researching, reading, and writing, and besides classes, academics have flexible schedules like freelance journalists. Much of the work of both journalists and academics can be done from home, particularly since the adoption of Zoom and other videoconference software as a key communication tool by most organizations. Importantly, both women academics and journalists are subject to the same pervasive gender roles that leave women bearing the brunt of

housework and family care, and since the beginning of the pandemic, have made them primarily responsible for homeschooling and childcare (Collins, 2020; Obiria, 2020; Robinson, 2008).

In general, the pandemic has been a crisis within a crisis for the already-struggling news industry. Lockdown measures have forced local businesses to slow down, leading advertisers to become even scarcer than before. The news industry's advertising revenues, which were already in decline, have plummeted (Lacroix & Carignan, 2020b). Many news organizations have since been forced to lay off journalists, cut wages, cut back or cancel print editions, and even close their doors (Ashton-Beaucage, 2020; J-Source, 2020; Wechsler, 2021).

Though the pandemic has affected most journalists in Canada and Québec, some evidence has shown that women have been impacted more than men. A survey by the International Federation of Journalists (2020c) has revealed that women journalists are experiencing increased inequalities in newsrooms worldwide. According to respondents, the COVID-19 pandemic has “had a negative impact on women's salaries as well as on their work responsibilities, career advancement and private life” (Associated Press, 2020, para. 2). The majority of women who participated in the study reported an increase in stress and anxiety caused by multitasking, which led to sleeping and health problems (IFJ, 2020b).

Eighty percent of Canadian respondents reported feeling stressed due to the lack of access to childcare, managing multiple duties while working from home, fear and psychological impact of covering the pandemic, and concern over loss of work or income (Unifor, 2020b). The inequalities accentuated by the pandemic are having devastating impacts on women's work-life balance, on their ability to fulfill their work responsibilities, and as a result, may have long-term effects on their salaries (IFJ, 2020b, 2020c).

It is not surprising that many women journalists report that lack of childcare is affecting their stress levels. A Statistics Canada study (Leclerc, 2020) indeed revealed that the school and

daycare closures caused by the pandemic and the ensuing additional parental responsibilities, particularly homeschooling, affected parents throughout the country. However, not all parents were impacted equally: before the pandemic, women fulfilled more household tasks than men, and the pandemic has only increased this disparity, particularly among women who are working from home or who lost their jobs (Leclerc, 2020). In addition, the added homeschooling responsibility has mostly been taken on by women throughout Canada (Leclerc, 2020); this has likely been the case among journalists as well because women in this field tend to have more flexible schedules than their men counterparts, in part because many of them are freelancers or part-time workers rather than full-time staff at news organizations (CAJ, 2021; Salamon, 2019). This has likely enabled them to take on more childcare responsibilities than their men partners.

Women journalists, who often hold the most precarious jobs of the industry, are likely to have suffered unequally from the waves of layoffs and freelance budget cuts. In addition, many soft news sections suffered budget cuts because of the closures of entertainment and artistic venues, and as these beats are dominated by women, it is likely that many more women than men were let go (Myles, 2020; North, 2016). Finally, most of the women who work in journalism are younger and less experienced; on average, they have been working in the field for a shorter period than men journalists (Bernier & Barber, 2012; Dawson et al., 2021; De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2019). Faced with hard decisions to make about whom to let go, managers have likely been forced to lay off the least experienced, and therefore, more women.

Estimates of the impact of the pandemic on journalists have largely failed to account for freelance journalists, even though they make up a large proportion of Canadian journalists (Langton, 2020; McCluskey, 2020; Wechsler, 2021). While layoffs and media closures in Canada have been reported on, few articles have focused on freelance budget cuts, which have left freelancers struggling to adapt to the pandemic (Castillo, 2020), although a review of the state of



Québec media points out that several media have shut down or spaced out their issues, which has caused many freelancers to lose contracts (Giroux, 2020). It is likely that the situation for Canadian freelancers is similar to that of freelance climate journalists in South Asia, whose financial security has been further impacted by outlets cutting their budgets because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Wadud, 2021). They have been living in constant stress of losing their livelihoods, and some report being willing to put their lives at risk to work but being unable to find any.

Though Canadian news organizations are faced with declining revenues and are still counting on freelancers to provide them with content while keeping their costs low, Jeff Gaulin, the owner of a popular freelance job site, noted that by early May 2020, the number of jobs posted on the website had declined by 90% (Stewart, 2020). As U.S. freelancer Alyssa Schukar explains, the pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities freelancers face, and “has forced her to transition a lot of her work away from the news industry” (Chiarito, 2021, para. 21). Freelancers are particularly vulnerable during this pandemic because due to the precarious nature of their jobs, they may not be “immediately eligible for employment insurance, paid sick days, benefits coverage, or other important entitlements” (Unifor, 2020a, para. 5). Those journalists who may have caught COVID-19 or had to take time off for family or personal reasons were likely even more impacted, as Schukar also points out that “editors are less likely to call you if you keep saying that you’re unavailable” (Chiarito, 2021, para. 16). Particularly at risk are freelancers working arts, entertainment, and restaurant industries, as these sectors were completely shut down in the early months of the pandemic. Despite this, freelancers still reported on the pandemic, often without the same protective equipment that staff journalists have had access to (McCluskey, 2020). As we have seen, most freelancers in Canada are women, which means that these budget cuts have likely impacted more women than men overall.

The factors outlined here highlight that the pandemic is turning back the clock on gender equality globally and is likely worsening the entrenched systemic inequality present in journalism. Women were already leaving the field of journalism at a higher rate than men before the pandemic, and this has now likely increased. A study on U.S. journalists covering the pandemic (Hoak, 2021) has already shown that women and younger or less experienced journalists “felt significantly more stress associated with pandemic coverage” (p. 854) than other journalists, results which were “consistent with previous research linking gender, age, and experience with job stress in journalists” (p. 867). It is particularly important to study and create more data on the impact of the pandemic on women journalists and freelancers so that any inequalities revealed cannot be ignored by media organizations.

Women must be represented in newsrooms so that the diversity and complexity of Canadian society is reflected in the news. Women journalists offer different perspectives and stories than men and losing them means losing highly qualified reporters. Indeed, evidence shows that women journalists’ COVID-19 reporting has overall been more credible and trustworthy (Kostreci, 2020). Meanwhile, research in six different countries has shown that coverage of women, especially as protagonists of COVID-19 stories and as experts, and of gender equality has declined during the pandemic, perhaps as a result of more women journalists losing their jobs and freelance contracts (Carr, 2020; Mulcahey, 2020). An investigation by *Le Devoir* has also revealed that although women suffered the most from the pandemic, their voices have been muted in francophone pandemic news coverage: since the beginning of the pandemic, only 36% of experts and 26% of politicians cited in articles are women (Croteau, 2022). The lack of women among sources and experts means news coverage is not presenting the diversity of experiences that exist in society; this reduces the public’s ability to objectively and critically analyze topics like the pandemic by presenting fewer points of view, and it also blurs women out of history

(Baillargeon & Croteau, 2022). This reflects the dangers of losing women’s perspectives and expertise in newsrooms, leading to less diverse news coverage that does not reflect the society we live in. Freelancers, independent of their gender, also bring a diversity of voices to the field, and losing this diversity would greatly affect the quality of news coverage in a democratic society.

In general, protecting and improving diversity in newsrooms is imperative to the long-term survival of the news industry. Media with diverse staff cover and represent the communities they serve better and more accurately by “providing well-researched, complex stories that explore different perspectives and voices” (Bourgault, 2021, para. 6). Inclusive media also seem more authentic and therefore more trustworthy to their audiences, who want content that “reflects their experiences and perspectives” (Bourgault, 2021, para. 4), and they may be more profitable by attracting readers searching for “an accurate representation of the world we live in today” (Bourgault, 2021, para. 16) in the news. Revealing whether journalists were unequally impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic can help safeguard diversity in newsrooms and is therefore essential for protecting not only the journalists themselves, but also the industry and media they love.

### Theoretical Considerations

Several conceptual frameworks are guiding this project. The hierarchy of influences model refers to the “various factors affecting news content, arrayed on a continuum from a micro-individual to the macro-social system level” (Reese, 2019, p. 1). As Reese (2019) explains, the hierarchy of influences model is presented as a set of concentric circles, with the *individual level* (the personal characteristics of individual communicators, which are presumed to be consequential to the health of the profession) at the centre, followed by the *routines level* (journalists are affected by routine actions “embedded in the immediate environment of their work” (p. 2)), and the *organizational level* (which “recognizes that news is produced within entities that have their own policies and economic imperatives” (p. 2)). A number of studies on

gender inequality in the media, including the GMMP and the IWMF's *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media* draw on the hierarchy of influences model but focus primarily on the individual level of analysis (Geertsema-Sligh, 2018). The routines and organizational levels of analysis can serve to further analyze the journalistic culture within which journalists operate, and the *social systems level* can serve to analyze the larger societal structures that lead to gender inequality (Reese, 2019).

This model was used for both the quantitative analysis — looking at a large enough sample across several important publications in Québec and Canada, coding for individual characteristics, such as gender, as well as characteristics that may be related to individual choices as well as routines, organizational and societal-level conditions, such as beat and employment status, that may have an impact on journalistic productivity — and in the qualitative analysis— determining who to interview to make sure the participants represent a wide enough variety of situations, and designing the interview guide to tackle factors at all four levels of analysis. Though directly measuring the “journalists’ organization, policies, and national culture” (Reese, 2019, p. 3) would likely offer more far-reaching insight, this short-term study focused on productivity as a directly measurable variable, and the qualitative portion of this research attempted to elucidate how journalists perceive the different levels to relate to each other and which ones are more influential.

This study additionally relies on Nicole Cohen’s work on freelance journalists, which, as Neilson (2018) writes, “builds on existing work in the critical political economy of communication” (para. 2) and “details the autonomy, precarity, and exploitation involved in freelance work” (para. 3). Cohen’s (2017) research draws on Marx’s theorizing about the labour process and attends to “relations of control and contestation at the point of production” (p. 2). In her work, the agency of workers is placed within the political economy of news: this will be

essential to bear in mind throughout this project, along with the hierarchy of influences model, given that the productivity of freelance journalists depends not only on their personal choices but also on the contracts that media companies offer them.

## Methodology

This study explores the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the productivity of journalists with a mixed methods research (MMR) approach, using an explanatory sequential design. Quantitative data was collected and analyzed, and the results were connected to and explained by qualitative data collection and analysis, before arriving at an interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

The productivity of journalists was measured by comparing the number of by-lines published by journalists in three daily francophone publications during the first wave, a three-month time period early in the pandemic (March, April, and May) in 2020, to the same period in 2019. The qualitative portion consisted of six semi-directed interviews with journalists picked from the quantitative sample. The interviews explored the hypotheses formulated to explain the changes in productivity discovered in the quantitative portion. The topics discussed in the interviews served to contextualize and explain in more detail the initial results of the study and to provide content for the multimedia journalistic creation and this academic report. The explanatory sequential design of this project was useful because the quantitative results informed “The types of participants to be purposefully selected for the qualitative phase and the types of questions that [were] asked of the participants” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 304). The quantitative results and the results of the qualitative data collection were tied together to provide a holistic picture of the impact of the pandemic on the productivity of print journalists.

Very few studies about gender in the Canadian media have used mixed methods to quantify and explain gender inequality in the field. Most studies either simply count, using a variety of methods, the number of women working and publishing in the media, while others use qualitative interviews and focus groups to contextualize and gain insight into the experiences of women working in journalism. Counting is indeed important, as it can reveal structural horizontal and vertical segregation and is essential to media monitoring, advocacy, and putting gender on the agenda in media organizations and public debate (Djerf-Pierre, 2011). However, it is not enough, and this quantitative method must be combined with an analysis of the underlying journalistic culture causing gender segregation and inequality in order to gain a deeper understanding of the “subtle and invisible mechanisms of gender bias” (De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2019, p. 24). Therefore, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was essential to explore the impact of the pandemic on journalists while considering the underlying gender and labour inequality in Canadian newsrooms.

MMR was justified in this context because the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses complemented each other (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). Indeed, the counting served to determine if there was a gender gap and a gap between staff journalists and freelancers in the pandemic’s effects on journalists’ productivity. The qualitative interviews attempted to elucidate the reasons behind this gap, helped to explain surprising and unexpected results, and helped me form more complete and holistic conclusions about the pandemic’s effect on journalists in Québec and Canada.

### Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

The first half of the study explored whether the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the productivity of certain groups of journalists — men vs. women, and staff vs. freelance journalists — differently, using publication rate as a productivity index.

A dataset from three publications was extracted using Eureka, a Canadian media monitoring database operated by Cision. *Le Devoir*, *La Presse* and *La Presse Canadienne* were chosen because they are daily francophone news providers with a national scope, they hire medium to large newsrooms, and their bibliographic data is available on Eureka. *La Presse* is the number one online daily news provider in Québec, with 2,239,000 weekly readers and more than three million monthly readers in late 2019 (Levasseur, 2019). While *Le Devoir* is a smaller publication, it is independent, has a loyal readership and is considered the media of reference; *Le Devoir*'s readership increased in 2018 while their competitors' readerships decreased (Rody, 2018). Most of the journalists at *La Presse* and *Le Devoir* are based in Montréal, the largest city in Québec and second largest in Canada, though both news providers have a national scope and have correspondents in Ottawa and Québec. *La Presse Canadienne* is a national news agency whose journalists cover news from all over Canada. Its articles are sold to and published in both *La Presse* and *Le Devoir*, and have a national reach, so the inclusion of this publication's journalists adds to the range of this project. In addition, *Le Devoir* and *La Presse* have both issued statements explaining that they were affected by the pandemic, leading to wage reductions and job losses even though their workers are unionized, and it is likely their freelance budgets have been slashed as well (Ashton-Beaucage, 2020; J-Source, 2020; *La Presse Canadienne*, 2020a; Myles, 2020). Indeed, *La Presse*'s collective agreement stipulates that before being able to fire permanent employees, management must cease collaborations with freelancers, so this group was the most affected by staff reduction measures in 2009 and likely have been again during this crisis (Brin & St-Pierre, 2013).

Bibliographic metadata from all the articles published in these three publications during two periods (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020) were extracted from the Eureka database and imported into Zotero, a free reference management software. This time period, from March to May 2020, represents the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada.

Eureka catalogues the articles from the different platforms that each news outlet updates daily as separate publication titles, such as the print newspaper, the website, or the electronic tablet version. Choices had to be made in that regard. “La Presse Canadienne” written articles were retrieved, as the other options were for radio and TV transcripts, which were not included in the current study. For *La Presse*, the options were “La Presse+,” the daily tablet version of *La Presse*, or “La Presse (site web).” “La Presse+” was chosen as a source because it represents the publication’s equivalent of their daily paper, which was discontinued in 2018. The search for “La Presse+” provided more articles (2019: 9157; 2020: 7773) than the search for “La Presse (site web)” (2019: 4993; 2020: 5952). The business model of *La Presse* is to publish more exclusive content in their free tablet version than on their website to build readers’ loyalty and sell advertising for this specific platform. For *Le Devoir*, “Le Devoir (site web)” was chosen because it resulted in more articles (2019: 6022; 2020: 5188) than the search for “Le Devoir” (stories published in the newspaper each day) (2019: 4864; 2020: 3579). *Le Devoir*’s business model is different from *La Presse*. The website has a paywall that requires a subscription: not only is every story published in the daily print edition also published on the website, certain stories are also published exclusively on the web or updated as breaking news happens. It was deemed preferable to use the source option in Eureka which provided more articles because it increased the chance of being exhaustive and retrieving all the articles written by the publication’s journalists during the selected periods.



*Table 1: Total number of articles published in La Presse+ (tablet version), Le Devoir’s website and by La Presse Canadienne between March 1 and May 31 in 2019 and 2020. Obtained as bibliographic data from Canadian media monitoring solution Eureka.*

Publication	March 1-May 31, 2019 articles	March 1-May 31, 2020 articles
La Presse+	9157	7773
Le Devoir (site web)	6022	5188
La Presse Canadienne	7048	6622

For each publication and time period, an advanced search was launched with the search fields empty, the selected publication as a source, and the selected time period as the date range. The articles’ bibliographic metadata was downloaded in RIS format in batches of 1000 articles, Eureka’s download limit. The downloaded .ris files were uploaded into Zotero libraries for each publication and year. The libraries were then exported into .csv files.

Once all the .csv files were exported into two separate folders for spring 2019 and spring 2020, their contents were combined into two “master” .csv files using a technique that merges .csv files (Hackit Guy, 2020).

The master .csv files were then combined into one master document, which was then converted into an Excel document (containing all exported articles from March, April, and May 2019, and from March, April, and May 2020). Only the following columns were kept, as they were necessary for the identification of the articles and the journalists that wrote them:

Publication Year, Author, Title, Publication Title, Date.

The MASTER\_1920.xlsx file was imported to OpenRefine, an online tool that facilitates the cleaning of data. The goal was to make the data as clean as possible to extract high-quality results. This was achieved through three major steps in OpenRefine. First, any articles with a blank author field or in which there was no name (for example, news wire articles and briefs) were removed. Then, duplicates (multiple rows with the same Author, Publication, and Title)

were removed. Thirdly, articles with multiple authors were split into multiple distinct rows so that each row only contained one author, but all those rows had the same article title.

Other key steps in the cleaning process included merging names that were the same person but with slightly different spelling due to input errors; removing articles by journalists working for news wires (e.g. Agence France-Presse, Associated Press) and by journalists from The Canadian Press in all three datasets (these pieces are written in English and translated to French, so they are not written by the francophone newsroom of La Presse Canadienne); removing all articles written by people whose total article count was less than five (this was done to remove articles written by non-journalists, such as opinion pieces and some sponsored pieces) and articles credited to photographers and caricaturists; removing articles written by journalists from the Local Journalism Initiative (these journalists do not work for the three media in the study, but La Presse Canadienne sometimes republishes them).

Once the data was clean, it was imported into Microsoft Excel. Gender was assigned to each author line by line. To save time, gender was determined through the first name of each journalist, and when it was ambiguous, an internet search was performed to confirm it. Efforts were made to respect journalists' self-identification, using gender confirmation from their social media biographies or from their public communications. Though this method is often trans-blind, the time limitation of this project and the necessity of creating data on this subject overshadow the imperfection of this method. Employment status during the time periods in the study was determined through internet searches, especially focusing on publications' websites, Google searches, Twitter, LinkedIn, and other social media.

Using pivot tables, individual authors and the number of articles written by each were then extracted. Employment status (staff, freelancer, supernumerary (extra or "surnuméraire"

journalists), or a combination if the journalist changed position during or between the time periods studied) was then assigned to each author.

Gender and employment status were chosen as important characteristics to highlight for many reasons. First, determining the gender of the journalists in the sample was important to perform a gendered analysis of productivity. Additionally, employment status was likely an important factor in journalists' productivity, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis, and thus had to be determined to complete a comprehensive analysis. Other characteristics, such as journalistic beat, career length or age, and type of journalist (reporter, columnist, editorialist, editor-in-chief, etc.), as well as ethnicity, may have had an impact on the productivity of journalists but were difficult to determine due to time constraints. Ethnicity, particularly as it intersects with other personal characteristics such as gender and age, has been shown to have an impact on a journalist's career in Canada — for example, by widening the pay gap: visible minority women journalists' average employment income in 2015 was less than half that of white male journalists' (Statistics Canada, 2018c) — and thus, when possible, should be included in an analysis of this kind.

Unexpectedly, one of the interviewees in the qualitative portion of the study suggested that the number of stories with their byline obtained through the selection of “Le Devoir (site web)” in Eureka seemed inaccurate. This was one of the expected and acceptable limitations of this project, as journalists' bylines are particularly hard to count, especially in a digital news context. Their articles may be published much later than originally planned, or the media may publish some articles on their website but not in their print version, or vice versa. Journalists may also publish in different publications than the one they have their main contract with, or they may work with different types of media (such as audio or video).

In the case of *Le Devoir*, the data collection and cleaning process was repeated to answer the interviewee's concerns. It was possible to determine that the discrepancy was caused by the omission of certain authors, in Eureka, in articles with multiple bylines in *Le Devoir*. As a last resort, the number of articles in the selected periods for each journalist in the sample were counted manually on [ledevoir.com](http://ledevoir.com). The dataset retrieved with this method was slightly different from the initial results but was more reliable. Tests were performed to make sure the same error did not contaminate the dataset for *La Presse* and *La Presse Canadienne*: it was not the case. In the process, an additional four journalists were added back to the sample for *Le Devoir*; they had originally been removed because their total number of articles was below five, but the new data collection methodology revealed this number to be five or above.

#### Data Analysis

For the analysis, freelance and supernumerary staff journalists were grouped together into the “precarious” category, as both employment statuses are precarious positions in the journalism industry. They have fewer benefits and job security than regular, permanent staff journalists.

In this analysis, productivity (or publication rate) was measured as the number of articles written by journalists during two comparable three-month periods, March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020. The average number of articles written per journalist during these study periods was calculated to determine if there was a significant difference between the publication rate in 2019 and in 2020, first for all publications and then for each publication. These calculations were then repeated for the different groups under study: men, women, staff, and precarious (freelance and supernumerary) journalists.

Using Excel, the following analyses were performed: Number of articles written by men and women in 2019 and 2020; Number of articles written by men and women in 2019 and 2020 at each news outlet; Number of articles written by staff and precarious journalists in 2019 and

2020, for all news outlets and at each outlet; Variation in number of articles published in 2019 and 2020, for all journalists and between each group (men vs. women, staff vs. precarious, staff vs. precarious split by gender); Average number of articles written by individual journalists in 2019 and 2020 for all news outlets and at each outlet; Descriptive statistics such as the median, mode, and standard deviation of the data for each sample. Different t-tests (paired and two-sample, one- and two-tailed) were then performed on the data for each group of journalists, first for all publications and then for each publication, to determine if the difference in the number of articles published in 2019 and 2020 was statistically significant (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009).

The average publication rate for the whole group and all the subgroups were calculated by removing journalists who did not publish in one study period or the other from that individual study period's total. In other words, each average calculation had a different denominator depending on the number of journalists who wrote articles in each year, and the actual journalists present in the total number of journalists varied between study periods. These results represent the average rate of publication for each group and subgroup (the total number of articles in each study period was divided by the number of journalists actually publishing in that study period). This was the measure used as a basis for further analyses and the qualitative study and the results obtained using this calculation will be reported in the Findings section. It can be schematized as:

$$\text{Average Publication Rate YearX} = \frac{\text{Number of articles published in YearX}}{\text{Number of journalists' distinct bylines in YearX}}$$

The results of this quantitative analysis led to preliminary conclusions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the productivity of journalists in Québec and Canada and helped in the finalization of the qualitative portion's design.

## Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

The quantitative data analysis revealed interesting effects on journalists' productivity. Hypotheses were formulated to explain why these effects occurred. However, a series of qualitative interviews exploring the quantitative results was necessary to comprehensively understand why the COVID-19 pandemic had these impacts on journalists in Québec and Canada, and to illustrate the different levels of influences on productivity, such as personal, routine, and organizational influences (Reese, 2019),.

Following the explanatory sequential design of the study, the qualitative portion of the study followed up on the quantitative results and explored them in more depth. The interviewees were therefore selected from the sample of journalists studied in the quantitative portion of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative results were also used to inform the design of the qualitative interview guide (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

A series of in-depth, semi-directed qualitative interviews were conducted with six journalists chosen from the quantitative sample. Each interview took place on Zoom, a videoconferencing software, for 45 minutes to an hour each and were recorded with the interviewee's consent. As stipulated by the ethics protocol, participants read the consent script and had the opportunity to ask the interviewer about any questions and concerns they may have about the project before the interview started.

The six journalists were chosen to be representative of the different situations encountered by journalists, varying in gender, employment status, publication, and productivity change. A total of 15 journalists from the quantitative sample were selected, including at least one person of each gender per media, one freelancer per media (except *La Presse Canadienne*, as that sample contained no freelancers), and at least one significantly negative and one significantly positive

productivity change. Of these, 13 were contacted (contact information could not be found for the others), nine responded to the initial contact, and only six finally agreed to participate. One of the contacted journalists refused to participate because they did not agree with using publication rate as a productivity index. They felt that editors' requirement to constantly publish more without regard for the time required to research, analyze, and reflect, leads many journalists to leave the field due to burnout and exhaustion. Another journalist declined to participate because their decline in productivity was unrelated to the pandemic. It would have been interesting to include them if they agreed, since individual situations like these could explain some of the variations in productivity discovered.

*Table 2: Description of all six qualitative interview participants selected from the quantitative data sample to obtain information on the lived experiences of journalists of a variety of genders, publications, employment statuses, and productivity changes during the pandemic. Gender and publication removed to protect anonymity.*

Participant	Employment status	Productivity change
M73	Staff	Increase
B34	Staff	Decrease
H21	Staff	Increase
V92	Staff	Decrease
P17	Freelancer	Decrease
K68	Freelancer	Decrease

Of the staff journalists, two worked for *La Presse*, one for *Le Devoir*, and one for *La Presse Canadienne*. One of these changed status between the 2019 and 2020 study periods, from supernumerary to staff; this is reflected in the data analysis. Of the freelancers, one wrote articles for *Le Devoir* and the other for *La Presse*, though both also published in different publications during the study periods. There were no freelancers in the *La Presse Canadienne* sample. Three journalists in the sample were men, and three were women.

This is a small and non-statistically representative sample, and their answers during the interviews helped in the construction of a holistic vision of the situation they collectively faced.

The topics discussed gave insight into the experiences and perceptions of journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic in Québec and Canada.

The interview guide was designed to investigate the original assumptions of the study as well as the hypotheses developed to explain the initial data. The goal was also to delve deeper into the questions raised by the quantitative analysis, including some unexpected results. Care was put into the order of the questions so that the participants could be guided towards deeper, more meaningful answers, but the semi-directed interview design allowed the conversations to flow naturally, and questions were sometimes reordered, added, or discarded depending on the participant. The interview script was loosely adapted from a guide about qualitative interview best practices, which recommended to organize questions according to their type and temporality (Patton, 2014). First, questions on the participants' behaviours and experiences were asked, then questions on their opinions and values, on their feelings, on their knowledge, and on their senses. The questions were designed to be open-ended and clear, and throughout the interview, techniques such as active listening, follow-up questions, and feedback were used to help the interview flow.

Once the interviews were completed, the participants were given a code to anonymize the data and the recorded interviews were transcribed. Only the sections judged to be the most important and relevant for the analysis, for the elaboration of theories, and for the article and thesis report were fully transcribed. The remaining sections were loosely transcribed. As per the ethics protocol, any information that may allow the identification of the participants was not transcribed.

A thematic analysis of these transcribed interviews was then performed on Dedoose, a free qualitative data analysis software. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis — “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79)—is a



flexible research tool that can “provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data” (p. 78). By uncovering themes that repeatedly occurred throughout the interview data, the factors that have impacted the productivity of journalists were extracted (Hawkins, 2017).

The first round of analysis was performed by going through each individual transcript and noting codes (such as descriptions of the topic discussed, action verbs, and key words or phrases) for blocks of sentences, paragraphs, or several paragraphs at a time. The resulting code list was then refined by regrouping the codes into loose themes or ideas. The themes were then compared to the research questions and the data to ensure they were useful and accurate representations of the data. Some themes were split up, combined, discarded, and created in the process. Finally, the themes were given succinct and understandable names, and defined by formulating their exact meaning and how they help in understanding the data.

Once the data analysis was complete, the results were interpreted to arrive at a series of conclusions about the multitude of factors that have impacted francophone journalists in Québec and Canada during the pandemic.

### Limitations

Given the importance of a gendered analysis of the impact of the pandemic, the need to collect data also meant accepting the imperfection of the dataset. The quantitative part of the study therefore has several limitations that could not be avoided but that should be addressed in further research.

The quantitative data collection does not consider newsroom routines, individual circumstances, and other variables that could impact the productivity of the reporters. For example, it was not possible to distinguish short articles from longer, in-depth or investigative articles. During the pandemic, journalists who usually wrote fewer but longer articles may have been redirected towards writing short articles, which may have led to an increase in the overall

publication rate. The study does not either make a distinction between journalists working regular day shifts and those working night or weekend shifts, during which they are often the only journalist covering breaking news as they occur, which might lead to a higher publication rate.

A significant limitation of using Eureka to quantitatively measure journalists' productivity is that although it is quite reliable, it might contain errors that are difficult to spot or acknowledge for. For example, in the case of *Le Devoir*, it was realized at one point during the study that only the first author was included in the data when a story had multiple authors. This was considered an acceptable risk given the need to create data for this project, and Eureka was still considered the most accurate source to retrieve the data from.

An important issue with studying freelancers with this method is that it ignores articles they may have written for other media outlets. The freelancers' publication rate discovered in this study is therefore likely an underestimation of their productivity and is instead a measure of the contracts awarded by the media in the sample. Freelance contracts are not necessarily chosen by the journalists themselves but instead assigned by the publication as needed, and the pandemic likely had an impact on how many contracts were awarded to freelancers. This method, too, does not consider that some freelance articles are paid better than others, regardless of the time or effort required to write them, which likely had an impact on the articles these journalists chose to write. Some journalists may choose to write fewer articles that are remunerated better, while others may decide to write more articles. Even supernumerary and staff journalists working for the three publications under study may have written articles in other media as freelancers, which means they would have been more productive than this dataset reveals.

The quantitative analysis is made more reliable by the large size of the sample, which helps account for normal variations like journalists on vacation, sick leave, or parental leave. However, even with all three media combined, the sample of 195 journalists was still limited,

which narrows the conclusions of the study. Future studies should include more news outlets to expand on this study's results and the potential reasons behind the changes discovered, which are outlined below.

Finally, certain variables could not be accounted for in this study even though they may have impacted the results. For example, some journalists in the sample may have stopped writing between the study periods because they retired (by choice or as part of an early retirement program), went on parental leave, or were let go. Others may have written less during the study period because they went on vacation or sick leave, or their status changed to part-time. Some journalists also started writing between the study periods, possibly because they were newly hired or returning after a leave, such as parental or sick leave. Finally, some journalists may have changed status between the two periods, going from a precarious status (supernumerary, freelance, or part-time) to full-time staff, or vice versa. The qualitative portion of the study was important as it allowed an exploration of some of the different factors responsible for productivity changes, including these variables.

The qualitative analysis also had several limitations. It was relatively difficult to get enough participants as it was impossible to find contact information for several of those initially selected from the quantitative sample and some did not answer even after several attempts to contact them, potentially because they were too busy, not interested, or it was simply the wrong email. For some journalists, particularly freelancers, emails were impossible to find and attempting to contact them on LinkedIn or other social media made things harder as in many cases, one must already be connected on LinkedIn or Twitter to be able to send them a message. Some of the journalists contacted also refused for different reasons, including that they were on parental leave.

Though attempts were made to interview enough participants to have a representative sample, it was still relatively small, and the results were therefore necessarily non-exhaustive and not generalizable to the whole population. However, the interviews were relatively repetitive by the end and therefore it could be said that saturation was reached.

Another limitation is that the qualitative data was coded and interpreted by only one person, and the validity of the results would likely be increased if several other coders agreed on the analysis. A strength of this study, however, is that the interviews were long, in-depth, and built upon the results of the quantitative analysis.

## Findings and discussion

### Quantitative findings

The quantitative data analysis revealed that the first three months of the pandemic had various impacts on the productivity of francophone print journalists working at *La Presse*, *Le Devoir*, and *La Presse Canadienne*.

#### Productivity across all publications

After the cleaning process, 18,754 articles remained in the whole sample, 9,553 of which were written during the 2019 study period by 278 journalists, and the remaining 9,201 of which were written by 265 journalists during the 2020 study period. While the number of journalists publishing decreased by five percent from 2019 to 2020, the overall productivity, or publication rate, of the journalists in the sample increased by one per cent.

*Table 3: Number of journalists (of each gender and in total) who wrote articles published in La Presse+, Le Devoir, and La Presse Canadienne, during each study period (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020).*

	2019	2020
Women	128	126
Men	150	139
Total	278	265

Table 4: Number of journalists (of each employment status and in total) who wrote articles published in La Presse+, Le Devoir, and La Presse Canadienne, during each study period (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020).

	2019	2020
Staff	202	189
Precarious	76	76
Total	278	265

Further analysis reveals that the small increase in overall productivity was in part driven by a seven percent increase in women journalists' publication rate. This means that unlike what was originally assumed, the first wave of the pandemic had a positive impact on women journalists' productivity. This measure includes 128 women journalists in 2019, and 126 in 2020. Meanwhile, men journalists' productivity during the first months of the pandemic is lower compared to the previous year. Indeed, the average publication rate decreased by three percent for the 150 men journalists who wrote in 2019 and the 139 who wrote in 2020. These results indicate that the productivity men and women journalists were indeed affected differently by the first three months of the pandemic, as overall, women's productivity increased while men's productivity decreased.

Table 5: Productivity change for all journalists who wrote articles published in La Presse+, Le Devoir, and La Presse Canadienne during the study periods (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020). Split by gender or employment status. Statistically significant results (for  $p=0.05$ ) are shown in bold.

Gender	Status	Change	P-value
Women	All	7%	0.269
Men	All	-3%	0.353
<b>All</b>	<b>Precarious</b>	<b>-33%</b>	<b>0.029</b>
All	Staff	9%	0.095

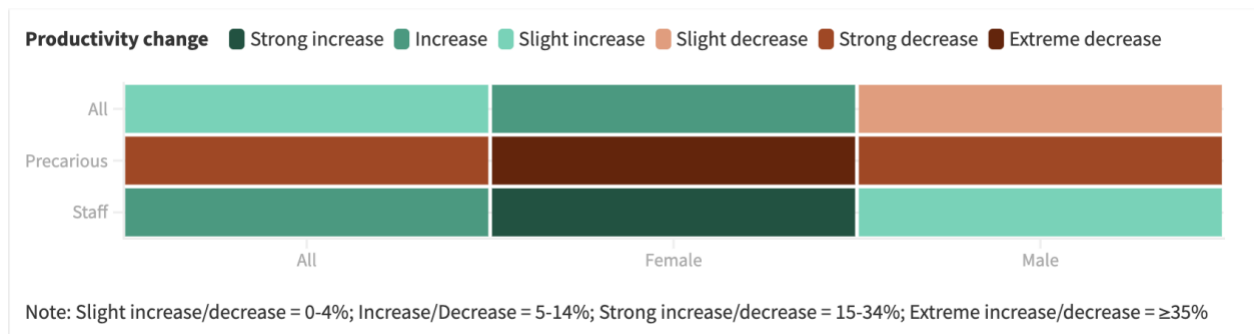


Figure 1: Heatmap of the productivity changes experienced by journalists who wrote articles published in *La Presse+*, *Le Devoir*, and *La Presse Canadienne* during the study periods (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020). Split by gender and employment status.

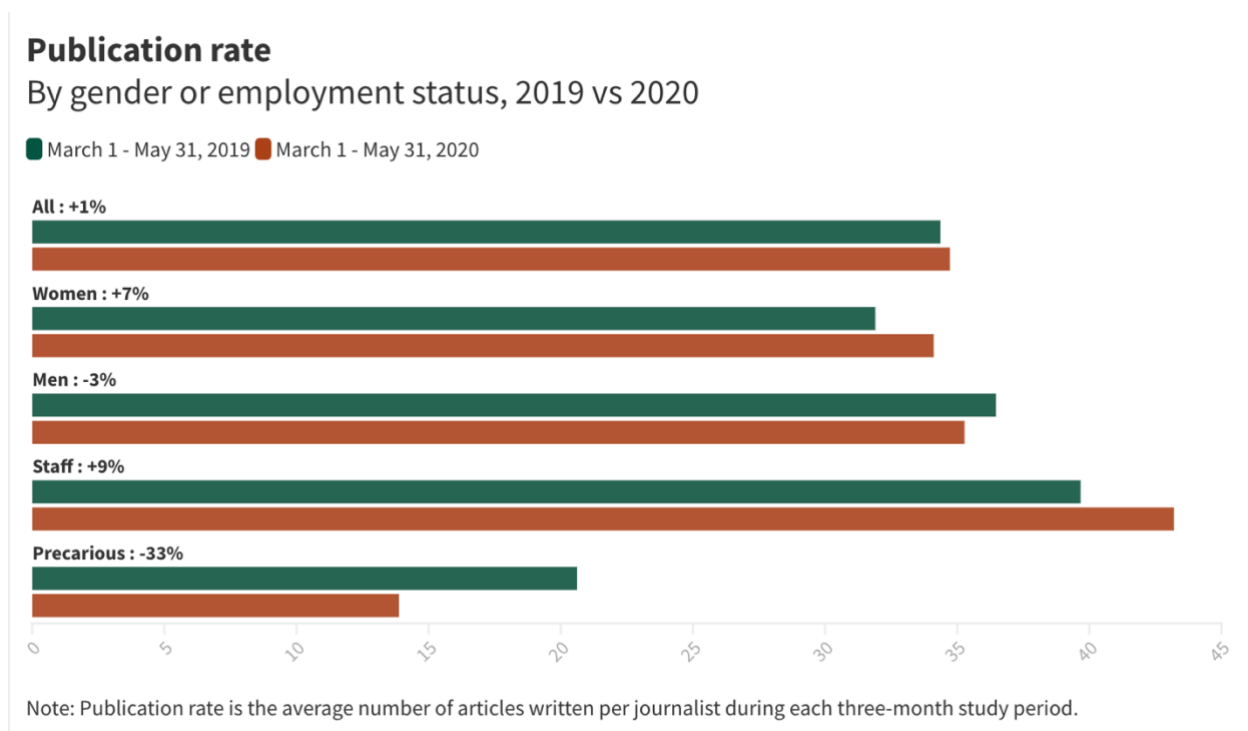


Figure 2: Bar chart showing the changes in publication rates experienced by journalists who wrote articles published in *La Presse+*, *Le Devoir*, and *La Presse Canadienne* during the study periods (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020). Split by gender or employment status.

Splitting the data by employment status reveals that the overall increase in productivity in the sample was also driven by the nine percent increase among the staff journalists in the sample, of which there were 202 in 2019, and 189 in 2020.

The most striking change in productivity, however, occurred among the precarious journalists of the sample. For the 76 precarious journalists who published in each study period,

productivity decreased by 33%, a statistically significant difference from the previous year ( $p=0.029$ ). The results of this analysis therefore reveal that the productivity of precarious journalists was much more negatively impacted compared to that of staff journalists, as their productivity was reduced by a third while staff productivity increased.

**Productivity Split by Status and Gender**

Looking closer, calculating the publication rate for precarious journalists split by gender reveals that for the 38 women journalists who wrote in 2019 and the 39 who wrote in 2020, productivity decreased by 44%, a statistically significant difference from the previous year ( $p=0.043$ ). The productivity of men precarious journalists (38 journalists in 2019 and 37 in 2020) decreased by 31% (not a statistically significant difference for  $p=0.05$ ).

Among the staff journalists of the sample, the analysis shows that for the 112 men in 2019 and 102 men in 2020, productivity increased by four percent. For the 90 women journalists who wrote in 2019 and the 87 who wrote in 2020, productivity increased by 15%.

Interestingly, the analysis split by employment status and gender reveals that the impact on women journalists’ productivity was more consequential across both statuses, but in opposite ways. Among precarious journalists, women’s productivity decreased more than that of men, while among staff journalists, their productivity increased more than that of men.

*Table 6: Number of journalists of each employment status and gender who wrote articles published in La Presse+, Le Devoir, and La Presse Canadienne, during each study period (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020).*

		2019	2020
Precarious	Women	38	39
	Men	38	37
Staff	Women	90	87
	Men	112	102

Table 7: Productivity change for all journalists who wrote articles published in *La Presse+*, *Le Devoir*, and *La Presse Canadienne* during the study periods (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020). Split by gender and employment status. Statistically significant results (for  $p=0.05$ ) are shown in bold.

Gender	Status	Change	P-value
<b>Women</b>	<b>Precarious</b>	<b>-44%</b>	<b>0.043</b>
Men	Precarious	-31%	0.091
Women	Staff	15%	0.088
Men	Staff	4%	0.321

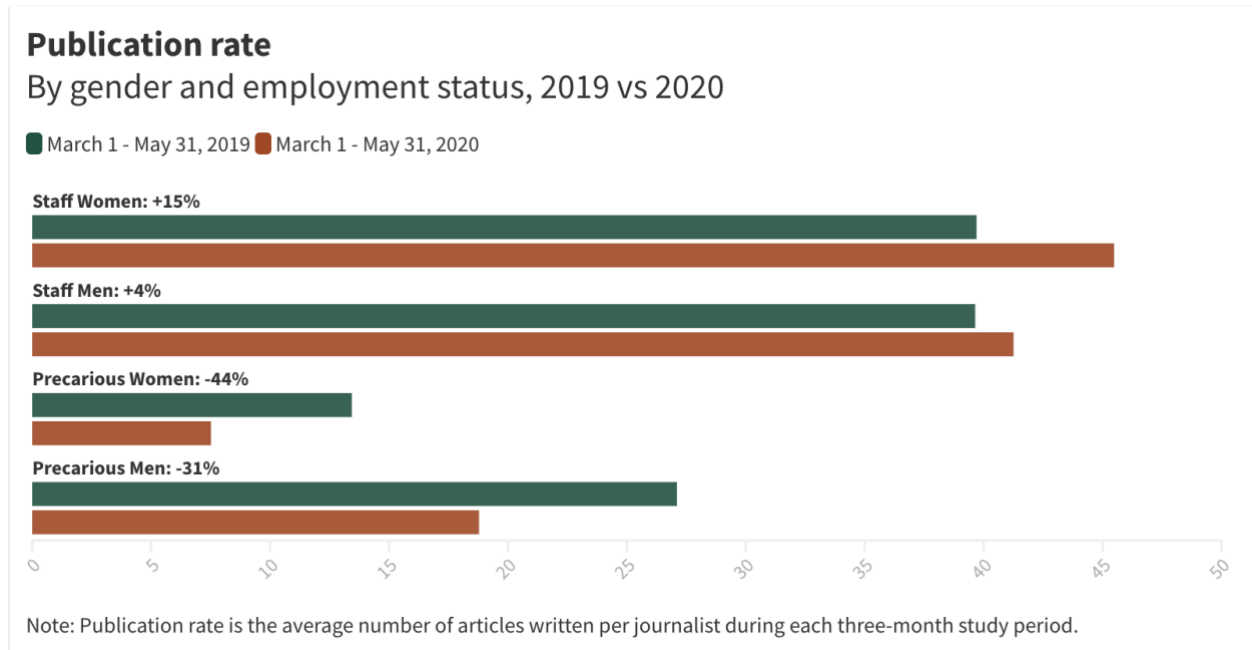


Figure 3: Bar chart showing the changes in publication rates experienced by journalists who wrote articles published in *La Presse+*, *Le Devoir*, and *La Presse Canadienne* during the study periods (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020). Split by gender and employment status.

### Productivity by Publication

The results of the analysis within each publication reveal results similar to the global analysis, except in the case of *Le Devoir*. Indeed, while overall productivity increased for *La Presse* and *La Presse Canadienne*, by four and seven percent respectively, productivity decreased by five percent for *Le Devoir*. This difference arises from the fact that among women journalists working at *Le Devoir* during the study periods, productivity decreased by one percent.

These results are opposite to those of the other publications and the overall productivity measures. This can in part be explained by the large number of precarious journalists working at



*Le Devoir* (out of the total sample size of 118 for this publication, there were 57 precarious journalists, representing 48% of the sample, compared to only 18% of the *La Presse* sample, and no precarious journalists among *La Presse Canadienne*), since women precarious journalists suffered the largest decline in productivity of all groups under study. There were indeed almost as many women of each employment status in *Le Devoir*'s sample. While the productivity of *Le Devoir*'s staff women did increase by 11% ( $p=0.291$ ), the productivity of women precarious journalists significantly decreased by 39% ( $p=0.024$ ), thereby decreasing the overall publication rate of women journalists publishing in *Le Devoir*.

#### Proportions by Gender and Status

Between 2019 and 2020, the total number of journalists writing articles during the study periods decreased by five percent (from 278 to 265), largely driven by 11 men journalists disappearing from the sample in 2020 (a seven percent decrease). In 2019, the 128 women journalists represented 46% of the total sample and wrote 42.7% of all articles, while the 150 men represented 54% of all journalists and wrote 57.3% of all articles. In the same period in 2020, the 126 women journalists represented 47.5% of the sample, a 1.5% increase, while the proportion of articles they wrote increased by four percentage points, to 46.7% of all articles. In comparison, the 139 men journalists represented 52.5% of the 2020 sample and wrote 53.3% of all articles in this study period.

In 2019, staff represented 72.7% of the total sample and wrote 83.9% of all articles, while in 2020 they represented 71.3% of the sample, a six percent decrease, but the proportion of articles they wrote increased by 4.8 percentage points, to 88.7% of all articles. The absolute number of precarious journalists did not change, 76 in both years, but their proportion among the whole sample increased from 27.3% to 28.7%, while the proportion of articles they wrote decreased from 16.1% to 11.3%.

## Proportion of journalists, by gender

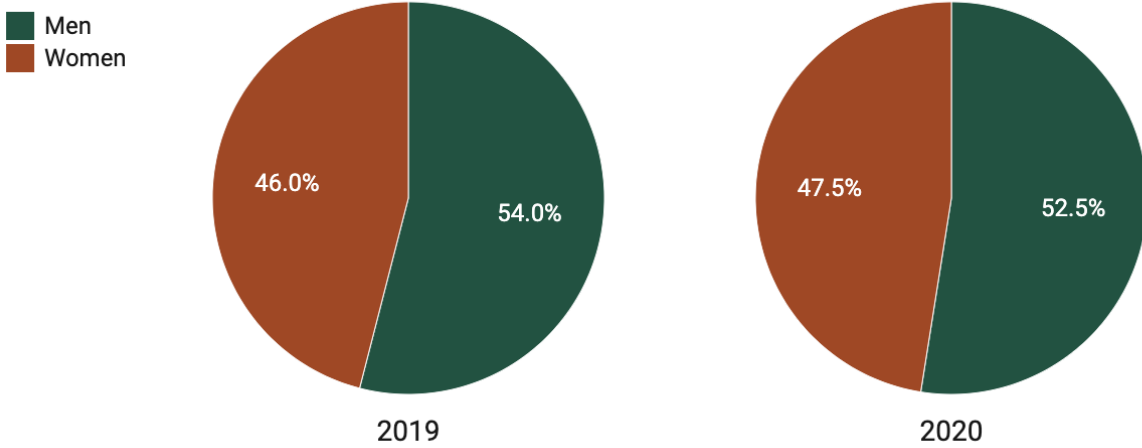


Figure 4: Proportion of journalists of each gender among total sample of journalists who wrote articles published in *La Presse+*, *Le Devoir*, and *La Presse Canadienne* in each study period (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020).

## Proportion of journalists, by employment status

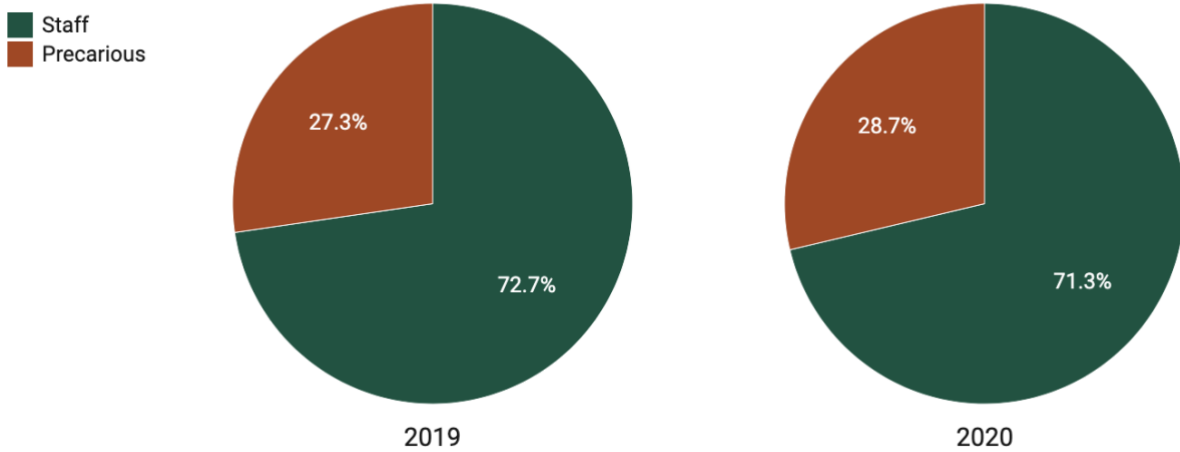


Figure 5: Proportion of journalists of each employment status among total sample of journalists who wrote articles published in *La Presse+*, *Le Devoir*, and *La Presse Canadienne* in each study period (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020).

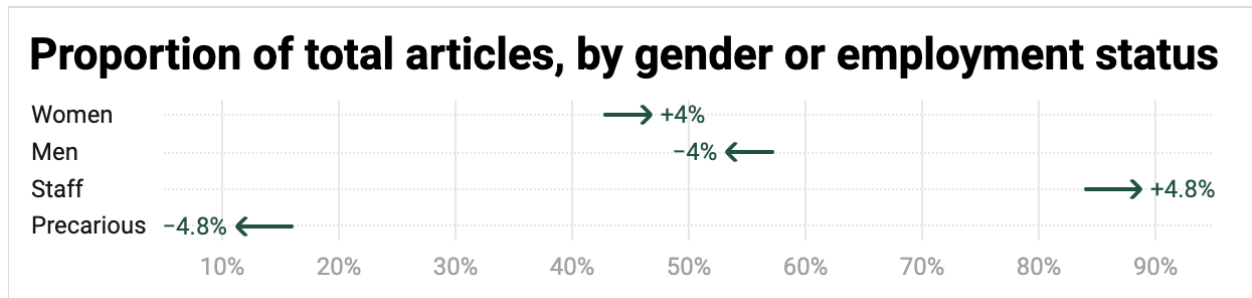


Figure 6: Arrow chart showing percent change of proportion of total articles written by journalists of each gender or employment status who wrote articles published in *La Presse+*, *Le Devoir*, and *La Presse Canadienne* in each study period (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020).

The total number of precarious journalists working remained at 76 between 2019 and 2020, although some of the individual journalists changed between study periods. Of the 87 total precarious journalists in the sample, only 65 published across both years. There seems to have been more displacement among women precarious journalists, as the total sample stands at 46 journalists, but the 2019 sample has 38 women journalists, and the 2020 sample has 39. For men precarious journalists, the whole sample had 41 journalists, the 2019 sample had 38, and the 2020 sample had 37.

Looking at proportions, while women and men precarious journalists each represented 50 per cent of the sample in 2019, this changed to 51.3% and 48.7% respectively in 2020. On the other hand, women only wrote around 33% of all articles by precarious journalists during both study periods, much less than their men counterparts. Between study periods, this changed very little but still decreased by 0.2% for women journalists of precarious status.

## Proportion of precarious journalists, by gender

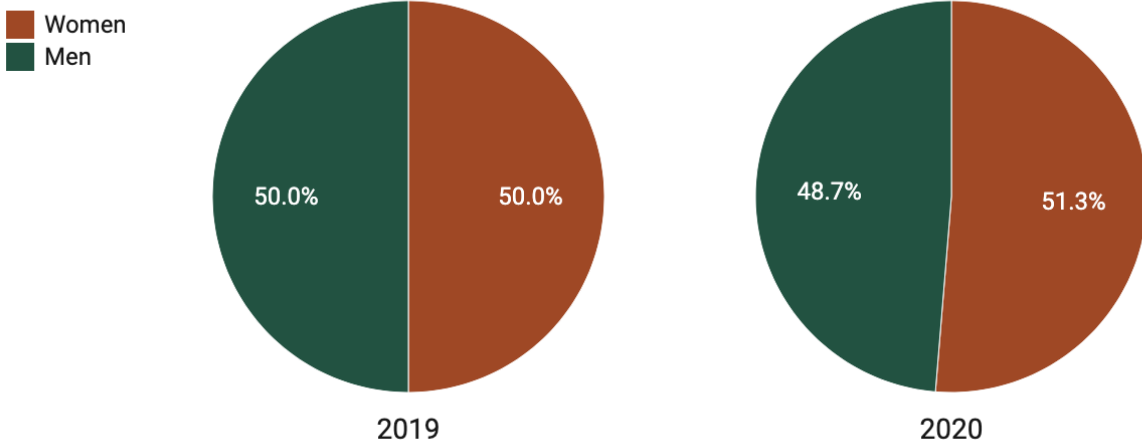


Figure 7: Proportion of precarious journalists of each gender among total sample of journalists who wrote articles published in *La Presse+*, *Le Devoir*, and *La Presse Canadienne* in each study period (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020).

## Proportion of staff journalists, by gender

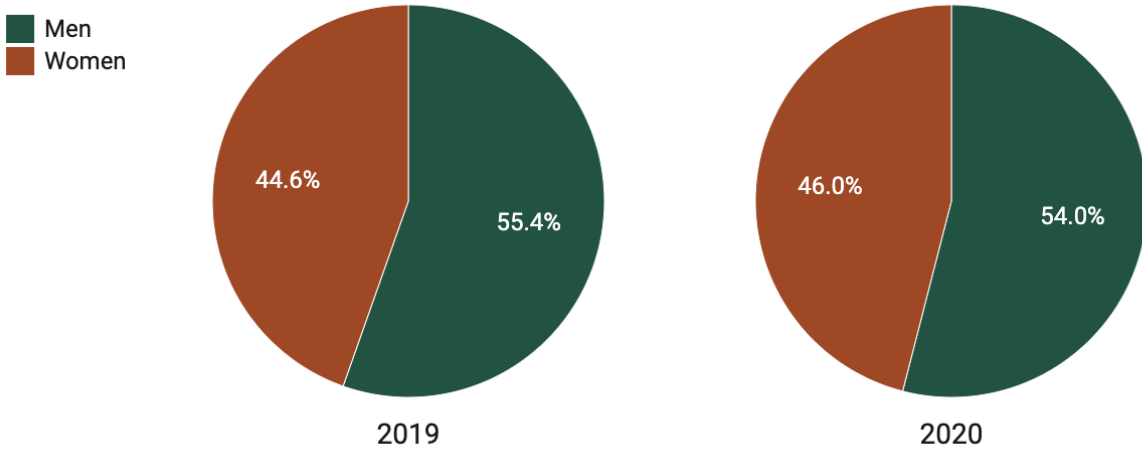


Figure 8: Proportion of staff journalists of each gender among total sample of journalists who wrote articles published in *La Presse+*, *Le Devoir*, and *La Presse Canadienne* in each study period (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020).

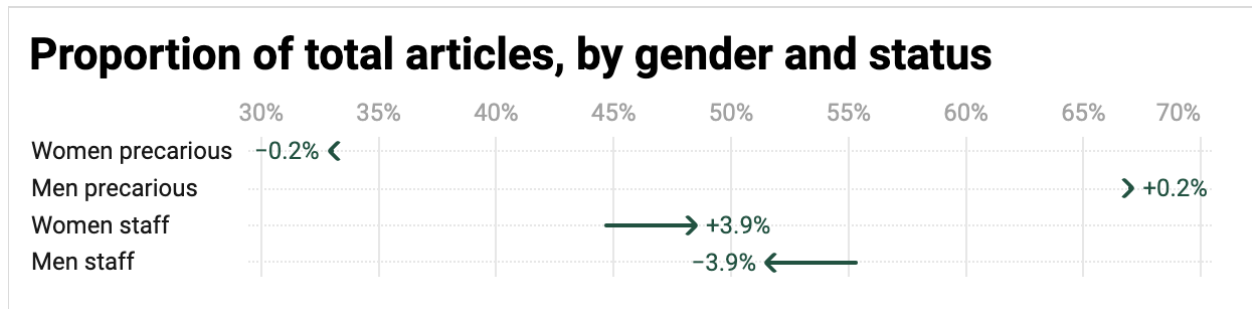


Figure 9: Arrow chart showing percent change of proportion of total articles written by journalists of each gender and employment status who wrote articles published in *La Presse+*, *Le Devoir*, and *La Presse Canadienne* in each study period (March 1 to May 31, 2019, and March 1 to May 31, 2020).

While the total number of staff journalists in the sample was 210, 181 published across both years. In 2019, there were 90 women staff and 112 men staff who wrote articles, while in 2020 there were 87 women and 102 men staff. In 2019, women achieved parity by representing 44.6% of staff journalists and writing 44.6% of all articles written by this group. In 2020, their representation increased by 1.4% and the proportion of articles they wrote increased by 3.9%, to stand at 48.5%. This means that while the overall number of staff contributing articles decreased (by three percent for women and nine percent for men), the women who kept working through the first months of the pandemic increased their contribution to the article pool, surpassing their representation among all staff journalists. Therefore, their individual workload increased compared to men staff journalists.

### Analysis

It is difficult to tell whether there was a statistically significant difference between men and women journalists, and between precarious and staff journalists. In addition, few of the tests of statistical significance on the difference between years within the same group found statistically significant results using  $p=0.05$ .

This is because this analysis has a limitation in that when groups were split by gender, employment status, or both, the journalist sample size was reduced, which may mean that the results of the statistical significance tests were misleading, although the total number of articles

remained large in all analyses. Another limitation related to statistical significance is that some of the results may have been skewed. For example, in some cases, staff journalists had a count of only one or two articles during a study period; this may have occurred because the journalist was on leave or vacation during the study period, but a few articles they wrote before leaving were published (and therefore counted in the study) even though they were technically not “productive” during the study period. A larger study sample and a comparison over several years, rather than just two years, would likely remove these limitations’ impacts on the tests of statistical significance.

Regardless of the limitations, many of the statistically nonsignificant results are clearly strong differences in productivity in a real-life context, which makes them interesting and important to discuss regardless. Quantitative analysis of the data does show that the productivity of men and women journalists was impacted differentially, and the same is true for staff and precarious journalists. Importantly, the latter group’s productivity appears to have been greatly impacted by the first three months of the pandemic, as it significantly decreased across most measures.

Overall women’s productivity showed a statistically nonsignificant increase, mainly because the impacts on women journalists were opposite depending on their employment status. Indeed, while the productivity of precarious women journalists decreased, that of staff women journalists increased, thereby almost cancelling each other out. It is also valuable to know that the overall proportion of articles they wrote increased compared to that of men journalists, especially among staff journalists, while the proportion of articles written by precarious women journalists decreased. Among men, while staff journalists’ productivity slightly increased, overall productivity decreased because of the large decrease among precarious journalists.

This varied impact on women journalists was especially important to investigate in qualitative interviews, since it seems that as expected, women bore the brunt of the pandemic's impact on productivity. This occurred in opposite and, in the case of staff journalists, unexpected ways. Women staff journalists seem to have had to work much harder than their men counterparts during the first months of the pandemic, while women precarious journalists seem to have lost more work than men precarious journalists. The qualitative interviews aimed to help determine what may have caused this increase among staff and decrease among precarious journalists, and whether this may lead (or may have led) women journalists to leave the field, for example due to burnout, loss of revenue and options, or dissatisfaction.

There are many potential factors that may have influenced the productivity changes discovered during this analysis. Productivity may have increased among women journalists because women typically cover beats like health and education, which were the main news topics during the 2020 study period, when the government announced public health measures and school closures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As experts in these particularly feminized beats, women journalists may have been called upon to write more articles on the subject than their men peers. Meanwhile, men typically cover beats like sports and crime, about which there was little to write about, and politics, which revolved around the public health crisis at the time. As we have seen, women journalists are also less likely than their men counterparts to have children, as they often leave the field when they find their hours incompatible with their childcare responsibilities. Therefore, they may have been less affected by the pandemic than the average woman and may have continued to work hard to inform the public during the public health crisis.

Productivity may have decreased among precarious journalists because, as the name implies, their jobs are the least safe. Media faced with tough decisions about who to let go during the financial crisis that beset them as ad revenues fell were undoubtedly forced to cut freelance

and supernumerary journalists first. Meanwhile, staff journalists likely had to make up for those lost to budget cuts by writing more articles to fill their news sites, and as permanent staff wanting to keep their jobs, they would have had no choice but to work at an increased pace. It is also possible that during the first months of the pandemic, journalists were forced to put longer projects on hold to focus on informing the public about daily changes during the crisis, therefore writing a larger quantity of shorter and faster articles.

Among precarious journalists, it is possible that women lost more contracts because they tend to be younger and have less experience than men (D'Amours, 2014), leading those in management to cut them first. Since women freelancers are also paid less than men (D'Amours, 2014), they may have chosen to leave journalism for a career with better pay. Those who have children may have searched for jobs with more flexible schedules or may have been forced to accept less assignments so they could take care of them when schools and daycares closed.

The results of the analysis also indicate that more men than women journalists stopped working between the two study periods. While further research may reveal that the journalists who “disappeared” in the 2020 sample simply went on parental or medical leave, or were furloughed, those who truly stopped working in the journalism field may have done so for a variety of reasons independent of the pandemic, including retirement, burnout, and dissatisfaction with their career. One reason that more men may have stopped working than women, a result which contradicts the literature, could be that as men journalists tend to be older than women journalists, they may have chosen to retire early, either of their own accord or enticed by anticipated retirement plans. Further research could attempt to elucidate what happened to those journalists of all genders and employment statuses who “disappeared” between study periods and determine whether they retired, changed fields, went on leave, or were furloughed or fired.



Although the results of this quantitative analysis are interesting and reveal varied impacts on the productivity of journalists, it is hard to determine what was due to the pandemic itself and what is independent of the situation. Similarly, many impacts of the pandemic cannot be measured quantitatively or determined through this measure of productivity. It was therefore essential to conduct qualitative interviews to dig further into these results and go beyond them.

### Qualitative Findings

To investigate what factors may have influenced the changes in productivity discovered in the quantitative portion of the study, qualitative interviews with six journalists of a variety of genders, employment statuses, and publications from the quantitative sample were essential. The interviews were also useful in going beyond the question of productivity and drawing a non-exhaustive but holistic picture of the different ways in which francophone print journalists were impacted by the pandemic, particularly the first wave (March to May 2020).

The potential factors that may have influenced the changes in productivity outlined above were integrated into the qualitative interview guide (see Appendix) to lead the participants towards thinking about the different ways their productivity and that of their colleagues may have been impacted during the first months of the pandemic, and to explore the potential reasons (including the hypotheses outlined earlier) behind the productivity increase among women and decrease among men. Participants were also prompted to reflect upon the potentially unequal impacts of the pandemic on journalists—particularly as it concerns gender, employment status, and beat—and on general members of society, and were encouraged to discuss what improvements could be made in the future to prevent such unequal impacts from occurring again. Finally, participants were invited to express their feelings and opinions on the pandemic's impacts on journalists—including their productivity, their work, and their lives—, on the journalism industry, and on society at large.

The participants were chosen to highlight the diversity of impacts on different groups discovered in the quantitative analysis to maximize the variety of perspectives and experiences included in the analysis. Unfortunately, no women precarious journalists and only one man staff journalist agreed to participate in the study, but the experiences discussed throughout the in-depth qualitative interviews were sufficiently varied to build a coherent picture of the pandemic's impact on francophone print journalists working at the three publications under study.

If the participants' feelings about the impact of the pandemic on their work and lives could be summarized in one sentence, it would be that the situation was difficult, but they adapted. Indeed, while these journalists experienced tremendous **pressure** (both internal and external), **distance** (from people and the field), and **inequality** at various levels, they adapted to the widespread **changes (to their work and their lives) over time**. The pandemic also had a variety of **psychological and emotional impacts** which may have impacted their productivity. These five themes, which resulted from thematic analysis of the qualitative interviews, are inextricably interconnected. They will be discussed and illustrated in turn throughout this analysis to shine a light on the varied factors which impacted journalists—and more specifically, their productivity and their work-life balance—during the first months of the pandemic, and in many cases continue to do so today. N.B.: Descriptors and quotes have been altered to the masculine form to anonymize responses and prevent identification of the participants' genders and identities.

### Pressure

During the interviews, the participants revealed that throughout the first weeks and months of the pandemic, they experienced different kinds of pressure, which in some cases impacted their productivity. This pressure presented itself both in external and internal ways, and

though it was in many ways imposed by the public health crisis, many of the situations described were simply intensified versions of the situations they experienced before the pandemic.

Journalists working at daily news providers, particularly those who cover general news, often must work long and atypical hours to report on stories as they happen. This only intensified during the first weeks of the pandemic, as the participants described that they suddenly had to work significantly more than usual, with very few breaks and at an even faster pace than before. Their hours, which were already unpredictable, were even more so during this time, as they had to make themselves available to experts and sources at times when they would be available themselves. As this was a public health crisis, the journalists often had to interview healthcare workers such as doctors and nurses, CHSLD (retirement home) workers, and public health professionals who were all extremely busy themselves during the day, and thus were only able to speak to journalists late in the evening. This contributed to making the participants' hours even longer and more unpredictable than usual, as explained by Participant M73: "On travaillait plutôt de la maison, beaucoup d'entrevues à toutes les heures du jour et de la nuit avec toutes sortes de personnes, les conférences de presse qui se succédaient à vitesse grand V, au début." Participant V92 also explained that,

"On était dans une situation de crise et ça faisait en sorte qu'on travaillait un peu tout le temps, parce que disons que tu veux parler à des infirmières ou des éducatrices, souvent c'est le soir qu'ils vont être disponibles parce que le jour ils travaillent, donc tu étais toujours en train de travailler puis d'essayer de prendre de l'avance pour tes articles."

There was also a constant influx of information and testimonies that kept them extremely busy, including from the daily press conferences by the government, and they were constantly on the phone for interviews with experts and sources. The participants felt that they needed to stay up to date on the high volume of news all while rapidly mastering a new subject. This left them

feeling like they had no time to do everything and that there was too much information, although most participants also expressed that as journalists, this was also a stimulating and exciting period (more on this later). Participant M73 explained that,

“C’était surtout en termes de volume, essayer de tout lire, savoir tout ce qui s’écrivait, lire des publications scientifiques, c’était beaucoup en pas beaucoup de temps donc il y avait une question de volume qui faisait que c’était dur de se garder au courant de tout, alors qu’en temps normal on est capable, mais là ça devenait... et en plus de devoir produire, donc c’était beaucoup.”

They felt overwhelmed but had no choice except to work. They took very few breaks (even to eat) and they often worked overtime (without asking for or receiving extra remuneration) to catch up or get ahead on articles. This was in part due to the lack of separation between work and home (more on this later), which several participants, including Participant H21, described as a probable reason their productivity increased by participants:

“En travaillant à la maison, on travaille plus. Je m’étonnais encore cette semaine, souvent le midi je ne m’assois même pas 30 minutes pour manger. C’est peut-être parce que si je dois parler à des médecins ou chercheurs qui sont très occupés, c’est sûr que je me rends 100% disponible tout le temps, tandis qu’en temps normal si je dois parler à un prof ou quelqu’un d’autre, peut-être que je me dis qu’il est un peu plus disponible donc peut-être que je suis capable de dire, là je mange et je mets le cellulaire ailleurs. Tandis que là maintenant jamais.”

Some expressed that there was competition with journalists from other media because the pace of the news cycle accelerated, which meant they needed to publish their articles as soon as they were verified instead of waiting for the morning edition of the paper, or the news would no

longer be relevant. This meant they had no choice but to increase their productivity, as Participant M73 explained:

“C’était un peu créé par le fait que tous les journalistes du Québec travaillaient sur le même sujet, ça a créé une certaine compétition, parce qu’on était tous à vouloir sortir la nouvelle du jour sur le même sujet, en temps normal on a moins de compétition.”

One journalist also mentioned that though there was no sense of competition within their media (most participants agreed that their focus was on collaboration and helping each other), there was a space limit within each virtual paper edition, which meant that there was some competition for space and sometimes, despite a journalist’s hard work (and high productivity) their article may not be published, which could have affected their publication rate.

The generalized feeling was that this intensified pace was not sustainable. Several participants expressed that they had difficulty sleeping during the first wave, due to stress and the feeling that they had no time to do everything they needed to do. Most journalists expressed feeling exhausted at one point or another, and it would be reasonable to conclude that if the first wave had not ended and the pace had not eased a bit, they would have experienced burnout.

Participant M73 described this:

“C’était extrêmement stressant, je ne dormais pas beaucoup parce que les journées finissaient à des heures de fous et recommençaient tôt le matin. Ça ne m’est jamais arrivé dans ma vie avant de ne pas dormir une nuit complète, mais pendant la première vague ça m’est arrivé, parce que par exemple je me suis levé la nuit pour écrire un texte que je me disais, mon dieu je n’aurais pas le temps de le faire demain. Ça n’arrive pas dans la vie normale, mais c’est arrivé pendant la première vague. Mais cette vague a eu un début et une fin, donc je pense que c’est ça qui a fait qu’on s’en est sauvés.”

Some of the pressure these journalists felt also came from sources and experts who often reached out to them with testimonies, story ideas, and questions for the government. They made themselves available, which made the journalists' work easier, but this also put more pressure on them to work hard and produce a high volume of articles. Pressure also came from the public in different ways. The journalists felt that readers had a deep desire and need for trusted, verified news, and had many questions they needed answered, as Participant M73 describes: "Les gens étaient supers avides de nouvelles, on sentait cette pression des gens, ce désir et besoin d'avoir de l'information." However, the public also increasingly scrutinized and criticized the work they did, and sometimes even harassed and insulted journalists. This put pressure on the journalists to work hard for their audiences, but the criticism and online comments also likely had an impact on the journalists' mental health. Participant V92 described the dual pressures journalists experienced:

"Il y a deux choses, vraiment cette fébrilité vu qu'on est en train de vivre un moment marquant de l'histoire, et aussi à un certain moment c'est qu'il y a beaucoup de témoignages qui rentrent, beaucoup de gens qui t'appellent et t'interpellent pour te parler de situations critiques, qui méritent d'être dénoncées, d'angles morts dans la gestion de la crise, puis il y a cette responsabilité de transmettre ces inquiétudes et ces préoccupations qui viennent directement du terrain au public et aux décideurs."

This also fed the internal pressure journalists were putting on themselves to do their jobs right and inform the public, to reveal information, and to fulfill journalism's essential democratic role. Participant B34 said that "Tout l'intérêt des gens portait sur la crise qu'on était en train de vivre, la situation pandémique: on était devant l'inconnu, les gens avaient beaucoup de questions, d'interrogations et inquiétudes, ils souhaitaient que le gouvernement puisse y répondre." Many of the journalists also expressed feeling a sense of responsibility, for keeping the public informed

and for questioning the government and shining a light on important issues, as Participant M73 explained:

“On était en temps de crise et il y avait pleins de besoins dans la population, dont celui d’être informés sur un nouveau virus qui touchait la planète entière, donc on avait un rôle de porte-parole qui allait au-delà des conférences de presse, il y avait tout un travail d’analyse qui devait être fait. Je pense que ça démontre qu’en temps de crise on augmente notre productivité parce que la demande et le besoin sont là.”

Participant M73, a health reporter, also felt an added sense of responsibility because of the contacts they already had and wanted to maintain with experts and sources:

“Quand on a un beat, c’est comme si on se sent responsable du beat. On veut bien couvrir le sujet. Même des articles que je n’écrivais pas, j’essayais d’être sûr qu’on en parlait. Mon expérience dans le sujet et le réseau ont sûrement alimenté certaines informations que je recevais, donc je me sentais responsable et je ne voulais pas m’asseoir sur l’information donc je la publiais.”

Many of the participants expressed that the first wave was an intensely stimulating period for journalists. Living through and reporting on a public health crisis was, of course, stressful, but it was also exciting because they are passionate about their profession. As Participant H21 explained, they worked hard and without breaks: “On était fébriles, il y avait une fébrilité qui faisait qu’on travaillait tout le temps, la période de référence sans doute que je travaillais 6 jours sur 7 et je n’ai jamais réclamé une minute de temps supplémentaire.” This is in part why their productivity increased, but they were not burnt out because they felt that they were writing history, as Participant V92 described:

“Il y avait cette frénésie, cette fébrilité de couvrir un évènement important comme on n’en verra peut-être plus d’autres dans notre carrière. Je le sentais très fort, donc je pense que

ça m'a mené à vraiment vouloir participer. Tu veux être là et couvrir cet évènement historique et rapporter ce qui se passe.”

Overall, several of them felt that though the intensity of this period was difficult, it was worth it because of the value of their work: they felt useful, like they were writing history, and like they were an essential service responding to the population's basic need for information. Participant V92 explained this: “C'était plus difficile, mais aussi je sentais vraiment qu'on était utile, qu'on était là pour une raison, les sites de nouvelles ont été très courus, il y avait beaucoup de lecteurs tout d'un coup sur nos articles.”

The participants who have children found it difficult to balance their work and family lives during this period, particularly if those children were young. They expressed feeling a double pressure to work hard to be good journalists and good parents. However, working at home while having to take care of their children because schools and daycares were closed took a toll on them, as Participant V92 explained:

“Il y avait cette pression à la maison d'avoir des enfants qui grouillent autour, le soir quand ils dormaient j'essayais de prendre de l'avance, d'aller chercher des infos, de faire des entrevues, de lancer des perches, donc c'était très intense! Mais en même temps il y a cette frénésie et excitation journalistique qui vient avec.”

Although they felt they adapted over time to the situation and eventually made it work by finding time between interviews and writing to take care of the children and homeschool them, they often had to work at odd hours in the evening or even the night to make up for lost time, as Participant M73 said:

“Je n'ai pas fait de burnout, je n'étais pas au bord des larmes continuellement, mais vraiment je pouvais me coucher à deux heures du matin, et me relever à six heures pour avoir le temps de tout faire, justement pour que les enfants ne paient pas trop le prix...”



donc ça ne pouvait pas être soutenu pendant trois ans. Dans mon cas il n’y a pas eu de dommages concrets, mais ça faisait quand même des journées de fou.”

When asked specifically about the increase in productivity discovered among staff and women journalists, the participants explained that they felt pressure, imposed by the situation and by themselves, to write fast and cover every subject that arose. They explained it was also easier to write a lot as they became knowledgeable about the topic and because stories were often short and superficial. However, more is not always better: they felt that the social impact of their large volume of articles was not necessarily as high as more in-depth, investigative articles which take longer to write and therefore would decrease their productivity. Participant H21 explains,

“En général la productivité des journalistes on l’évalue comment? Mettons que je fais 60 articles sur une période de trois mois, mais c’est des petits articles qui n’ont pas beaucoup de retentissement ou qui n’ont pas beaucoup d’impact social, je suis moins fière que si j’ai fait 20 articles qui ont été vraiment intéressants et qui ont eu un gros retentissement, ou qui ont pu faire infléchir une décision gouvernementale, ou qui ont fait un éclairage social important.”

Several of the participants also felt that the hard work they all put into covering the pandemic despite all the pressure and challenges they experienced should be recognized and valued by their management. Participant M73 also expressed that though productivity may have increased, this pressure to work hard may have had invisible impacts, particularly on mental and physical health:

“Je ne suis pas surpris de savoir que notre productivité a beaucoup augmenté, mais à quel prix? Je pense que moi je m’en suis bien sorti, mais je sais que pour beaucoup de collègues ça a été extrêmement difficile. [...] Et ce n’est peut-être pas non plus en termes de productivité, parce que je pense qu’on est capables de s’adapter à ça et produire quand

même, mais c'est peut-être en termes de fatigue, d'épuisement, ou les gens qui ont eu plus de responsabilités familiales qui leur sont tombées dessus ont peut-être écopé plus. Ça ne s'est peut-être pas traduit par une baisse de productivité, mais à quel prix? Il y en a peut-être pour qui ça a eu plus d'impact sur la santé mentale et physique.”

### Distance

The COVID-19 pandemic was unique in that it required everyone to stay at home: businesses and buildings of all kinds, including offices and schools, were forced to close their doors. Newsrooms were no exception, and many journalists were also forced to work from home. The interview participants expressed that this created a distance, not only from their colleagues and bosses, but also from their newsrooms and the field. They feel that this distance may have not only impacted their productivity but the quality of the news they produced too.

Adapting to working from home was difficult for many journalists, particularly for staff who were used to working in the newsroom and being able to have quick conversations with colleagues to discuss articles, and for journalists with children at home. However, the participants expressed that working from home did have some advantages. For example, reducing the time wasted on commute had a positive impact on productivity. Overall, the first wave was a difficult period for many of the participants, especially because the lack of separation between home and work meant that they often worked longer hours and took fewer breaks than when they worked at the office—this was also described as a potential reason for increased productivity—but over time they adapted and got used to remote work, as Participant M73 said:

“Ensuite on a fait plus de terrain, on a même pu retourner un peu au bureau, donc par moments c'est revenu plus ordinaire. La première vague c'était le plus “chamboulant”, mais maintenant on est presque rendus habitués à travailler chez nous.”

Meanwhile, the freelancers who participated explained that they were already used to working from home, which meant that the first weeks of the pandemic were not very different from normal in that regard. Participant P17 described this:

“Il n’y a pas eu beaucoup d’impact [sur moi] parce que comme travailleur autonome, j’étais toujours un peu n’importe où, souvent de la maison, bien avant la pandémie j’avais déjà un bureau à la maison, j’avais tous les outils qu’il faut.”

The participants expressed that a significant issue caused by the forced distance from the office was the difficulty communicating with their bosses and colleagues, as Participant H21 explained:

“Dans une salle de rédaction, normalement on sait sur quoi les autres travaillent, on se parle, là je ne savais plus qui faisait quoi, par moments je ne savais plus qui était mon patron. La communication avec les patrons était extrêmement difficile donc ça nuisait beaucoup à la productivité.”

Although some felt that their bosses were good at checking in and keeping everyone organized, many expressed that the first few weeks were a period of improvisation filled with miscommunications, which may have impacted productivity. Participant V92 described this:

“De perdre le contact avec nos collègues aussi, je pense que ça a été important, de s’adapter au télétravail, de s’adapter aux communications à distance, d’être plus accroché à son téléphone et de pouvoir faire moins de reportages terrain aussi je pense que ça a eu un impact [sur la productivité].”

This did improve over time, as everyone adapted, management set up communication tools, and outdoor socializing events were organized over the warm months, but several participants felt that, at the time of interview in early 2022, the distance was increasing again as people got tired of the pandemic and lost their desire to socialize.

The general feeling among the staff journalists who had to work from home during the first wave was that they missed the newsroom and the energizing feeling of being in a team, as Participant M73 described:

“Sinon l’impact de ne pas être en gang, il y a une espèce d’effet énergisant de travailler en équipe qui est immense, on ne l’a vraiment pas beaucoup depuis le début de la pandémie. Une salle de rédaction c’est fort, il y a beaucoup d’énergie, beaucoup d’échanges, de conversations qui se passent qui nourrissent nos reportages que là on ne peut pas avoir.”

Several participants felt that the forced distance from the newsroom may have negatively impacted productivity and the quality of the news produced, as to them, journalism is teamwork and working in a newsroom together means helping each other on articles and improving through each other’s guidance. Participant V92 explained this:

“Il y a des avantages au télétravail, mais moi ça me manque beaucoup le contact avec les collègues et la frénésie de la salle de nouvelle où on peut échanger avec les collègues et grandir à travers ça au niveau journalistique. On perd l’esprit qu’un journal c’est un travail d’équipe et qu’on est tous ensemble là-dedans et qu’on doit s’aider, qu’on est dépendant les uns des autres.”

Another significant issue was the distance from the field, as journalists’ access to the field and many important sources, such as politicians, was restricted by public health measures. Most participants felt that this restriction was a significant loss and may have had an impact on the quality of the news, as one of the roles of journalists is to document history by witnessing and reporting on it. Participant P17 described this:

“Assister aux évènements pendant la première année de la pandémie était impossible donc il s’est perdu une qualité de l’information en n’allant pas dans les conférences et en

côtoyant les gens de façon informelle dans des congrès. Il s'est perdu des occasions de prise de contact, de découverte de sujets.”

Participant B34, a parliamentary correspondent, also expressed that no longer being able to have hallway conversations with politicians and the limited time for questions during the daily press conferences had a serious impact on the quality of their reporting:

“Il n'était plus possible de nous adresser aux parlementaires dans les couloirs, d'en attraper un sur un sujet ou enjeu d'actualité. C'est surtout la perte des accès qui est grave pour les journalistes politiques, que ce soit aux députés qui sortent d'un caucus qu'on peut attraper dans un corridor, on ne les voit plus ! Ils sont tous en virtuel ! C'est problématique.”

Participant V92 did express that the lack of fieldwork likely had a positive impact on productivity, however, as phone calls take less time than going on site to interview people, but that this increase in volume is not a reflection of the quality of the work:

“C'est sûr que les reportages terrain sont super importants dans un journal, mais souvent ça prend plus de temps que ce que tu fais de ton bureau avec ton téléphone, quand tu te déplaces sur le terrain. Mais en même temps c'est une valeur ajoutée donc est-ce qu'on peut dire que ça nuit à la productivité? Non, parce que c'est une meilleure qualité, quand tu te déplaces sur le terrain et que tu fais des reportages directement sur place, que tu vas parler aux gens, que tu es toi-même témoin de ces événements.”

One of the freelancers, Participant P17, also felt that restricting access to the field had a higher impact on freelancers as they are naturally more mobile, which means one of their strengths as journalists is that they do more fieldwork:

“Les pigistes sont par définition plus mobiles, ils sont souvent là où l’action se passe, donc ils ont perdu encore plus de ce qui faisait leur particularité, leur spécificité, de ne pas pouvoir être sur place leur complique le travail.”

Regardless of the distance from the field and the newsroom, most participants felt that what saved them and helped them remain highly productive during the first months of the pandemic was strong collaboration between colleagues. Instead of competing over articles, participants felt that everyone helped each other and worked together on articles to ensure that all aspects of the crisis and the health beat were covered. Participant M73 explained this:

“On a vraiment beaucoup travaillé en équipe, c’est ce qui nous a sauvés. Curieusement on était chacun chez nous, mais on n’a peut-être jamais autant travaillé en équipe de notre vie. En travaillant à plusieurs, ça a facilité les choses.”

Finally, some participants thought that the distance from the office was particularly hard on those journalists without children or partners, who may have felt lonely and isolated during the first months of the pandemic as they lost contact with their colleagues, and they felt that this may have impacted their productivity. Participant H21 described this:

“Dans la salle de rédaction, on savait que ceux qui n’allaient pas bien du tout c’est ceux qui étaient célibataires sans enfants, leur santé mentale était affectée, alors sûrement que leur productivité a été affectée par ce biais.”

However, this was not the case for the participants who had no children and partners; they felt lucky and privileged to be alone during this time, as they had fewer responsibilities and worries, as explained by Participant K68:

“Je ne sais pas comment mes collègues ont pu faire du travail à la maison avec les enfants qui font l’école à distance. Je me considère chanceux dans ce contexte-là parce que je n’ai

pas eu les tracas que d'autres collègues ont eus et je suis sûr que j'ai des collègues pour qui la qualité de leur travail et leur productivité ont été impactées.”

### Inequalities

Many factors which affected journalists' productivity and lives appear to have been unequal and varied depending on gender, employment status, and beat. Interestingly, however, several journalists expressed that the pandemic made their work easier. They found that it was faster and easier to produce large quantities of articles because they were always writing about the same topic, and the articles they wrote tended to be shorter and more superficial, instead of in-depth investigations and analyses. They found working the health beat to be easier than other beats since experts were very willing to speak to journalists and even reached out to them. The government also made information and data easily available, as Participant M73 explained:

“Ce qui aidait beaucoup c'est que beaucoup d'experts se sont rendus très disponibles, ils ont vraiment été généreux, ils étaient super réactifs donc ce n'était pas difficile d'avoir de l'information. Même le ministère de la Santé en début de crise était vraiment efficace à nous répondre, donc ça a facilité notre travail au début.”

Unfortunately, the pandemic did not make things easier for everyone, and in many ways increased existing or created new inequalities. The participants expressed that the crisis was lived differently by those who lived alone and those who lived with their families, by parents and non-parents, by those who were able to escape the city to live in cottages and those who had to remain in town, and even by parents of young children and those with older children who required less caretaking. Participant M73 described one such disparity:

“Tous les journalistes qui n'avaient pas d'enfants à la maison, ils ne vivaient pas la même réalité que nous. Eux ce qu'ils trouvaient lourd c'était d'être seuls, de se sentir isolés chez

eux, mais ils disaient qu'ils étaient capables de faire leurs journées de travail normalement parce qu'ils n'avaient pas de gens de qui s'occuper.”

The participants also expressed that they thought women, regardless of their profession, were impacted more than men, particularly if they had children. Among journalists specifically, the participants felt that freelancers suffered more than staff, and journalists covering specific beats—particularly feminized beats like health and education—felt more pressure to produce (more on this later), as Participant H21 described: “Dans les grands médias, celles qui couvrent les beats santé sont généralement des femmes. C'est sûr que la personne qui couvre ça en mange une claque.”

Overall, the participants agreed that women were in many ways more impacted by the pandemic, though they did not specifically think this was true about journalists, or at least themselves. Despite living some inequalities at home concerning the sharing of childcare tasks and homeschooling, the women felt that men were overall better at sharing household and cleaning tasks. They were aware and concerned about traditional gender roles and the difficulties women throughout society were experiencing during the pandemic, several of them having written articles about the issue, but most believed that as journalists, their work and productivity were not impacted. Participant V92 described this:

“Est-ce que ce ne sont pas les femmes qui subissent davantage les contrecoups au niveau des tâches à la maison, s'occuper des enfants, faire l'école à la maison ? Mais d'un point de vue personnel, j'ai l'impression que j'ai autant travaillé que mes collègues et vice-versa.”

Most of the participants felt they had not witnessed or experienced any gender inequality in their lives or at work, particularly from their bosses, who were understanding about their requirements and their children, as Participant M73 described:



“Il n’y avait pas de pression, si on avait besoin de ne pas travailler une journée on pouvait la prendre, mais c’est moi qui n’étais pas capable! L’information elle rentre sur ton téléphone et tu sais que tu ne peux pas attendre une journée, donc c’est toi qui deviens ton propre problème parce que les patrons comprennent.”

The participants did overall agree that some beats were hit harder than others. Though almost all staff journalists were reassigned to the health beat, those already working beats like health, science, education, and politics experienced additional pressure to work hard and use their experience to adequately cover the most pressing issues. Others lost more work, such as the arts, culture, sports, and police beats. Interestingly, some participants reflected on the feminization of beats like health and education, and their lack of prestigious status despite their importance during the pandemic. Several of them felt that the additional pressure on the health and education beats may have been a reason behind the increased productivity of staff women journalists, as these are normally mostly covered by them, as Participant B34 said:

“Santé et éducation, les affaires sociales, il y a eu beaucoup d’enjeux d’affaires sociales qui ont été pris en charge par des journalistes féminines dans les salles de rédaction donc c’est peut-être pour ça que tout à coup il y a eu un essor de productivité pour elles et chez les gars il y a eu une baisse.”

Those working these beats explained they had indeed felt a pressure to write as much as possible about the issues they uncovered, and those who were not working those beats thought bosses may have called upon those who already had experience in these topics more than upon others, despite everyone rallying to help. Participant M73 explained,

“Dans les journaux le beat éducation et santé c’est souvent des femmes qui les ont, les gars ils font le crime, les enquêtes, c’est souvent comme ça. Il n’y a pas beaucoup de journalistes santé hommes au Québec, donc oui l’actualité s’est imposée à nous tous, mais

est-ce que les femmes ont vu une hausse parce que c'est des sujets d'emblée que les femmes portent plus dans les journaux?"

Participants also discussed the fact that at some media, there are no freelancers covering general news and health. Beats like arts and culture are mostly written by freelancers, but there was very little work concerning these topics during the early months of the pandemic, and staff journalists covered what little there was. Although one participant said the pandemic was a good year for freelancers covering science beats, most thought the unequal impacts on different beats may be in part responsible for the declining productivity of freelance journalists, as Participant M73 explained:

“On n’a pas une tonne de pigistes chez nous, mais je sais que les pigistes ne pigent pas vraiment en santé et actualité, c’est plutôt des piges aux cahiers périphériques. C’est sûr, il n’y avait plus de voyages; il y a une série de sujets aux arts, mais les arts, ça a été sur la glace donc assurément que l’impact a été plus grand sur eux.”

Regardless of their employment status, the participants agreed that precarious journalists, including freelancers and supernumerary journalists, were more impacted by the pandemic than staff journalists. Participant P17 said, “Il y a des pigistes qui ont perdu beaucoup de travail, mais je n’ai pas tant vu des employés dans les salles perdre leurs emplois, ce n’était pas proportionnel.” Budget and staffing cuts affected precarious journalists first, as they have no contracts—or, in the case of supernumerary journalists, one main contract without guarantee they will be given work hours—or protection. This meant many lost work opportunities and their main source of income, so the participants thought their financial anxiety and insecurity likely worsened. Participant K68 explained that,

“Mon cas personnel illustre parfaitement la dynamique générale des pigistes versus les salariés. C’est évident que lorsqu’un média a moins de pages, moins d’argent, moins de

revenus publicitaires, les pigistes sont les premiers qu'on coupe. Ça a toujours été comme ça, il y a toujours eu des pigistes, mais c'est sûr qu'avec la transformation du marché du travail et du modèle économique il y en a plus.”

As freelancing became less and less appealing, many were pushed out and forced to leave the profession. Despite this, the freelancer participants felt that this was simply a reality of the industry they work in, which has been undergoing a transformation—causing more journalists to be forced into precarious employment situations—, and a continuation and potentially worsening of a long-term phenomenon of there being less room over time for freelancers in print journalism.

Freelancers have fewer advantages, protection, and benefits, have no long-term contracts and unpredictable orders and hours, and must therefore be prepared for tough times and for things to change quickly. They did not feel that their bosses owed them any special treatment and understood that staff would be prioritized over them. They were not indignant or shocked, and felt no resentment towards them; instead of feeling like bosses chose to let them go, they felt that the situation imposed it and it was inevitable since they had no contract, so they were owed nothing, as Participant K68 said:

“Ce n'était pas un choix [de travailler moins], mais moi je me mets à la place d'un gestionnaire de média, vous avez des employés permanents, des journalistes salariés que vous devez occuper parce qu'on les paie, puis vous avez un pigiste... c'est sûr qu'il faut qu'ils fassent travailler leur monde à l'intérieur d'abord, donc je n'étais pas outré, c'est la réalité d'une organisation avec des employés syndiqués, salariés qu'ils doivent occuper parce que ça leur coûte pas mal plus cher que moi. [...] Je savais très bien que [la personne gestionnaire] avait les chiffres devant [elle] et qu'[elle] devait faire avec l'argent qu'ils avaient. C'était inévitable que j'en fasse moins.”

For the participants, the main issue freelancers face are their low wages, which haven't increased in a long time and do not reflect the work they put in. For example, articles that require more interviews and research are not necessarily paid better. The participants, regardless of their status, agreed that they should be offered more protections and benefits, and must be paid better to help them prepare for dry periods and crises like the pandemic. Instead, as it currently stands, precarious journalists who were not financially prepared—for example, younger journalists too early on in their careers to have saved sufficiently—were likely more financially affected by the pandemic than the two freelance participants, who had time to prepare for difficult periods, as Participant P17 said:

“C’est dans la nature du travail de pigiste d’être occasionnel et un peu risqué, mais à la base peut-être mieux payer les pigistes quand on les emploie, parce que les montants payés n’ont pas changé ou même baissé depuis 20 ans, donc pour ces gens qui veulent être travailleurs autonomes et qui sont prêts à prendre le risque que les contrats se terminent de façon imprévue, d’avoir un coussin financier ça rend les choses moins compliquées. Donc d’être mieux payé en partant quand on a du travail à faire, ça peut rendre les choses moins douloureuses dans les moments où on n’a pas de travail.”

Participant K68 explained that despite having fewer articles to write for their usual culture beat and their overall production rate declining during the first months of the pandemic, their remuneration did not suffer much as they wrote articles for the better-paid sections:

“Moi je pouvais continuer à écrire sur d’autres sujets, et même si mon volume de textes diminuait, je n’ai jamais cessé de travailler. Parfois j’écrivais des textes et je faisais des tâches de rédaction qui étaient plus payantes que de faire deux-trois critiques par semaine par exemple. Donc oui sur le plan quantitatif il y a eu un impact majeur, mais sur le plan

du volume de travail, des choses intéressantes à faire, et sur le plan financier, honnêtement je n'ai pas vu la différence.”

Most participants agreed on the importance of freelancers and felt that they contribute to the diversity of voices in journalism, and that the arts and culture pages in daily news publications would barely exist without them. Staff and freelancers alike agreed that their hard work needs to be valued more (including by increasing their remuneration), and their rights should be recognized, as Participant K68 explained:

“[Il faudrait] un soutien plus grand de la part de l'état aux médias en général, et une reconnaissance des pigistes comme des auteurs pour leur permettre d'avoir des droits d'auteurs sur ce qu'ils font, [...] et une conscience plus grande des rédacteurs en chef de tous les médias de l'importance des journalistes pigistes dans leur média. Si vous regardez les cahiers culturels et littéraires, sans les pigistes, ils seraient bien vides, alors j'aurais tendance à leur dire, nous sommes là, nous faisons de l'excellent travail, ayez conscience que ce qu'on fait a de la valeur et essayez de le prouver de toutes sortes de façons parce que je crois qu'on le mérite.”

Finally, most participants felt that they received no unequal treatment from their bosses, as Participant V92 said: “C'est sûr que les journalistes qui avaient des enfants en bas âge, il y a eu des inégalités dues à la situation, mais je n'ai pas senti que les patrons avaient fait preuve d'une quelconque inégalité à mon endroit.” Most felt that their bosses often had to make tough decisions (particularly in the case of precarious journalists), and while in some cases they struggled with organization and communication and were too demanding at first, they felt they did their best. One participant expressed some frustration over unfair treatment, and many felt that bosses need to recognize how difficult work is for reporters and how hard they worked during the early months of the pandemic. However, most participants agreed that they were

understanding about their individual situations (including their children if they had them) and were available, communicative, and caring, especially as time went on, as Participant M73 said:

“Je pense que ce qui a été très bon c’est les patrons, on sentait toujours qu’on pouvait leur parler, [il y avait] beaucoup d’écoute même si on n’était pas avec eux physiquement. C’était un gros défi pour eux parce qu’ils ne pouvaient pas savoir qui allait bien et qui n’allait pas bien, mais ils prenaient des nouvelles, ils nous appelaient beaucoup, [il y avait] énormément de communication.”

### Time/Change

Overall, the interview participants felt that everything changed once the pandemic hit: everything closed, there was no more fieldwork or hallway conversations, and their daily work, including the amount of it, changed significantly. Their work was reorganized around lockdown measures, which had an impact on their productivity by removing the separation between work and life.

Time was also a significant theme discussed by the participants. Indeed, the first wave of the pandemic was the most difficult period, but one journalist explained that they did not burn out because it had an end. At the time of interview, they felt they had adapted and were getting better at managing the situation, or at least were used to working a lot and the unpredictable hours: they fell into the routine of the fast-paced rhythm, as Participant M73 said:

“Collectivement et personnellement, tout le monde s’améliore à gérer ça, mais [...] on a hâte de se retrouver et de pouvoir aller au travail et juste travailler. Ne pas avoir à s’occuper de la maisonnée en même temps, ça va être un luxe.”

However, they also felt a certain boredom or professional fatigue, as they were getting tired of always writing about the same topic, asking the same questions, and they wished they could get back to writing about other issues, as Participant B34 said:

“J’entends une grande lassitude de la part de mes collègues, une fatigue professionnelle, tout le monde est assez tanné de rédiger sur la COVID, mais tout le monde a un assez bon moral, ils ont toujours le goût de faire le métier.”

They shared the sense that the pandemic was lasting a long time and they were tired of it, and that after having lost contact with their colleagues for so long, some were now losing the desire to socialize. They felt that things would be better when they returned to normal, as Participant H21 expressed:

“On a fait des petits *partys* dans le parc pendant l’été quand c’était tranquille, des petits cinq à sept, mais les derniers il n’y avait plus grand monde. C’est comme si même les journalistes on perd le goût à la socialisation; ça va être important de resserrer les liens entre nous, parce que ça aide à la productivité! Moi je trouve beaucoup de mes sujets en allant à la cuisine et en discutant avec d’autres journalistes.”

The participants also shared ideas they had about various improvements to be made for the future, such as continuous education on specialized topics, improving health, safety, and prevention at work, more clarity on who is responsible for covering technology costs, more protection of journalists and their mental health, and more governmental support of news media. Although some participants also felt there is no real solution to certain issues, such as the news cycle being too fast, social media, and the transformation of the industry, they also felt that vulnerable and precarious workers like freelancers should be protected, paid better, and their rights should be recognized. The participants also felt that their bosses should recognize and value how hard they worked during the pandemic, as Participant M73 explained:

“Une reconnaissance des heures de travail. On était payés une semaine normale de travail, mais ce n’était vraiment pas des semaines de travail normales. C’est un travail qui est dur

à chiffrer, le journalisme, parce que quand tu réponds à tes courriels le samedi matin, oui c'est du travail, mais d'un autre côté si tu n'y réponds pas..."

Finally, they felt that bosses need to recognize how difficult it is to work as a reporter, especially in the field, and that it takes time to write a good article, but it is worth the wait, as Participant V92 said:

"[Les patrons] devraient venir faire un petit stage de temps en temps pour voir ce que c'est le travail des journalistes sur le terrain. C'est des conditions qui sont souvent difficiles, ce n'est pas évident de rentrer en communication avec les gens et de gagner leur confiance, c'est long de faire des reportages, donc je pense que les décideurs ou patrons devraient davantage le prendre en considération. Et que ça prend du temps de faire un bon reportage. Tu peux écrire une petite nouvelle rapidement, mais ça vaut souvent le temps de prendre le temps de bien le faire, de mieux l'écrire, de faire plus d'entrevues, de mieux pousser le sujet."

### Psychological and Emotional Impacts

The pandemic had a variety of impacts on journalists' productivity and lives in the ways outlined above which consequently led the participants to experience many psychological and emotional impacts. Although these may have impacted their productivity in some ways, these themes are outside the scope of this project. They will be discussed briefly, but further research and analysis would be needed to further understand their impact on journalists.

Despite feeling stimulated by their work, the participants still expressed that they at times felt a kind of generalized anxiety, as well stupefaction, fear, and panic. As one participant explained, journalists are humans and citizens too, and this crisis had a serious impact on them. They had to manage their anxiety about getting infected with COVID-19, improvise, and adapt through traumatizing times, as Participant V92 recounted:



“Quand la pandémie est arrivée, il y avait une anxiété généralisée chez tout le monde, on est des citoyens aussi avant d’être des journalistes. Quand c’est tombé le jeudi avec la conférence de presse, ils nous annoncent qu’ils ferment les écoles pendant deux semaines, donc c’est un peu la panique de citoyen, de parent, mais aussi en tant que journaliste c’est la frénésie qui embarque. Pour moi c’est pour ça que je fais ce métier, c’est pour couvrir des événements comme celui-là, c’est un événement majeur, historique. On comprenait dès ce moment-là qu’on vivait quelque chose de très grand, de très grave, de très important.”

For several participants, constantly listening to the testimonies and stories of sources who needed to share their distress was a lot to manage, as Participant V92 said:

“Je me souviens avoir senti que c’était beaucoup les témoignages que je recevais, il y avait beaucoup de détresse qui était exprimée dans de nombreux reportages. J’avais l’impression de faire quelque chose d’important en travaillant comme journaliste, mais il y avait ce sentiment d’impuissance aussi.”

They felt empathy for those they reported on, but this was a heavy emotional charge, and they eventually felt the need to take breaks, as Participant H21 explained:

“Il ne faut pas minimiser l’impact de la pandémie sur notre travail. Une personne normale qui fait son travail, il parle d’autres choses, il lit d’autres choses, mais moi depuis le début j’avais dans ma face tous les jours toutes les études, les cas, les témoignages... T’es chez toi, tu as peur de perdre quelqu’un qui t’es cher, donc t’es vraiment tout le temps là-dedans, donc à un moment donné on a besoin d’en sortir vraiment.”

While some participants did not feel any financial anxiety or insecurity, several did express that they were concerned for themselves or for other journalists, particularly freelancers. The participants also expressed that they were concerned about several issues, including for the

future of their profession and industry, about journalists and columnists maintaining a standard of objectivity and avoiding conflicts of interest, for the independence of news media and about the (declining) attractiveness of the journalistic profession due to financial insecurity. Finally, some participants were concerned about the declining diversity of voices in journalism as more journalists are pushed out of the field or pulled into content production, as Participant P17 expressed:

“C’est sûr qu’à grande échelle il doit y avoir un impact négatif pour la diversité des voix parce qu’il y a moins de gens qui collaborent aux espaces médiatiques, peu importe que ce soit une question de genre ou de culture ou d’origine. Étant donné qu’il y a moins de monde, naturellement la diversité des voix en souffre. L’expertise qui est souvent très répandue, là elle est concentrée auprès de certaines personnes qui se répètent au lieu de créer de l’espace pour d’autres.”

Despite their concerns, Participant M73 expressed pride at having managed to keep their media publishing daily through two years of a pandemic: “On a quand même été capables depuis deux ans de publier tous les jours en étant chacun chez nous, ce qui est quand même un petit miracle pareil!” Other participants also expressed pride and felt that they worked hard and did good work, steering clear of sensationalism and revealing essential, unknown, and sometimes hidden information, as they feel journalists should do. Participant V92 explained that,

“Rapidement on a commencé à mettre le doigt sur des angles morts de la pandémie, le gouvernement était en gestion de crise, tout était nouveau, on n’était pas préparés, donc il y avait beaucoup d’angles morts justement aux garderies, ce qui se passait dans les CHSLD, puis c’est vraiment les journalistes qui ont mis le doigt dessus et qui ont réussi à avoir des témoignages de personnes qui étaient sur le terrain. Je pense que ça a vraiment

aidé à faire progresser le débat. Je pense que le travail de la communauté journalistique a été primordial à ce moment-là.”

Many participants also felt that they did not suffer too much from the pandemic thanks to their mindset. Several journalists explained their productivity was not impacted because they felt a certain detachment from the situation: they were not thinking about the future or their concerns too much and were instead taking everything one day at a time, as Participant B34 explained:

“Quand on est dans l’œil du cyclone, on ne réalise pas qu’on est dans la tempête. J’ai cette chance d’avoir un certain détachement, je ne me pose pas trop de questions sur qui arrive, c’est une forme d’armure contre l’anxiété. Dans ce métier, il faut s’attendre à vivre tout le temps de l’incertitude et de l’inattendu alors si on commence à se questionner sur comment on le vit psychologiquement, sur notre ressenti, ça peut commencer à être très lourd.”

Several participants also discussed relativizing their situation by comparing themselves to others who had it worse and therefore feeling lucky and privileged. They expressed empathy for those in more difficult situations than their own. For example, several of the journalists felt it was harder for healthcare workers than for them; those without children felt empathy for the difficulties parents faced, while those who had their families at home thought the isolation was probably hard on their colleagues who lived alone. Participant M73 said:

“C’était combiné au fait de devoir être à la maison et de devoir faire tout le reste aussi, d’avoir à combiner la vie familiale et le travail en même temps dans une période aussi occupée. Mais moi je me disais toujours, ce n’est peut-être pas une bonne façon de penser, mais j’interrogeais des infirmières monoparentales qui se faisaient imposer du temps supplémentaire obligatoire et qui travaillaient dans des milieux infectés donc je me disais, ouais ce n’est quand même pas si pire. Quand on se compare, on se console, c’était

mon réflexe, mais je n'ai pas été brûlé parce que c'était stimulant quand même. Et j'avais toujours en tête qu'il y avait des travailleurs de la santé qui étaient pas mal plus dans le trouble que nous..."

## Conclusions

The goal of this research project was to use a mixed methods approach to determine whether the pandemic had a measurable impact on journalists' productivity, and whether that impact was different depending on gender and employment status. It was hypothesized that the results would show that women and precariously employed journalists, a particularly feminized group, had suffered more from the pandemic and that this would be reflected in a decrease in productivity among these groups.

While this study has indeed shown that women and precarious journalists were particularly impacted, this unexpectedly occurred in different ways depending on the group. Precarious journalists suffered a severe decline in productivity as a result of budget cuts in newsrooms. This is no surprise, as the precariousness of these employment conditions make them more vulnerable to changes in financial conditions. During crises, they are the first to be let go as they have no contracts, as opposed to permanent staff who are more protected by their unions' agreements (Brin & St-Pierre, 2013). Within this group, women journalists lost more opportunities than their men counterparts, but the interviews with the study's participants did not shed a definitive light on why this may be.

Meanwhile, the productivity of staff journalists increased compared to the previous year, likely to meet the public's rising demand for updates on the public health crisis and possibly to make up for the loss of precarious journalists' contributions. Unexpectedly, among staff journalists, women's productivity increased more than that of their men counterparts, despite the

expectation that additional childcare and homeschooling responsibilities would affect their ability to produce articles.

One potential reason for this increase among staff journalists, regardless of gender, is that journalism is a profession that leaves little room for procrastination. The pressure to produce, both internal and external, is so powerful that overall, the pandemic pushed staff journalists to increase their publication rate. During the qualitative interviews, the journalist participants expressed that they had no choice but to increase their productivity, as the crisis imposed it. However, they also produced more because they came alive during this crisis: they were excited and stimulated as journalists. They felt it was their duty and responsibility to inform the public quickly about new developments and to reveal hidden information, such as the government's mismanagement of retirement homes.

The participants suggested that the feminization of beats like health and education were in part responsible for the disparity of impacts between men and women. It is possible that women, who were more likely to cover these beats before the pandemic, were called upon more by their bosses during the early months of the pandemic. It is also likely that, as one health reporter participant expressed, they felt an added responsibility to their beat and their audiences which pushed them to work harder than ever. Interestingly, journalists' work was in part easier because they did not have to chase down experts and sources as they made themselves available to them, and data was easily accessible. This echoes the results of a study on science journalists who felt that their workload increased but that scientists were more available during the pandemic (Massarani et al., 2021).

The pandemic forced a total reorganization of the journalists' lives around the government's lockdown measures. Most participants were forced to work from home and had limited access to the field, which had varied impacts on their productivity. The lack of fieldwork;

the focus on short, factual articles; collaboration with their colleagues; competition with journalists from other media; and the lack of separation between work and home all had positive impacts on their publication rates. Meanwhile, working from home with their children around them; miscommunications with colleagues and bosses; and in the case of precarious journalists, budget cuts related to the industry's financial crisis had negative impacts on productivity. Importantly, while writing short articles and not doing fieldwork may have increased productivity, the participants agreed that it had a negative impact on the quality of the work they produced.

Overall, most participants felt that many of the factors they discussed—such as the stress of catching COVID-19 and of having their children at home, the emotional charge of listening to distressing testimonies, and any inequalities they experienced (especially related to gender or unpaid labour)—did not have an impact on their productivity. An exception came from the freelancers, who explained that the decline in their publication rate was not a choice but instead due to the lack of protection for precarious journalists, which led them to be cut first when print media experienced financial difficulties.

It is possible that many of the pandemic's impacts could not be measured by looking at productivity, as it may have instead affected journalists' mental and physical health without being reflected in their publication rate. The mixed methods design of the project required the use of qualitative methods to explore the changes in productivity discovered in the quantitative analysis. The qualitative interviews led to deeper understanding of the pandemic's varied impacts on journalists. Interestingly, most participants who discussed the pandemic's psychological and emotional impacts, as well as varied inequalities, felt that their colleagues were more affected than they were themselves. However, several of the women staff journalists made it clear that the increased pace of the first wave could not have been sustained forever.

The increase in productivity discovered among women staff journalists is surprising, in part because this contrasts what has so far been shown about women in different professions, such as academics. This could be explained by the fact that the differences between journalists and academics are stark enough to counter the similarities in gender inequalities. Indeed, while it was posited that the flexibility of journalists' schedules made them similar to academics, it would seem that they have less flexibility. Indeed, journalists must keep up with the news cycle and meet shorter deadlines than academics, and there is more competition between journalists since they want to be the ones to reveal scoops.

Another potential explanation is that according to the literature, women journalists are less likely to have children than their men counterparts of the same age. This means that on average, they may have been less affected by the increase in unpaid labour and the displacement of schooling from the public to the private sphere than the general population. Interestingly, however, all three staff women participants had children, and the productivity of two of them increased significantly, which may lead to the conclusion that though the increase in caretaking responsibilities had an impact on women journalists' stress and perception of increased workload, it was not reflected in their productivity.

In many ways, the results of this study are similar to that of other studies on journalists during the pandemic. Like in a recent study on Québec journalists, the participants expressed great love for their profession and a feeling of contributing positively to their society and to democracy (Lamoureux, 2021). Out of the four participants with children, the three women expressed that working with their children at home during the first wave's lockdown led to greater difficulty balancing family and profession, while the man felt there was no difference. This is similar to findings that francophone women journalists in Belgium were more likely to

find lockdown difficult, in addition to which they were also more scared of losing their jobs and more likely to change employment status (Le Cam et al., 2020).

Another study has found that the shift to virtual newsrooms increased collaboration and teamwork, which several participants felt was true, but it also led to an overload of work and psychological distress (García-Avilés, 2021). Like journalists in Britain, the participants also felt negative emotions like anxiety and stress, but they also felt pride in the work they achieved during the pandemic (Šimunjak, 2021). This sharp contrast between the satisfaction they felt from the social contribution of their reporting and the difficulties they experienced, such as challenging working conditions, was also discovered among Belgian journalists (Libert et al., 2021).

This project's results also reflect those of Lacroix & Carignan's (2020a) study on Québec journalists, which found that during the pandemic, pre-existing challenges increased while the new realities of lockdown created new difficulties. While new collaboration practices were put in place, the participants felt that they missed interactions with their colleagues and that balancing work and family was difficult.

The staff journalists interviewed did not feel any job insecurity or loneliness from lack of teamwork. In fact, several journalists felt there was more collaboration than before. Most felt little stress and high levels of commitment to their work, which might be because they felt highly supported by their organizations (Hoak, 2021).

### Conclusion and Future Research Orientations

In conclusion, this study found that staff women journalists' productivity increased compared to the previous year, and it increased more than that of their men counterparts. Since this is the opposite of the anticipated result that women's productivity would suffer a reduction in productivity while men's would increase, these results are even more significant. This reflects the



enormous effort put in by women staff journalists during the first wave of the pandemic.

Importantly, several participants felt that this increased pace could not be sustained for long.

The question remains as to what these results mean regarding the long-term impacts of the pandemic on journalists. While the participants felt that the pressure eased over time, further quantitative measurements should confirm whether this production rate was sustained or eventually let up. It is also unknown whether the pandemic has increased burnout or the rate of women leaving their journalism careers. Further research may shed a light on this by following up on the journalists in this sample (particularly those whose productivity severely declined or even decreased to zero during the 2020 study period) to determine whether they have remained in the field or not. Interviews could shed a light on their potential experiences of stress, anxiety, and burnout.

The pandemic undoubtedly had a significantly negative impact on the productivity of precarious journalists, and therefore likely on their income. It is possible that many have chosen to abandon journalism altogether, finding the conditions too difficult. The study also reveals that there was a sharper decline in productivity among women precarious journalists. This may be in part because women freelancers tend to be younger and have less experience in the field than their men counterparts, which would lead to them being cut first, or because they tend to be less well paid than men, which could have led them to decide to leave the field to find better conditions (D'Amours, 2014). Further research should explore the reasons behind this specific disparity. Contrary to general belief, this study found that there were as many women as men freelancers. However, even before the pandemic, they only wrote half as many articles as them. Future research should confirm these findings, since this would mean women journalists' situation is different in Québec and Canada. Further studies should also attempt to elucidate why

women precarious journalists wrote less than men: were they offered fewer assignments by their clients or instead refused more of them, for example to care for their children or family members?

Another counterintuitive result of this study is that more men than women “disappeared” from the sample between the 2019 and 2020 study periods. There could be many reasons behind this, including that some were on leave during the first wave, or that they changed media. Since men journalists tend to be older than women, several of them may have retired, possibly by accepting early retirement plans. While this study was unable to determine the specific reasons behind these departures, future research should specifically look at journalists who left the field before or during the pandemic and determine whether men were more likely to do so than women. These results indeed raise a question: do men leave their journalism careers when it becomes unbearable, driving a feminization of the profession that occurs as working conditions worsen? One woman participant felt that women journalists tend to shoulder more responsibilities during difficult times, in part to prove that they can do it all: have successful journalism careers and raise their children. Future research could also explore gendered differences in mindset and psychology among journalists and determine, for example, whether women tend to take on too much work while men stand their ground and say no when they need to.

This study has several limitations, including that the productivity comparison was only calculated using two study periods, one in 2019 and one in 2020. Further research could perform the same comparison over several years to determine whether the variation in productivity discovered was normal or indeed a result of the pandemic. Further analyses could also split columnists from reporters, exclude journalists in managerial positions from the sample, and determine the career length, age, and ethnicity of the journalists in the sample, all of which could be linked to different productivity patterns. Finally, further research could explore the theory that

journalists were more productive because they wrote shorter articles and investigations were put on hold, perhaps by quantitatively measuring the average word count of articles during each study period, or by using a qualitative assessment of the depth of the stories that were produced, preferably over several years.

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## Appendix: Semi-directed qualitative interview guide

Questionnaire pour les participants.

**Q0 Nous venons de compléter la lecture du formulaire de consentement. Merci ! Êtes-vous prêt.e à commencer ?**

**Q1 Décrivez-moi comment vous avez travaillé pendant la pandémie. Qu'est-ce qui a changé: est-ce que vous travailliez plus à la maison, sur le terrain?**

### *Questions de clarification*

- En tant que journaliste, comment vous êtes-vous senti.e pendant la pandémie?
  - Comment vous sentiez-vous lorsque vous travailliez pendant la pandémie? Étiez-vous plus stressé, ressentiez-vous plus de peur, ou de l'urgence/de la nécessité à travailler vite...
- En quoi votre travail était plus difficile? Plus facile?
- En quoi votre productivité a-t-elle été affectée? Quels ont été les impacts sur votre motivation?
- Quels facteurs vous ont affectés le plus? Le moins?
- Quelles expériences à la maison, au travail, ou sur le terrain ont eu un impact sur votre travail ou votre productivité?
  - Qu'avez-vous vu sur le terrain/à la maison/aux bureaux pendant le début de la pandémie? Qu'avez-vous vécu/quelles expériences ont eu un impact sur vous?

**Q2 Selon ma recherche, votre productivité journalistique a subi des changements depuis la pandémie. (expliquer résultats) Êtes-vous surpris.e par ces résultats? Pourquoi? Selon vous, quelles sont les expériences qui ont causées ces changements?**

### *Questions de clarification*

- Plus de détails sur la situation au travail?
- À la maison — enfants? Famille malade? Conjoint.e qui aide ou pas?
- Selon vous, quels facteurs ont eu un impact plus important sur votre productivité — personnels, votre publication, profession, société?
- Si vous deviez changer quelque chose pour empêcher d'autres impacts négatifs pendant la vague actuelle ou s'il y avait une autre pandémie, que feriez-vous? Que demanderiez-vous de votre média?
- Quels sentiments éprouvez-vous lorsque vous pensez aux résultats de mon projet? À ce qui pourrait ressortir du partage des résultats?

### **Q3 Ressentez-vous que l'impact de la pandémie sur la productivité est inégal entre les hommes et les femmes journalistes?**

#### *Questions de clarification*

- Pensez-vous avoir vécu des inégalités au travail? À la maison?

### **Q4 Ressentez-vous que l'impact de la pandémie sur la productivité est inégal entre les pigistes et les employés permanents? Entre différents beats journalistiques?**

#### *Questions de clarification*

- Quel est votre statut? Votre beat/sujets habituels? Est-ce que votre statut ou votre beat a dû changer à cause de la pandémie?
- Est-ce que c'est un choix d'être pigiste ? Est-ce que c'était un choix de travailler plus/moins pendant la pandémie ?
- Quels sentiments avez-vous ressentis par rapport à une possible perte de revenus ou d'emploi pendant la pandémie? Pourquoi/comment?
- Quelle était votre opinion sur les différences entre les pigistes et les travailleurs à temps plein avant la pandémie? Comment est-ce que la pandémie a changé cette opinion?
- Est-ce que vous avez vécu ou vu des expériences qui pourraient expliquer mes résultats?
- Que pensez-vous de l'avenir des journalistes pigistes ? Comment des impacts similaires pourraient être évités dans le cas d'une autre pandémie ou urgence similaire?

Comment est-ce que les journalistes peuvent être plus ou moins productifs dans votre média?

Est-ce que le nombre d'articles publiés dans une période est, selon votre ressenti, un bon reflet de leur productivité?

Qu'ignorons-nous toujours sur ce sujet? À part le nombre d'articles publié/la productivité, sur quoi la pandémie aurait pu avoir un impact?

Quels sont les impacts qu'on ne peut pas mesurer ?

Qu'entendez-vous sur le sujet de la part de vos pairs? Quelles expériences ou émotions ou ressentis ont-ils/elles partagé sur leur charge de travail et leur capacité à travailler pendant le début de la pandémie?

Qu'est-ce qu'un lecteur devrait savoir de plus pour comprendre l'impact de la pandémie sur les journalistes? Qu'est-ce qu'il/elle devrait voir ou lire ou entendre pour mieux comprendre? Qu'est-ce qu'un décideur devrait voir ou lire pour préparer les médias à une nouvelle pandémie? aider les journalistes dans leur travail? protéger les pigistes et les aider à se sentir en sécurité?

Pour ma part, ça fait le tour de mes questions. Y a-t-il un sujet que nous n'avons pas abordé ou quelque chose que vous aimeriez ajouter?