THE DANGERS OF SPORTS JOURNALISM
MY RESEARCH INTEREST

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

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

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

So is there a problem – or is it just the company I keep?
IS THERE A PROBLEM?

Exploratory research to identify

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

- Where: 35 countries, six continents, all types of political regimes = it happens everywhere
- Which sports: 50 incidents out of 78 related to football (soccer)
Attacks, threats of death or violence, digital hate speech – mainly against female sports journalists

Verbal and physical assaults, sexual abuse of female sports journalists

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

Legal pressure

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

Sports journalists

Mixed zone (athletes & coaches)

Clubs and national associations

International sports federations

Authorities

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

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

Arrested for reporting on Qatar's World Cup labourers.
SOME CONCLUSIONS

• Not just a whistleblower issue: All sports journalists whether they cover sports on an everyday basis or are investigative journalists are potentially at risk.

• Many of the perpetrators are new faces in the discussions about safety for journalists and may require new approaches from media freedom organisations.

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

Bulgaria: Attacker sprays substance in sports journalist's face.
QUESTIONS TO MOVE ON TO

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

ksp@cc.au.dk
ksp@dmjx.dk