

Investigative Journalism; Threats and Opportunities in Iran

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ABSTRACT

Since many years ago, journalism has played a decisive role in the process of information in many societies. However, opportunities for professional dissemination of information, which have been provided in Western countries due to development of professional journalism, have not been extant in the developing countries, for different reasons. In many such countries, due to ambiguity of laws, lack of legal supports, weak infrastructures, and absence of needed journalistic education, journalists have not been able to play their due role. Under these circumstances, journalists in these countries, including Iran, have been working on repetitive subjects and in a superficial manner and have been unable to update their audience with transparent information.

Documented figures in the Iranian society show that despite increased number of academic graduates and growing number of youth, which should be naturally accompanied by more interest in reading newspapers, for various reasons, newspapers are losing their readership and their circulation is on the decline. It seems that the present Iranian society which is full of social, political and economic complexities, needs infrastructures and laws to support journalists in order to pave the way for the ideal form of journalism, that is, investigative journalism, to come into being. Under the present conditions when Iranian organizations and institutions, due to weakness of laws pertaining to free access to information (of course, new approaches have been started in recent years to support this right) consider most information and documents about the realities of social, political and economic life as secret and prevent free flow of information in the society, this form of journalism can lead to presentation of documented facts about various events and put an end to the existing tunnel vision. In this way, in addition to bolstering professional status of journalists, it will allow them to act as representatives of the public opinion and restore the trust of the audience. On the other hand, due to extreme centralization of information

and willingness among newspapers to publish general news and information, most of which pertain to the capital city, and absence of effective local newspapers, there is a type of information gap surrounding current events and realities of the country most of which are hidden in cities which are far from the capital. Under these conditions, it seems that prevalence of investigative journalism among the Iranian journalists is one of the best solutions for shedding more light on effective realities which remain untold. In this paper, the main obstacles on the way of developing investigative journalism in Iran are discussed in view of political, legal, economic, and educational factors.

*** What Is Investigative Journalism?**

Investigative journalism is a type of reporting in which reporters deeply investigate a topic of interest, often involving crime, political corruption, or some other scandal. An investigative journalist may spend a considerable period researching and preparing a report, sometimes months or years, whereas a typical daily or weekly news reporter writes items concerning immediately available news. Most investigative journalism is done by newspapers, wire services and freelance journalists. An investigative journalist's final report may take the form of an expose. (Wikipedia)

An investigative journalist is a man or woman whose profession it is to discover the truth and to identify lapses from it in whatever media may be available. The act of doing this generally is called investigative journalism and is distinct from apparently similar work done by police, lawyers, auditors is not limited as to target, not legally founded and closely connected to publicity. (Hugo de Burgh, 2000:9)

Investigative journalism attempts to get at the truth the truth is obscure because it suits others that it be so; they choose their topics from a sense of right and wrong which we can only call a moral sense but in the manner of their research they attempt to be dispassionately evidential. (ibid : 23)

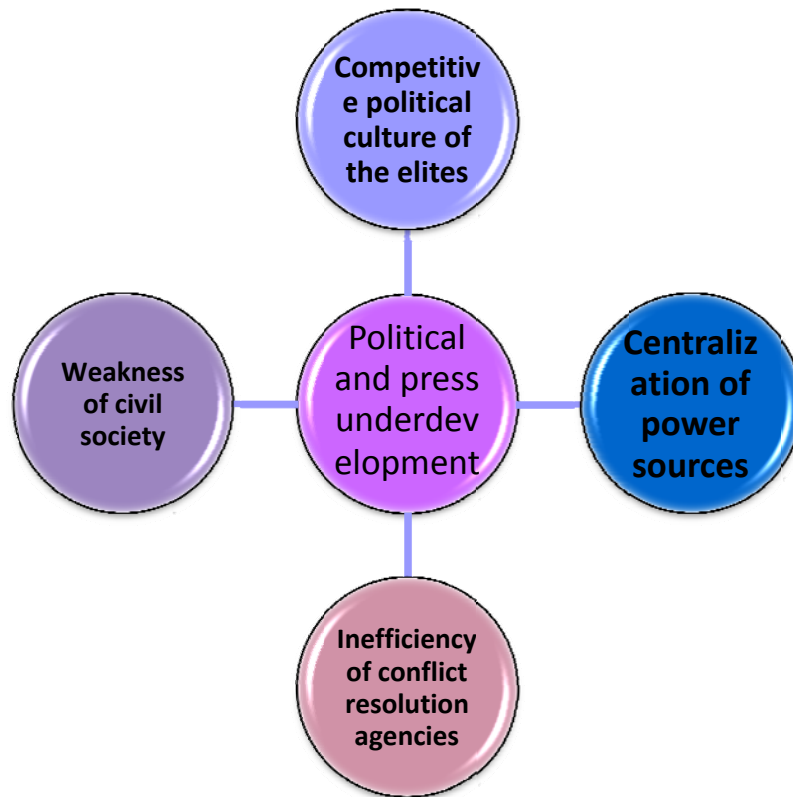
1. Background And Main Factors (barriers and cirques in Iran)

1.1. Political obstacles: centralization of power sources and weakness of civil society

In many studies on reasons behind underdevelopment of the Iranian press, the researchers have mentioned underdevelopment of the political system in various historical junctures as a major factor. With regard to investigative journalism, it seems

that special conditions of political power structures constitute the most important factors preventing development of this form of journalism in Iran. In other words, since political development in Iran is focused around boosting possibilities for political participation and competition, and since development of the press is a result of developments related to this sphere, which cause competition in press products, general obstacles in the way of final development of the Iranian press is closely related to obstacles that prevent the country's overall, especially political, development. In fact, it seems that a type of selective link exists between different social factors (which constitute society and the political system) and situation of the press, which are assessed according to special indexes. In fact, structural similarities between the society and the press will lead us to the conclusion that political underdevelopment of the press can be explained due to lack of social development. (*Khaniki, 2002: p. 49*)

According to studies by *Hadi Khaniki*, an Iranian professor of communications, who has studied obstacles to political development in Iran during constitutionalism and Pahlavi periods, “concentration of power sources” and “weakness of civil society” were two major obstacles to political development and, subsequently, to development of the Iranian press. He also adds two other factors to the above factors, which may be common to all Third World countries, which are special to historical and cultural circumstances in Iran. Those factors are “political culture which encourages competition among the elite” and “inefficiency of dispute settlement bodies”. Thus, the model he presents for underdevelopment of political and press system in Iran is as follows:



Model for political and press underdevelopment of Iran

The circles around this model show a centralized power model in the course of the Iranian history, which only allows for increased participation and competition among social groups when the central power is weak, (*ibid*). As put by *Khaniki*, within a centralized social structure which is characterized by dictatorship, an undeveloped press structure can be observed and when social structure is based on distribution of power and diversion of resources, a more developed press structure can be imagined. Why such a relationship exists between social structures, especially its political and press systems is due to hidden functions of the press in societies like Iran. That is, in the absence of a civil society, the press rapidly supplants it and develops a political function. The press and freedom are twins and since they advocate change and mutual relations, they are usually faced with different kinds of social and political resistance. This change of role does not mean that the status of the press is institutionalized, but it adds to complexity of barriers which impede development of the press. In other words, the press has been looked upon as a political matter for many years and expectations from them have been political. In this way, as put by *Khaniki*, since we are faced with weakness or transformation of the civil society, the independent role of the press will be low-key and it would be, in fact, a function of the political system. Political function of the press has made their development conditional on political development of Iran and has considered a role for political factors and obstacles in political development of the country (*ibid: pp. 371 and 372*).

Results of *Khaniki's* study show that throughout the Iranian history, anytime that dispersion of political power in Iran has increased and supervision over the press has diminished, press groups have emerged and circulation of newspapers has increased (*ibid: pp. 377 & 378*).

In a research conducted on the situation of criticism in the Iranian press in 2004; this issue came to the fore that social history of Iran is mostly history of complex relationships between nations and various forms of totalitarian governments. It showed that when Iran entered the new age, the press could not act as intermediary between the government and the nation and, in fact, the new phenomenon could not relieve itself from the destructive effects (*Mohsenian-Rad, 1994*). Findings of another research in 1999 and 2004 show that during 116 years of press history in Iran, the relationship between the government and the press has been such that only in 11 percent of cases, it has been interactive and in 89 percent of cases, interaction has given way to confrontation or obedience (*Mohsenian-Rad, 2006: 14 and 16*).

Situation of Iranian press in the past 116 years



Under conditions when long periods of centralization have prevented development of nongovernmental press, on the one side, and independent ones, on the other side, nobody can expect critical journalism to come into being and finally give birth to the most ideal form of journalism, that is, investigative journalism.

1.2. Legal obstacles: Freedom of speech and free access to information and the right to be published

Democracy, freedom of speech, and free access to information are integrated concepts. As democracy has no meaning in the absence of freedom of expression, the latter cannot exist without free access to information and its main component, that is, the right of citizens to have free access to information which is controlled by the government. The same argument can be applied to special responsibility of journalists to fulfill their main duty, that is, dissemination of information and news and promoting awareness among citizens. In order for journalists to publish news and information and enlighten the public opinion, they must first have free access to news and information.

While playing a critical role in establishing and strengthening democracy and freedom of speech, press and journalists are among those entities that make the most of that freedom. Especially, investigative journalism is heavily dependent on free access of journalists to information and their room for taking advantage of that freedom. On the other hand, it seems that in addition to needing free access to information in order to write an investigative report, they should enjoy the right to “freedom of publication” because if an investigative report is not published, it would not be able to impress the public opinion. Therefore, in order to promote investigative journalism in all societies, all journalists should have “free access to information” and the right to “free dissemination of information” while their audience should be entitled to the right of “freedom of expression”. Also, “laws supporting news sources of journalists” and “the right to freedom of expression” should be added to the above set of freedoms because safeguarding professional and social security of news sources that have cooperated with investigative journalists and have provided them with revealing information, is more important than other fields of journalism.

1. **Freedom of expression:** The concept of “freedom of expression” which has given rise to the “right of free information”, the “right of informing” and “the right of communication” has a long history. The concept has been born under the impression of freedom seeking and democratic ideas in the age of illumination at the end of the 17th and beginning of 18th centuries which was inspired by three revolutions of that time, that is, constitutional revolution in Britain (1688-89), the American revolution (independence war of 1776) and the great French revolution (1789), especially the last two. It should be noted that the concepts of “freedom of expression” and “freedom of press”, which is one of its subsidiaries, entered the constitutions of the European and American countries and those of other countries during 19th and 20th centuries and topped the list of fundamental freedoms envisaged by those laws in order to realize personal and group rights of human beings. These concepts were modified in the period following the World War II and in parallel to the establishment of the United Nations and compilation of UN Charter as well as statute of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1945 as well as during formulation and approval of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 1948) and International Convent on Civil and

Political Rights (November 1966) and through negotiations and actions taken by the general conference of UNESCO in 1970s and 1980s. The modifications aimed to oppose communication inequalities and information imbalances in contemporary world and to stress the need for establishment of a “new world order for information and communications”. New concepts like “freedom of information”, “free access to information”, “the right to know”, “the right to communicate”, and the “right of public access to information” were outcomes of those changes. (*Motamednejad, 2004*)

Article 23 of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s constitution has recognized freedom of expression for all Iranians and has forbidden inquiry into other people’s beliefs, stipulating that nobody can be prosecuted for holding a conviction. (*Hosseini-Nik: 39*)

2. **Free access to information:** There are frequent claims that “people have a right to know”. But does such a right really exist? If yes, how it could be realized, implemented and supported? The first discussion of the necessity of the right to know comes from James Madison, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, who has noted that a popular government without popular information and the means to obtain it will be either a tragedy, or comedy, or both. He maintains that people, who want to rule themselves, would avail of the power of information.

Harold L. Nelson and Dwight L. Teeter have noted in their book, *Law of Mass Communications: Freedom and Control of Print and Broadcast Media*, argue: “*If state officials at any level, hide their deeds, they would have protected themselves against public inquiry. If secrecy dominates state policies, the old terms of “despotism” and “repression” will be reapplied to modern human beings. They maintain that injustice, unaccountable power, inattention to human needs and rights, inefficiency and corruption take place in secret. A democratic society has an arsenal of all arguments in order to make the lion’s share of state information open to the public.*”

The most basic principle in any democratic country is that journalists should be able as citizens’ representatives to see into and supervise the conduct of state authorities. However, supervision cannot take place in a vacuum. The prerequisite for its realization is free access to information. Freedom of information includes the right to have free access to information which is monopolized by state bodies. The right to have free access to information is based on this fundamental principle: government is not the owner, but depositary of information.

In other words, under these conditions, citizens trust their government to give them useful information. The right for access to information is indispensable from the right to freedom of expression. Therefore, in related texts, most emphasis is put on this argument that “if there were nothing to express, then the right to freedom of expression would be meaningless.” (*Namakdoust Tehrani, 2003*)

The first law which stipulated the right of free access to information was approved in Sweden 242 years ago as part of that country's press act and, thus far, many countries have realized that right in their domestic laws. However, in many countries, laws ensuring free access of citizens to information have not been ratified and, if ratified, citizens are still facing difficulties in accessing information. Such conditions are frequently seen in countries where publishing newspapers requires permit from the government. Iran is one of those countries in which this preventive measure is practiced for publishing newspapers and journalists have to obtain relevant permits from state authorities before publishing a newspaper.

Iranian journalists face tremendous difficulties when they want to compile the simplest news and have access to documentary information and statistics. On the other side, in many instances and in organizations that are managed according to traditional administrative systems, there is no organized process to register and record information. On the other hand, access of journalists to statistics on various issues, from the simplest social and cultural areas to complicated political matters, is considered a risky measure by many state officials and authorities. Although a large part of daily information is published through media, people have gotten used to it and they get much of their needed information through media. But communication and information experts maintain that absence of reliable information is a major problem. Under these conditions, reporters and correspondents have to obtain first-rate statistics and information through every official and unofficial source. However, *Akbar Nematollahi*, a communication expert in Iran, believes that statistics and information presented today mostly mean to reflect the status quo as suitable and protect the interests of the organization which gives out that information. As put by *Nematollahi*, people see that realities contradict with those statistics and are wary about trusting them. He maintains that only security and intelligence information should be released cautiously and information related to other areas should be freely communicated to people (*ISNA news agency*).

In Iran, the law for classifying documents and information for people is not clear-cut and as put by *Mohsen Mandegari*, editor-in-chief of Jam-e Jam newspaper, "state-run bodies consider themselves entitled to put a secret label on all documents and papers related to them and prevent people and journalists from having access to them." He mentioned non-specified classification of information as a threat to the right of journalists for having free access to information and says, "As long as the law pertaining to free flow of information has not been approved, it is directors and even low-ranking civil servants who decide about what information people and journalists can have access to and what documents should be secret (*Fars news agency*).

The main reason frequently mentioned in many countries, including Iran for withholding information from journalists is "national security". It seems that disclosure of information in a way that may affect the public opinion has not been recognized in Iran yet. On the other hand, according to Iranian laws, access by people and media to

classified information is considered an offense and offenders will be punished according to the law. Revelations about such documents has, thus far, led to closure of newspapers and subsequent trial of journalists, as happened to *Salaam* daily in 1999.

During recent years, Iran has made its early efforts to ratify a law allowing free access to information. Under former president, *Seyed Mohammad Khatami*, a draft bill allowing free access to information was compiled and presented to the parliament. That bill has been approved in recent months after some modifications. According to that bill, the mass media will be obliged to put information which pertains to their rights and obligations at people's disposal without discrimination. According to the bill, every Iranian has the right to access general information and public as well as private institutes should answer inquiries about information within 10 days. Article 4 of the bill notes that forcing people, including journalists to disclose their sources is forbidden unless through legal permits and if the law is supported by adequate executive guarantees, some obstacles that harassed journalists during the past years would be removed. Although it seems that institutionalization of the public culture demanding the right for free access to information beyond legal infrastructures in a society where statistics and information are considered classified security data would require more time.

3. **The right of free publication of information:** Only free access by journalists to information is not sufficient for writing investigative reports, but investigative journalism is realized only when it is possible for them to publish investigative reports which frequently include shocking and disclosing information.

Professional working with editorial rooms of various Iranian newspapers shows that although many statistics and research findings are documented on reliable sources, it is not possible to publish them even in nonpolitical fields. For example, it is not possible to publish a documented report on suicide among university students or possible spread of AIDS in Iran or statistics on illegal abortions because this kind of information may disturb the public opinion. If published, the newspaper or its columnist may be prosecuted by judicial officials on grounds of disturbing the public opinion. However, nowhere in Iranian Press Act, publication of such figures and information has not been considered as equal to disturbing the public opinion and it seems that stances taken on such reports and subsequent treatment of journalists are mostly based on personal tastes and customary reactions to reports. Under such conditions, if a report creates major social waves, as every investigative report is supposed to do, most probably the newspaper which has published it may be temporarily banned or even lose its license. However, as the Iranian law has emphasized on free access by all citizens and journalists to information and that the law requires journalists to publish information in order to enlighten the public opinion, we must wait and see to what extent the implementation of the said law would be able to put an end to personal and customary approaches to this issue.

1. The right to receive free information: Although free access to information by journalists and their right to publish free information are part of a process which is taken to writing an investigative report, the rights of the audience that reads the report should also be heeded. In reality, in countries where newspapers are run by the state, the readership faces limitations when receiving information and, in fact, newspapers cannot play their actual role in the information process. Major examples of such circumstances in Iran are reflected in increased number of news websites. Since there are fewer limitations on the Internet, journalists prefer to use it as a tool for free publication of information.
4. Protecting news sources of journalists: One of the most important preconditions for investigative journalism is existence of laws to protect news sources of journalists. This is a cornerstone of freedom of press. In investigative journalism and after publication of such reports, people who are threatened by the reports may try to put pressure on journalists to disclose their sources.

In European Union member states, journalists are protected by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and courts can reject complaints of newspapers on the strength of that article as well as the European Council resolution (approved on January 8, 1994) which bans revelations on the sources used by reporters (*Roya Motamednejad, 2003*). The first steps to secure that right in Iran were taken through approval of the law for free access to information in 2007.

5. Support for investigative journalists: Since investigative journalism, in its global sense, has not been realized in Iran yet, there are no specific laws to support investigative journalists in the country. Meanwhile investigative journalism is accompanied by too much psychological stress. Spending day hours on research about social issues will also negatively affect personal lives of investigative journalists. Also, investigative journalists are more than their colleagues exposed to threats, setup, libel and isolation (*Kibble, 1948: 427*). Therefore, one of the most important needs for investigative journalists in Iran is ratification of suitable laws to support them and as long as this form of journalism has not entered editorial departments, expecting such laws to be ratified would be optimism.

1.2. Economic obstacles: State journalism and lack of job security for journalists

Press freedom is not simply limited by political powers, but in many countries, especially in the developing states like Iran, they are also restricted by economic problems facing journalists. While creating a suitable atmosphere for spreading freedom of expression and free access to information as well as empowerment of the press to support legal freedoms and meet people's needs as well as professional education and independence are requisites of investigative journalism, it seems that all of them are a function of economic factors. In better words, realization of investigative journalism in a country with multiple, free press and press institutes

that are not dependent on the government is much easier than a country where newspapers are weak and dependent on the government.

One of the less-studied and yet important areas of journalism in Iran, which affects this profession qualitatively and quantitatively, is economy of journalism in Iran.

Economy of journalism can be viewed from two angles:

1. Economic independence for those newspapers launched to promote cultural goals as well as to bolster the civil society and realize freedom of expression and public services.
2. Economic independence for those newspapers which serve the interests of a small group.

Our subject is the first type of economic independence which will enable journalists to help the free flow of information and realization of civil society. It seems obstacles to development of the press in Iran have influenced the economy of journalism just in the same way that they have hampered the growth of overall system of the Iranian journalism. At present, this sick economic system is one of the most important hurdles on the way of professional journalism, especially investigative journalism.

Although it seems that lack of open political atmosphere is one of the most important obstacles to development of investigative journalism, a study of incomes as well as economic situation of journalists shows that the slow trend of development of journalism in Iran is as much affected by limited access to information and lack of political freedoms as it is hampered by economic issues. Economic issues are among the most important problems faced by the press, including private newspapers.

It seems that the most important economic hurdles to investigative journalism include:

1. **Economic dependence on the government and high risk of investment in the press:** Since their establishment, Iranian press have gone through despotic and revolutionary conditions and now, they are in transition to a commercial state though some of them have retained some of their past characteristics. Iran Press Institute is currently working as a state-run medium which has been influential on elections through its political functions (*Mir-Abedini, 2006: 553*). In a general approach, development of the press in Iran has started after a 200-year lag compared to Western press and through a wrong understanding of the role of the press. Delayed establishment of journalism in Iran, imitating methods used by Western press, incomplete growth of the press, and longstanding impact of dictatorships on newspapers are among the most important obstacles to professional journalism in the country whose consequences extend into economic aspects of this profession (*Khaniki, 2006: 134*).

A glance at the history of the Iranian press during the past 100 years shows that despite pressures from the government on the press, Iranian newspapers had made efforts before the 1979 revolution to become commercial papers and get rid of state pressures. In those years, *Ettelaat*, *Kayhan*, and *Ayandegan* gradually established private press institutions

and tried to be as independent as they could and this process increased their quality due to competition for gaining more share of advertisements. A 62-day strike by the Iranian press in the fall 1978, greatly increased circulation of the press and built up public support for freedom of press, thus improving their economic situation and commercial motivations. The Islamic Revolution in Iran was a turning point in establishment of commercial press and prevalence of party-based journalism, which is a threat to existence of independent newspapers, especially commercial ones, has prevented economic fundamentals of independent journalism in Iran (*Abedini, 2006: 563 and 564*).

Circulation of the Iranian press in later years (especially after the end of eight-year war between Iran and Iraq) reduced due to restricting state policies and special conditions of the country. However, as the war ended (1988) and a department at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance was dedicated to the press and publicity affairs, new approaches were taken to press activities and financial assistance was made available to them, which led to unprecedented growth of the press, so that, the number of periodicals increased from 100 to 550. From 1989 to 1997, reconstruction of economic institutions raised new hopes about emergence of new commercial papers and new periodicals popped up out of governmental and semi-governmental institutions. Tehran Municipality launched *Hamshahri* daily as a counterbalance to *Ettelaat* and *Kayhan* dailies which were once among the main players of the Iranian press scene and it marked a watershed in commercial and professional journalism in Iran (*ibid: 567*)

In addition to many innovations which overruled traditional journalistic traditions, *Hamshahri* was published in full color and carried interesting headlines which brought about a major change in the economy of journalism in Iran. On the other hand, recruitment of some cultural elites plus facilities considered for newspaper staff helped it look different from other newspapers. In later years, special issues were published to provide citizens with information they needed and publication of a large volume of advertisements turned *Hamshahri* into a commercial paper whose main source of revenue was commercials. In fact, *Hamshahri* was a forerunner in commercial journalism. This experience proved that a high-quality paper is possible to be published in Iran, but it is still the organ of Tehran Municipality, which is a public body, and although it has been very influential in raising the quality of journalism in the country, it has been limited to red lines set by Tehran Municipality as well as the Islamic City Council, which actually bar the paper from entering the field of investigative journalism.

Although there were no major developments in economy of journalism after the coming to power of the reformist government in 1997, establishment of similar press institutes like Iran (state-run) and *Jam-e Jam* (affiliated to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting) indicated the direction in which state-run and commercial Iranian papers moved. At that juncture, independent newspapers which had been published as a result of a relatively more open political atmosphere were not tolerated by the ruling system for

different reasons and their short lifespan (sometimes less than a month) prevented them from gaining economic independence.

Even during the second term of Mohammad Khatami as president (2001-2005), when journalism was more restricted, newspapers like *Shargh* daily which took advantage of young journalists, was a new experience in Iranian journalism. Although it also depended on government subsidies, its relative independence from political currents, which was more evident in later years of its activity, paved the way for the newspaper, which was run by the private sector, to launch a private press institution in the country. Few months before its closure, the phrase “private sector medium” was seen near the logo of the newspaper. However, experiences have shown that totalitarian rule in Iran seldom tolerates such newspapers and it was banned in the same year that it launched an effort to establish an independent press institute. It seems that most resistance to emergence of independent press institutes is due to the fact that such institutes can cross the red lines set by the government and this has caused the government to be fearful about emergence of private commercial press institutions.

Restriction of criticism in the press after 2004 has created new conditions for the press. During those years, Iranian press experienced new circumstances under which few of them survived the power game against the government and the survivors are those newspapers which focus on special subjects like economic issues. It is true that private newspapers gradually turn into big and small commercial bodies and raise hopes about strengthening of independent journalism; they cannot fulfill the main responsibilities of the press in enlightening the society and can only meet the limited needs of few specialized groups because those newspapers want to “get through the crisis”. (*ibid*; 578)

From a realistic angle, economy of newspapers in Iran is facing many problems. They are mostly dependent on government subsidies to get their needed paper and cover their other costs and if those subsidies were cut, they would not be able to survive. The most important outcome of dependence on the government especially when state policies are austere is more conservatism and self-censorship in newspapers.

Due to many reasons, the most important of which being instability of journalism due to government’s interferences, journalism is not considered a lucrative business in Iran and these conditions have made it very difficult for journalists to continue their careers. Frequent ban on newspapers, especially in recent years, has increased the risk of economic investments in the sector and, thus, few investors are ready to launch an independent and private press institute because experience has shown that most independent news entities are not tolerated by state rivals and if banned, there is no authority to make up for the losses suffered by investors. (*Jaafari: 2006: 68*)

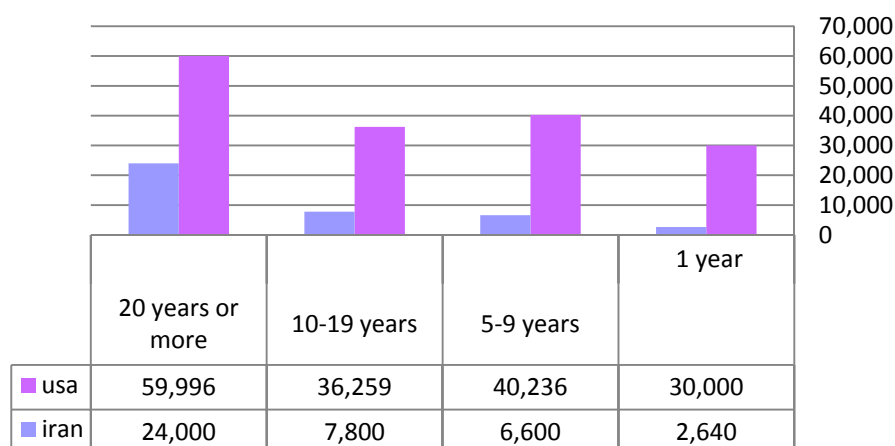
Only in rare times the Iranian press has been able to live as an independent economic and commercial entity by relying less on the government. However, willingness of governments to close supervision over the press, on the one hand, and the comfort that

newspapers feel through dependence on the government, has influenced the quality of professional journalism and nobody can expect a newspaper which is dependent on the government or parties to get active in the field of investigative journalism.

2. **Job security and income of journalists:** Inattention to economic independence of the press and livelihood of their staff has left many journalists jobless. Most of them go through long periods of unemployment after their newspapers are banned. Therefore, even if trained in investigative journalism, those journalists who are unable to cover the most basic costs of their lives should undertake the costs of writing an investigative report, such as travel expenses and other expenses, and this is impossible for them because such expenses are usually high. Otherwise, they should ask their respective newspapers to cover the costs of preparing an investigative report, which may take many months on some occasions and most Iranian newspapers are not able to do that. On the other hand, even when such a report is finished most newspapers are not able to publish them due to extreme conservatism or self-censorship. Therefore, preparing an investigative report is neither economical for a journalist nor profitable for his/her newspaper (*Jaafari, 2006: 73*). Although such conditions are not specific to Iran and, as put by Richard Keeble, writer of a guidebook on journalism, high costs of investigative journalism is usually a factor which prevents such activities (*Keeble, 2000: 440*); this factor is more influential in Iran due to the wide gap between salaries paid to journalists in Iran and other countries.

At present, maximum salary for an amateur journalist is 220 dollars a month and 400 dollars for a professional one. In other words, a journalist who has worked for a year earns 2,640 dollars and another one with a working record of five years and more would earn 4,800 dollars a year. The salary of Iranian editors and chief editors is, at least, 550 dollars and, at most, 2,000 dollars a month. A journalists having worked 5-10 years in Iran as an editor, earns about 6,600 dollars or at most 8,000 dollars a year. Meanwhile, an experienced journalist having worked for 10-20 years will earn 24,000 dollars a year. At the same time, a study by a research center in the United States whose results have been published on the Internet ” shows that an American journalist having worked for a year or less, will earn 30,000 dollars a year.(payscale.com)

Median Salary by Years Experience - Job:
Journalist USA & iran (\$)



Also, results of another research conducted by the Association of Iranian Journalists show that average salary (per month) of a male journalist in Iran (is 2,600,000 Rials(approximately 260\$) and a female journalist 1,700,000 Rials(approximately 170 \$) (*according to ISNA news agency*). Such an earning would barely help a journalist make the ends meet and it seems that under such conditions, economic barriers prevent journalists from venturing into the realm of professional and investigative journalism.

1.3. Educational barriers:

Due to underdevelopment of free papers in Iran and domination of totalitarian regimes on newspapers during long rules of Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties, attention to specialized journalistic training was paid with a lot of delay compared to other countries.

Experiences in education of journalism and other branches of communication sciences in Iran can be divided into five stages:

1. Journalism classes at Intellectual Training Organization in 1940;
2. Beginning of free journalism classes at Tehran University in 1956;
3. Establishment of Faculty of Social Communications Sciences in 1967 to 1980;
4. Establishment of supplementary master's degree (1990) and doctorate (1996) courses on journalism;
5. Reopening of the independent Faculty of Communication Sciences in three fields of journalism, public relations and communication studies, as well as information technology (2004). (*Motamednejad, 2005: 20 & 21*)

Despite all the efforts made during the past years to promote journalism in Iran, results of a research on journalism education system of Iran have shown that journalists studying at Iranian schools of journalism lack necessary practical skills to continue as professional journalists. Most Iranian journalists, even those who have studied journalism at higher education institutes, are not familiar with investigative journalism despite the fact that this form of journalism started in the world some 100 years ago and many specialized events in different countries are dedicated to it every year. It seems that one of the most important obstacles to development of investigative journalism in Iran is weakness of journalism education techniques in the country.

On the other hand, shortage of educated manpower has forced seasoned journalists to work for a number of publications at the same time and this has reduced quality of their professional activities. A more detailed analysis of this problem will reveal the following cases:

- Increased number of inexperienced and experiential journalists in the Iranian press;
- Not employing journalism graduates by Iranian newspapers;
- Lack of motivation among newspaper managers to avail of specialized manpower;
- Absence of effective contact and interaction between educational centers and press institutes;
- Shortage of experienced manpower as compared to number of print media;
- Reluctance of the elite to cooperate with the press;
- Unfamiliarity of journalists with developments communication and the press;
- Discontinuation of educational system which prevailed in the press due to shortage of experienced and skillful manpower (*Jaafari, 2006: p. 72*).

In the next part of this paper, we will present results of a research conducted on Iranian journalists, which show that most Iranian journalists know nothing about investigative journalism and cannot even present a simple definition of this form of journalism or bring world-famous examples such as the Watergate scandal.

2. Methodology

Here, findings of the present research, which has used the survey method to assess familiarity of Iranian journalists with investigative journalism and their viewpoints about the most important problems preventing this form of journalism in Iran, will be offered.

During the research a questionnaire comprising 10 questions has been handed out among 263 active journalists working with 9 widely circulating morning newspapers¹ of Iran. This questionnaire has been filled in through face-to-face interviews or phone contacts in three phases. During the first phase, journalists answered the first six questions which focused on general information. All respondents, regardless of their knowledge of investigative journalism, were able to answer the questions. If their answer to the sixth question was positive (that is, if they were familiar with investigative journalism) they were asked to answer the remaining questions until the ninth one. After the ninth question, the surveyors first presented a complete explanation about investigative journalism and some of its most important examples, and also expounded the covert and overt aspects of investigative journalism, especially its possible risks. Then they asked the journalists in case they were trained as an investigative journalist and got more acquainted with the investigative journalism methods whether they were still willing to work as an investigative journalist and write an investigative report despite knowing about such risks or they wouldn't be ready to accept the risks in view of backwardness of journalism in Iran as well as the restricting conditions.

The answers were collected through written questionnaires and phone interviews and were then fed into SPSS software. What has been presented in the findings section of this paper is a summary of the most important findings of the research.

¹ Hamshahri, Tehran Emrouz, , Jam-e Jam, Iran, E'temad, E'temad Melli, Resalat, Kargozaran, and Ettelaat

Questionnaire

1. Gender: Female male
2. Age: 20-25 26-35 36-45 above 45
3. Background of journalistic activities:
Less than 5 years 5-10 years 11-20 years above 20 years
4. Do you work with a reformist newspaper or with a principlist one?
5. What has been the most important field of your journalistic work?
social political economic cultural all of them
6. Are you acquainted with methods and principles of investigative journalism?
Yes No
-Can you name at least four main characteristics of this kind of journalism in case your answer is Yes?
7. Have you ever worked on a subject as an investigative journalist?
Yes No
8. If you were interested in following a subject through an investigative report, which one of the following factors would have obstructed your activities or dissuaded you?
Economic problems and limitations on payment to investigative journalists
Lack of job security, restricted freedom of speech and free access to information
Guild-related issues and lack of needed training on investigative journalism
Absence of laws supporting investigative journalists
9. In view of the aforesaid conditions, if you were more informed about investigative journalism and were taught the needed techniques, would you be ready to work as an investigative journalist and write an investigative report or do you think that due to backwardness of journalism in Iran and the existing constraints, you would not be ready to take the risks?

3. Research queries

➤ The research aimed at answering the following questions:

1. *To what extent are Iranian journalists informed about investigative journalism?*
 - I. *Is there a meaningful relationship between gender and an Iranian journalist's information about and experience in this field of journalism?*
 - II. *Is there a meaningful relationship between age and familiarity of Iranian journalists with investigative journalism, possible experiences in the field or similar fields, and willingness of journalists to experience investigative journalism methods?*
2. *What are the most important impediments to investigative journalism in Iran from the viewpoint of journalists?*
3. *Is there any meaningful difference between familiarity of experimental journalists and those holding academic degrees with investigative journalism?*
4. *Is there any meaningful difference between inclination toward either of two dominant political currents in Iranian journalism (reformist and principlist) and familiarity of Iranian journalists with investigative journalism and their possible experiences with this field or similar fields of journalism?*
5. *What percentage of Iranian journalists are ready to work as an investigative journalist and follow a subject if they received suitable training despite possible threats entailed and many difficulties?*

- I.** *Is there a meaningful relationship between gender of journalists and their risk acceptability as part of practical experience of investigative journalism?*
- II.** *Is there a meaningful relationship between age of journalists and their risk acceptability as part of practical experience of investigative journalism?*
- III.** *Do journalistic education and academic studies influence the risk acceptability of journalists as part of practical experience of investigative journalism in Iran?*
- IV.** *Is there a meaningful relationship between political leanings of journalists and their risk acceptability for practical experience of investigative journalism in Iran?*

3. Research findings

➤ **Part one: General Description of Findings**

3.1.1. Respondents' Gender

Table: 3-1-1

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|---------------|--------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| gender | man | 154 | 57.9 | 58.6 |
| | woman | 109 | 41.0 | 41.4 |
| | Total | 263 | 98.9 | 100.0 |
| Missing | System | 3 | 1.1 | |
| Total | | 266 | 100.0 | |

In this research, 266 questionnaires were handed out among journalists and viewpoints of 263 journalists active in Iranian newspapers with regard to investigative journalism were studied. Out of the cohort, 154 journalists, that is, 58 percent, were male and 109 journalists, that is, 41 percent, were female.(Table: 3-1-1)

3.1.2. Respondents' Age

Table: 3-1-2

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|---------|---------------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| Age | 26-35 years | 100 | 37.6 | 38.0 |
| | 36-45 years | 67 | 25.2 | 25.5 |
| | 20-25 years | 54 | 20.3 | 20.5 |
| | older than 45 | 42 | 15.8 | 16.0 |
| | Total | 263 | 98.9 | 100.0 |
| Missing | System | 3 | 1.1 | |
| Total | | 266 | 100.0 | |

In this research, age has been taken as a factor affecting willingness of journalists to work as investigative journalists. The respondents were divided into four age groups: 20-25 years (38 percent), 25-35 years (25 percent), 35-45 years (20 percent), and above 45 years (16 percent).(Table: 3-1-2)

3.1.3. Job background of Respondents

Table: 3-1-3

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|----------------|--------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| Job background | 5-10 years | 103 | 38.7 | 39.2 |
| | less than 5 years | 84 | 31.6 | 31.9 |
| | 11-20 years | 75 | 28.2 | 28.5 |
| | more than 20 years | 1 | .4 | .4 |
| | Total | 263 | 98.9 | 100.0 |
| Missing | System | 3 | 1.1 | |
| Total | | 266 | 100.0 | |

In this research, track records of respondents has been considered as a factor affecting their willingness to work as investigative journalists and their familiarity with and their possible experiences in this form of journalism. The track records of the respondents have been divided into four categories: 1. Less than five years of working background (39 percent), 5-10 years of working background (32 percent), 11-20 years of working background (28 percent), and more than 20 years of working background (0.4 percent).(Table: 3-1-3)

3.1.4. News Beats

Table: 3-1-4

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|------------|---------------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| News Beats | social | 87 | 32.7 | 33.1 |
| | political | 80 | 30.1 | 30.4 |
| | cultural | 62 | 23.3 | 23.6 |
| | economic | 31 | 11.7 | 11.8 |
| | various beats | 3 | 1.1 | 1.1 |
| | Total | 263 | 98.9 | 100.0 |
| Missing | System | 3 | 1.1 | |
| Total | | 266 | 100.0 | |

In this research, news beats in which journalists are active- taken up as a major determinant of their risk acceptability to enter the field of investigative journalism- and also their interpretation of obstacles of development of this form of journalism in Iran have been studied. (Table: 3-1-4)

3.1.5. Respondents' Education

Table: 3-1-5

| Respondents' education | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|---------|---------------|
| | | experiential | 169 | 63.5 |
| | relevant to journalism & media field | 94 | 35.3 | 35.7 |
| | Total | 263 | 98.9 | 100.0 |
| Missing | System | 3 | 1.1 | |
| Total | | 266 | 100.0 | |

In this research, educational backdrop of the respondents has been taken as a factor influencing their willingness to enter the field of investigative journalism. Also, their familiarity with and possible experiences in this field of journalism as well as factors affecting development of this form of journalism in Iran have been studied. Journalists have been divided into two main groups: 1) journalists who have started their experiential careers in editorial departments of newspapers and their original education has nothing to do with journalism (64 percent of respondents), and 2) journalists whose education is related to their field of activity or their media records (35 percent of respondents) (Table: 3-1-5).

3.1.6. Familiarity with Investigative Journalism

Table: 3-1-6

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|--------------------------------|--------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| Recognition of true journalism | no | 153 | 57.5 | 58.2 |
| | yes | 72 | 27.1 | 27.4 |
| | some | 38 | 14.3 | 14.4 |
| | Total | 263 | 98.9 | 100.0 |
| Missing | System | 3 | 1.1 | |
| Total | | 266 | 100.0 | |

One of the most important questions in this study was related to familiarity of Iranian journalists with investigative journalism; that is, to what extent they are informed about this field of journalism. Research results show that out of 263 journalists studied, 158 journalists (59 percent) had no information about investigative journalism and did not even know anything about one of the most world-famous examples of investigative reporting, that is, the Watergate scandal. Some 63 journalists, that is, 24 percent, were familiar with investigative journalism and 42 of them (16 percent) announced that they had relative knowledge of investigative journalism. (Table: 3-1-6)

3.1.7. Practical Experience with Investigative Journalism

Table: 3-1-7

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|--|--------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| Practical Experience with Investigative Journalism | yes | 43 | 16.2 | 16.3 |
| | no | 220 | 82.7 | 83.7 |
| | Total | 263 | 98.9 | 100.0 |
| Missing | System | 3 | 1.1 | |
| Total | | 266 | 100.0 | |

Research results show that 220 journalists, that is, 83 percent of them, had no practical experience with investigative journalism or similar fields. Some 43 persons, that is, 16 percent, announced that they have had experiences similar to investigative journalism during their careers or they had prepared a report according to the method used in investigative journalism. (Table: 3-1-7)

3.1.8. Willingness for Working as Investigative Journalists

Table: 3-1-8

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---------|--------|-----------|---------|
| Valid | yes | 137 | 51.5 |
| | no | 126 | 47.4 |
| | Total | 263 | 98.9 |
| Missing | System | 3 | 1.1 |
| Total | | 266 | 100.0 |

Journalists who had taken part in the research, answered questions posed to them in an interview in the second part of the study. First, they were asked whether they were willing to work as investigative journalists on a subject, which is usually dangerous and risky (like mafia of drug smuggling to Iran) and present an investigative report on it despite restrictions and difficulties that face investigative journalists and which intensify in countries like Iran due to a press system which is not developed. According to research results, 137 respondent journalists (52 percent) answered positively to the question and said in case they learn the principles of this form of journalism they were ready to brave following up an important news subject which has aroused sensitivity of public opinion. At the same time, 126 persons (47 percent) answered negatively and noted that embarking on investigative journalism would entail high risks and they were not ready to risk their lives in order to follow up a subject, even if it were important to the society.(Table: 3-1-8)

3.1.9. Political leanings

Table: 3-1-9

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|--|--------------|-----------|---------|
| Journalist & Political leanings | Reformist | 128 | 48.1 |
| | Principalist | 121 | 45.5 |
| | Both | 14 | 5.3 |
| | Total | 263 | 98.9 |
| Missing | System | 3 | 1.1 |
| Total | | 266 | 100.0 |

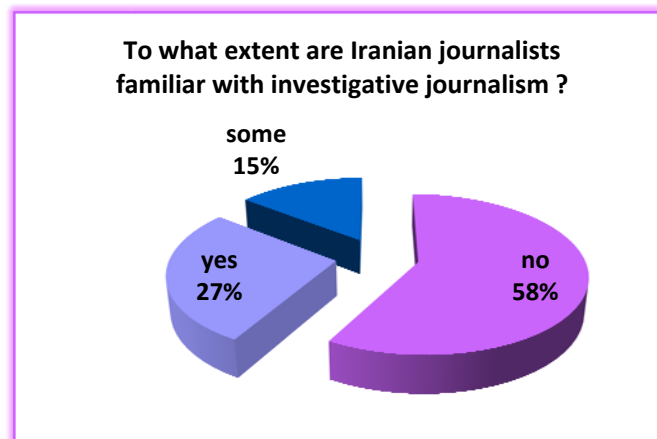
In this research, the political tendencies of respondents have been studied as one of the factors affecting their readiness to work as investigative journalists, their familiarity and possible experiences with this form of journalism and factors affecting development of this kind of journalism in Iran. Some 128 respondents, that is, 48.1 percent, were reformist journalists while 121 persons, that is, 46 percent, were principalist journalists.(Table: 3-1-9)

➤ Part Two: Answer to Research Queries

3.2.1. To what extent are Iranian journalists familiar with investigative journalism?

Table: 3-2-1

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|--|--------|-----------|---------|
| familiar with investigative journalism | No | 153 | 57.5 |
| | Yes | 72 | 27.1 |
| | Some | 38 | 14.3 |
| | Total | 263 | 98.9 |
| Missing | System | 3 | 1.1 |
| Total | | 266 | 100.0 |



Research results show that 58 percent of journalists taking part in the research were not informed about this form of journalism while 27 percent were informed about it and 15 percent announced that they were relatively informed about it. (Table: 3-2-1)

I. Is there a meaningful relationship between gender or familiarity of Iranian journalists with investigative journalism and possible experiences of journalists with this form of journalism?

Table: (I.1)

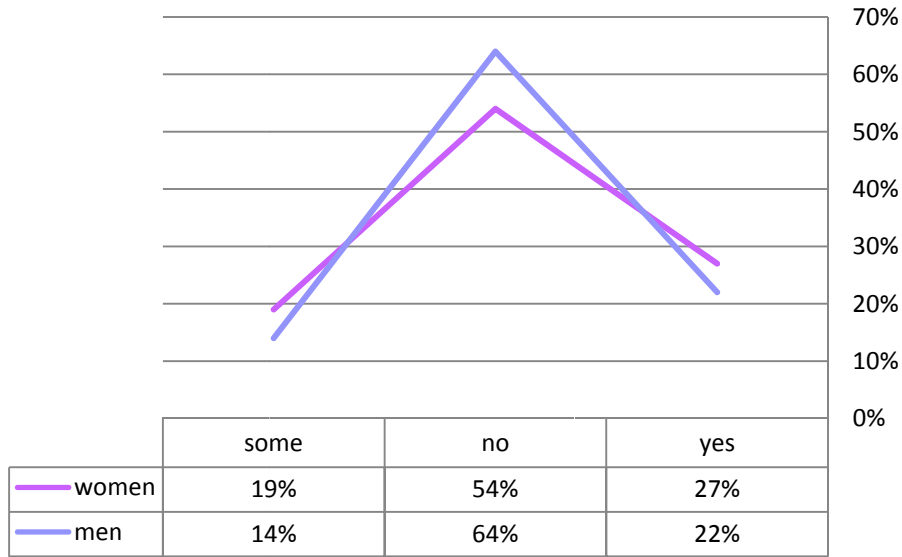
| familiar with investigative journalism | | | |
|--|--------|-----|-----|
| | | yes | no |
| Gender | Male | 34 | 99 |
| | Female | 29 | 59 |
| | Total | 63 | 158 |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|--------------------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 2.909 ^a | 2 | 0.234 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 2.897 | 2 | 0.235 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .020 | 1 | 0.888 |
| N of Valid Cases | 263 | | |

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 17.41.

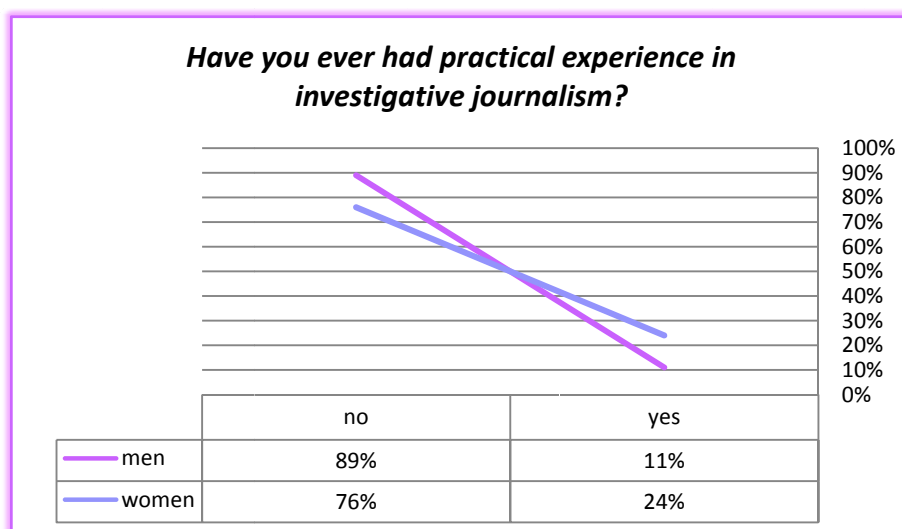
Familiarity of female and male Iranian journalists with investigative journalism



Research findings show that in view of chi-square, which has been calculated at 0.234 and a degree of freedom of 2, there is no meaningful relationship between familiarity of Iranian journalists with investigative journalism and their gender. Research results show that 27 percent of female journalists studied were familiar with investigative journalism, 54 percent knew nothing about it, and 19 percent had relative information about its methods and principles. Research findings show that 22 percent of male journalists studied were familiar with investigative journalism, 64 percent knew nothing about it, and 14 percent announced that they had relative knowledge of its methods and principles: (Table: 1.1)

Table: (I.2)

| | | Practical experience with investigative journalism | | |
|--------|--------|--|-----|-------|
| | | yes | no | Total |
| Gender | Male | 17 | 137 | 154 |
| | Female | 26 | 83 | 109 |
| | Total | 43 | 220 | 263 |



Research findings show that 89 percent of men have had no practical experience with investigative journalism or similar activities while 11 percent of them had practical experiences in the field. At the same time, findings show that 76 percent of female journalists have had no experience with investigative journalism or relative activities while 24 percent have had experiences with it or written investigative reports. The findings show that women’s experience with investigative journalism was more than twice the men. (Table: I.2)

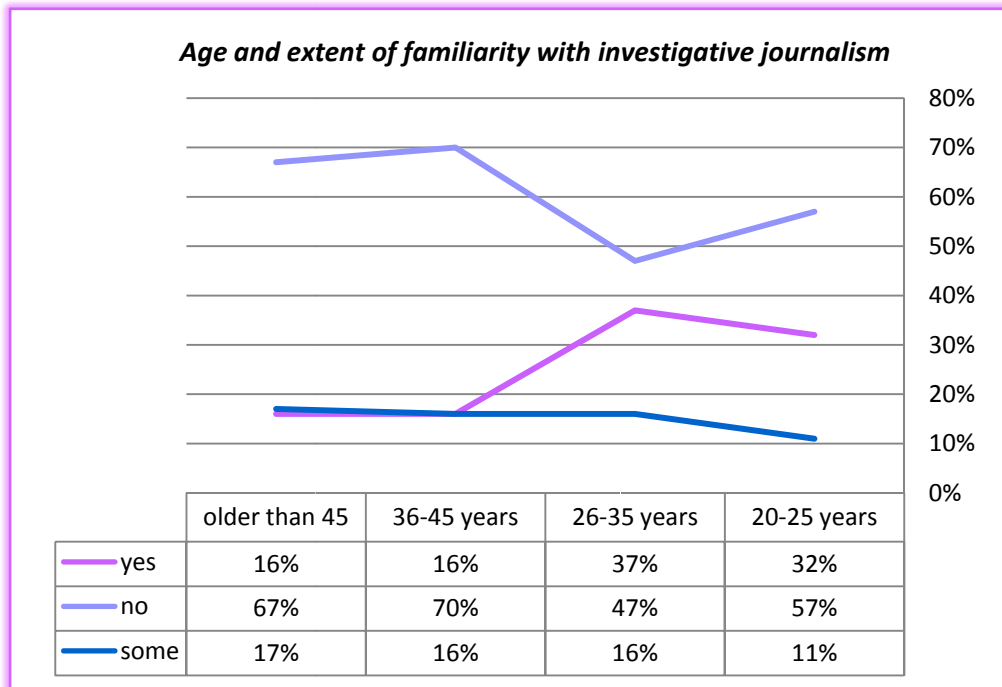
II. Is there a meaningful relationship between age and familiarity with investigative journalism, possible experiences with this field of journalism, and willingness of Iranian journalists to experience investigative journalism?

Table: (II.1)

| | | Familiarity with investigative journalism | | | |
|-----|--------------------|---|-----|------|-------|
| | | yes | no | some | Total |
| Age | 20-25 years | 17 | 31 | 6 | 54 |
| | 26-35 years | 37 | 47 | 16 | 100 |
| | 36-45 years | 11 | 47 | 9 | 67 |
| | Over than 45 years | 7 | 28 | 7 | 42 |
| | Total | 72 | 153 | 38 | 263 |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 13.512 ^a | 6 | 0.036 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 13.994 | 6 | 0.030 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 4.546 | 1 | 0.033 |
| N of Valid Cases | 263 | | |



Research findings show that in view of chi-square, which was 0.03, and a degree of freedom of 6, there is a meaningful relationship between age and familiarity of Iranian journalists with investigative journalism with surety of 95 percent and error possibility of 5 percent. Also, research findings show that journalists ageing 20-25 and 26-30 are more familiar with investigative journalism than their colleagues ageing over 30 years old. If journalists ageing 20-25 were considered as students of journalism and amateur journalists who would become professional ones in the near future, then it should be assumed that the new generation of Iranian journalists which have entered the field after 1990s, would be more familiar with investigative journalism.(Table: II.1)

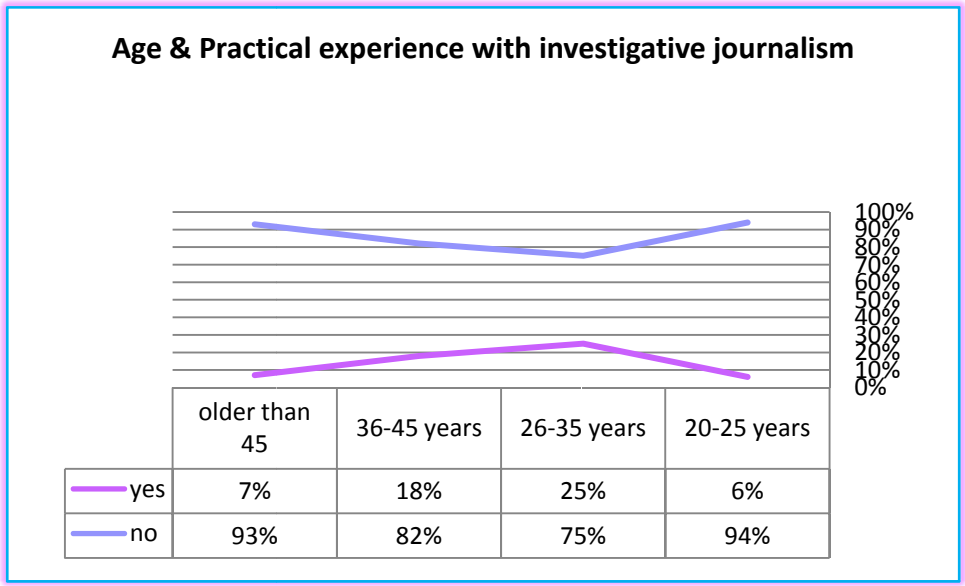
Table: (II.2)

| | | Practical experience with investigative journalism | | |
|-----|--------------------|--|-----|-------|
| | | yes | no | Total |
| Age | 20-25 years | 3 | 51 | 54 |
| | 26-35 years | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| | 36-45 years | 12 | 55 | 67 |
| | over than 45 years | 3 | 39 | 42 |
| | Total | 43 | 220 | 263 |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 12.794 ^a | 3 | 0.005 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 14.055 | 3 | 0.003 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .021 | 1 | 0.884 |
| N of Valid Cases | 263 | | |

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.87.

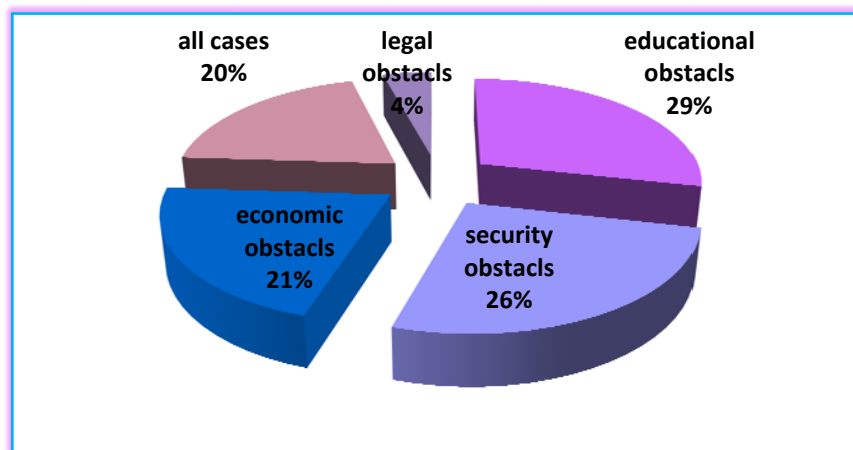


The research results indicate that in view of a chi-square calculated at 0.005 and a degree of freedom of 3, there is a meaningful relationship between age and practical experience with investigative journalism with a surety of 99 percent and an error index of 1 percent. Most respondents who have announced that they had practical experiences with investigative journalism aged 25-36 (25 percent) followed by those ageing 36-45 (18 percent). Only 7 percent of journalists over 45 years had practical experiences with journalism or related activities. .(Table: II.2)

3.2.2. What are the most important obstacles to development of investigative journalism in Iran from the viewpoint of Iranian journalists?

Table: 3-2-2

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------|-----------------------|-----------|---------|
| obstacles | Educational obstacles | 75 | 28.2 |
| | Security obstacles | 69 | 25.9 |
| | Economic obstacles | 56 | 21.1 |
| | All cases | 52 | 19.5 |
| | Legal obstacles | 11 | 4.1 |
| | Total | 263 | 98.9 |
| Missing | System | 3 | 1.1 |
| Total | | 266 | 100.0 |



Research findings show that in answer to the question about the most important obstacles to development of investigative journalism in Iran, the respondents have enumerated the following factors as the most important: weakness of professional rights and absence of educational programs (28 percent), restricted freedom of expression and limited access to information as well as limited political freedoms (26 percent), economic issues and low pay to investigative

journalists (21 percent), all the above factors (20 percent), and absence of laws supporting investigative journalists in Iran (4 percent).

3.2.3. What are the most important obstacles to development of investigative journalism in Iran from the viewpoint of women and men Iranian journalists?

Table: 3-2-3

| | | Gender | | |
|--|-----------------------|--------|--------|-------|
| | | Male | Female | Total |
| obstacles to development of investigative journalism | Economic Obstacles | 36 | 20 | 56 |
| | Security Obstacles | 39 | 30 | 69 |
| | Legal Obstacles | 8 | 3 | 11 |
| | Educational Obstacles | 32 | 43 | 75 |
| | All cases | 39 | 13 | 52 |
| | Total | 154 | 109 | 263 |

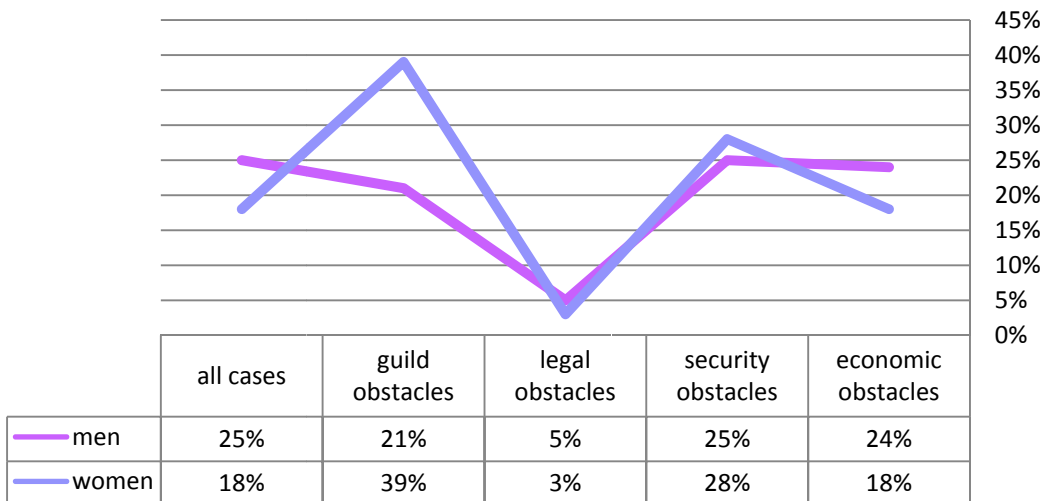
Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 15.382 ^a | 4 | 0.004 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 15.657 | 4 | 0.004 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .000 | 1 | 0.988 |
| N of Valid Cases | 263 | | |

a. 1 cells (10.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.56.

b.

Gender & obstacles to development of investigative journalism



The research results indicate that in view of a chi-square calculated at 0.04 and a degree of freedom of 4, there is a meaningful relationship between viewpoints of male and female journalists and obstacles on the way of developing investigative journalism in Iran with a significance level of 95 percent and an error possibility of 5 percent. While women considered lack of guild-related rights and necessary education for writing investigative reports as the main obstacle to investigative journalism in Iran (39 percent) followed by restricted freedom of expression, access to information and limited political freedoms, men maintained that limited freedom of expression and access to information as well as restricted political freedoms were major obstacles to development of investigative journalism in Iran followed by economic problems (24 percent)). (Table: 3-2-3)

3.2.4. Is there a meaningful relationship between familiarity of experimental journalists and those with academic studies and investigative journalism?

Table: 3-2-4

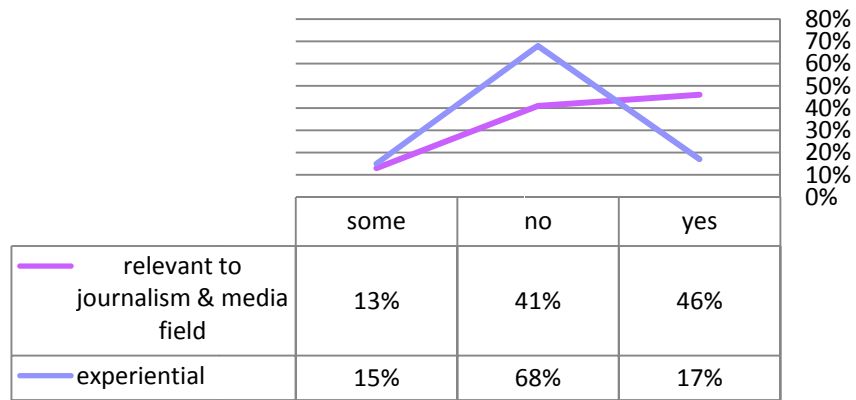
| | | Familiarity of experimental journalists | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|---|-----|------|-------|
| | | yes | no | some | Total |
| Education | relevant to journalism & media field | 43 | 39 | 12 | 94 |
| | experiential | 29 | 114 | 26 | 169 |
| | Total | 72 | 153 | 38 | 263 |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 25.316 ^a | 2 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 24.734 | 2 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 14.591 | 1 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 263 | | |

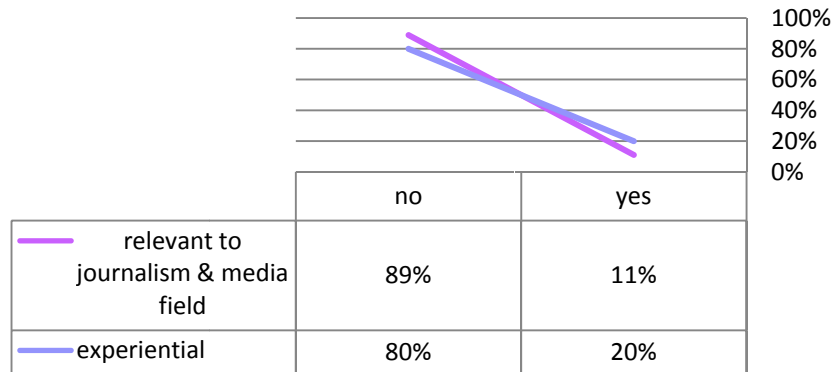
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13.58.

Familiarity of experimental journalists & Education



The research results indicate that in view of a chi-square calculated at 0.0 and a degree of freedom of 2, there is a meaningful relationship between familiarity of experimental journalists and those with academic studies and investigative journalism with a surety of 99 percent and an error index of 1 percent. The research findings also show that 46 percent of journalists who have academic studies in journalism are familiar with investigative journalism while only 17 percent of experimental journalists or those who have studied in unrelated courses are familiar with this form of journalism.

writing investigative report



The results also show that experimental journalists or those who have studied in unrelated courses have had more experiences with writing investigative or similar reports compared to journalists who have studied journalism.

3.2.5. Is there a meaningful relationship between two dominant political leanings of Iranian journalists (reformist and principlist) and familiarity of Iranian journalists with investigative journalism or possible experiences in this field or similar activities?

Table: 3-2-5

| | | Familiarity of experimental journalists | | | |
|--|-------------|---|-----|------|-------|
| | | yes | no | some | Total |
| dominant political tendencies of Iranian | Reformist | 41 | 73 | 14 | 128 |
| | principlist | 28 | 70 | 23 | 121 |
| | Neither | 3 | 10 | 1 | 14 |
| | Total | 72 | 153 | 38 | 263 |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|--------------------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 5.791 ^a | 4 | 0.215 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 5.830 | 4 | 0.212 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 2.822 | 1 | 0.093 |
| N of Valid Cases | 263 | | |

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.02.

The research results indicate that in view of a chi-square calculated at 0.215, there is no meaningful relationship between dominant political leanings of Iranian journalists and their familiarity with investigative journalism.

Table: 3-2-5-1

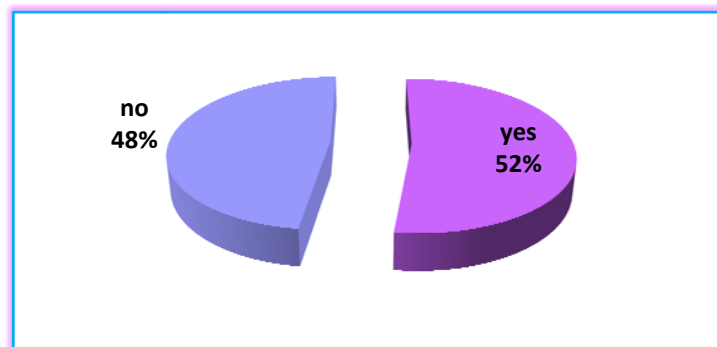
| | | do | | |
|--|-------------|-----|-----|-------|
| | | yes | no | Total |
| dominant political tendencies of Iranian journalists | Reformist | 24 | 104 | 128 |
| | Principlist | 15 | 106 | 121 |
| | Neither | 4 | 10 | 14 |
| | Total | 43 | 220 | 263 |

The research results also prove that in view of a chi-square calculated at 0.178, there is no meaningful relationship between dominant political leanings of Iranian journalists and their practical experiences with this field of journalism.

3.2.6. What percentage of Iranian journalists are ready to work as investigative journalists and follow a subject if they received suitable training despite possible threats and many difficulties entailed?

Table: 3-2-6

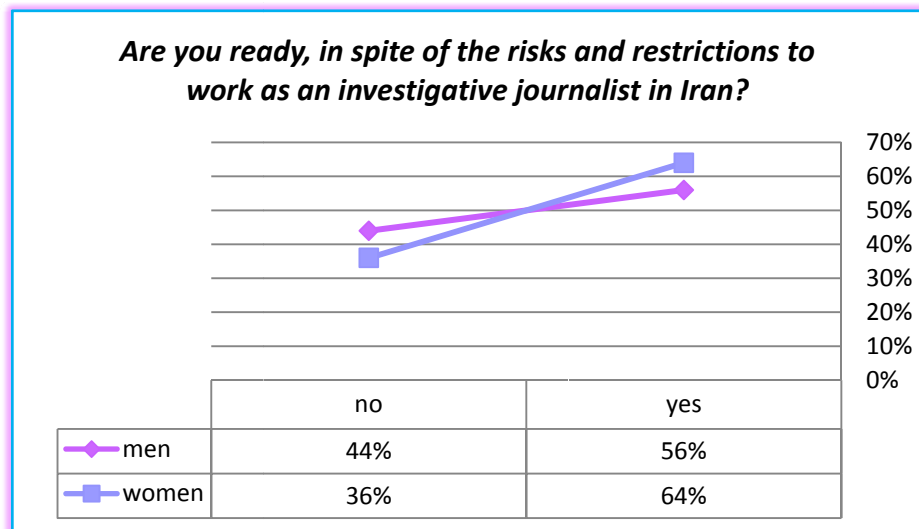
| willingness to experience investigative journalism | | | |
|--|--------|-----------|---------|
| journalism | | | |
| Answers | | Frequency | Percent |
| | yes | 137 | 51.5 |
| | no | 126 | 47.4 |
| | Total | 263 | 98.9 |
| Missing | System | 3 | 1.1 |
| Total | | 266 | 100.0 |



Research results show that 137 respondents, that is 52 percent, were ready to learn principles of investigative journalism and follow up a subject of importance to public opinion and accept the risks it entails. At the same time, 126 respondents, that is 47 percent, answered negatively and noted that investigative journalism requires high risk acceptability and they were not ready to follow a subject regardless of its importance to the public opinion. They maintained that such activities were not worth the risks in Iran. (Table: 3-2-6)

Table: 3-2-6-1

| | | willingness to experience investigative journalism | | |
|--------|--------|--|-----|-------|
| | | yes | no | Total |
| Gender | Male | 67 | 87 | 154 |
| | Female | 70 | 39 | 109 |
| | Total | 137 | 126 | 263 |



After answering all the questions and when they were introduced to principles, conditions, and possible risks of investigative journalism, journalists studied in this research were asked: Are you ready, in spite of the risks and restrictions to work as an investigative journalist in Iran? Research results show that there is a meaningful relationship between gender and willingness toward practical work in investigative journalism in Iran. Some 56 percent of men announced that due to threats that entail disclosure of information in investigative journalism, they are not willing to pursue this profession and 44 percent were ready to do that. At the same time, only 36 percent of women announced that they were not willing to work as investigative journalists due to subsequent risks and 64 percent announced that if there were an attractive subject for investigative reporting, they would be willing to work on it despite all the constraints and threats.

Table: 3-2-6-2

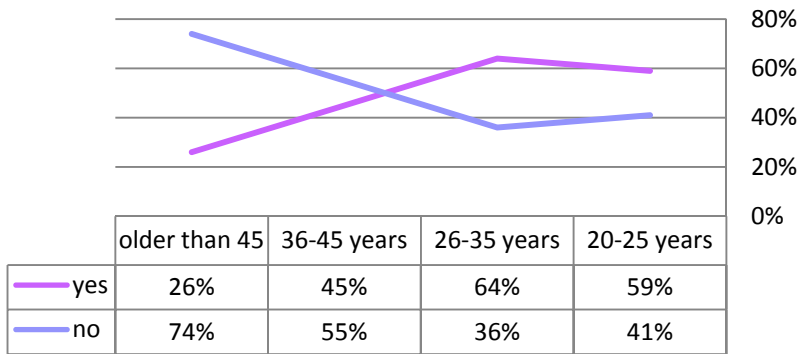
| willingness to experience investigative journalism | | | | |
|--|--------------|-----|-----|-------|
| | | yes | no | Total |
| Age | 20-25 years | 32 | 22 | 54 |
| | 26-35 years | 64 | 36 | 100 |
| | 36-45 years | 30 | 37 | 67 |
| | Over than 45 | 11 | 31 | 42 |
| | Total | 137 | 126 | 263 |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 19.521 ^a | 3 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 20.002 | 3 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 14.692 | 1 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 263 | | |

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 20.12.

Age & willingness to experience investigative journalism

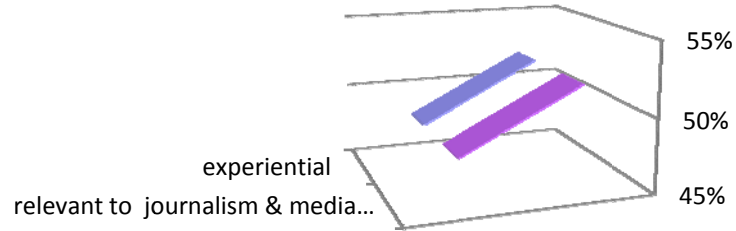


Research results indicate that in view of a chi-square calculated at 0.0 and a degree of freedom of 3, there is a meaningful relationship between age and willingness of Iranian journalists to experience investigative journalism with significance level of 99 percent and an error possibility of 1 percent. Most respondents who had announced that they were ready to embark on investigative journalism despite all the risks and circumstances, were aged 25-36 (64 percent) followed by those aged 20-25 (59 percent). It seems that there is a reverse relationship between willingness of journalists to file investigative reports and work as investigative journalists, on the one side, and increase in age, on the other side.(Table: 3-2-6-2)

Table: 3-2-6-3

| | | willingness to experience investigative journalism | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|--|--------|-------|
| | | (1)yes | (2) no | Total |
| Education | relevant to journalism & media field | 49 | 45 | 94 |
| | experiential | 88 | 81 | 169 |
| | Total | 137 | 126 | 263 |

ready to work as an investigative journalist



| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| | 2 | 1 |
| ■ relevant to journalism & media field | 48% | 52% |
| ■ experiential | 48% | 52% |

Research results show that there is no meaningful relationship in terms of willingness to write investigative reports between experimental journalists with an educational background unrelated to journalism and those journalists who have studied journalism at the university. (Table: 3-2-6-3)

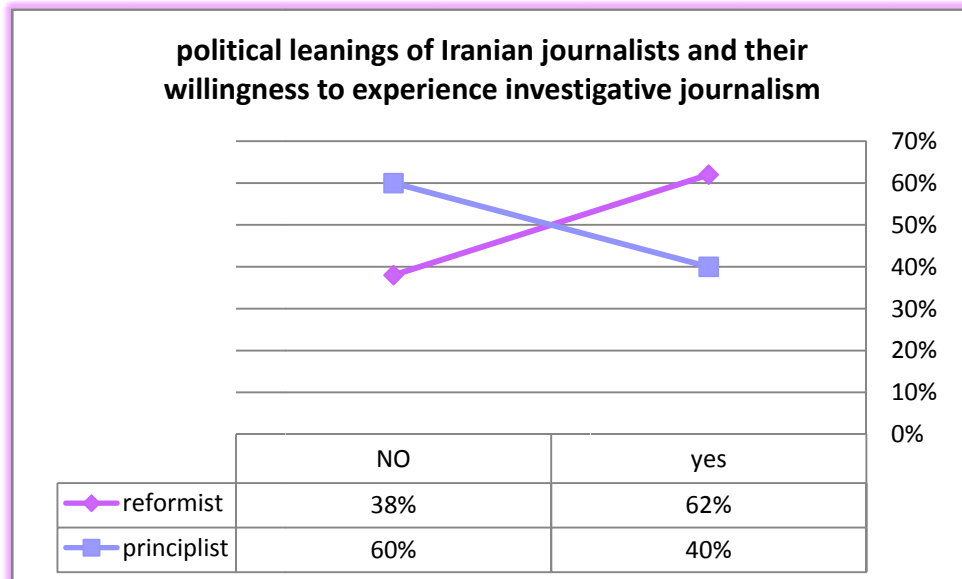
Table: 3-2-6-4

| | | willingness to experience investigative journalism | | |
|--------------------|--------------|---|------------|------------|
| | | yes | no | Total |
| political leanings | Reformist | 79 | 49 | 128 |
| | Principalist | 49 | 72 | 121 |
| | Neither | 9 | 5 | 14 |
| | Total | 137 | 126 | 263 |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 12.107 ^a | 2 | 0.002 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 12.194 | 2 | 0.002 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 4.859 | 1 | 0.028 |
| N of Valid Cases | 263 | | |

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.71.



The research results also indicate that in view of a chi-square calculated at 0.002 and a degree of freedom of 2, there is a meaningful relationship between political leanings of Iranian journalists, political tendencies of newspapers where they work, and their willingness to experience investigative journalism with a significance level of 99 percent and an error possibility of 1 percent. In view of the research results, 62 percent of reformist journalists who were asked whether they were willing to work on a subject as investigative journalists in spite of all the risks and restrictions that may be involved answered positively while 38 percent answered in the negative. At the same time, 40 percent of principlist journalists who were asked the same question gave positive and 60 percent negative responses. (Table: 3-2-6-4)

Conclusion

■ In studying the obstacles in the way of investigative journalism in Iran, irrespective of the factors considered in this research (political, economic, educational and legal), one should pay attention to the record of journalistic activities in the country and the 215 year time span between the launch of the first newspaper in the world and publication of the first newspaper in Iran. Under circumstances that journalism in the West had left two centuries of experience behind, the first newspapers in Iran were printed as a model imported from the West. From the time span of more than 150 years since the first Iranian newspaper was launched so far only 41.9 percent of this time the press was run under the monopoly or influence of the state. In the history of the Iranian press, the state monopoly of the press has always been an important issue affecting the process of development of investigative journalism and training of professional journalists. Under conditions that investigative journalists are supported by press institutes independent from governments in many countries of the world, it would be just illogical to expect Iranian journalists with one century of experience in the field a major portion of which has been monopolized by the state-run press, to play the role of investigative journalists like other journalists in Western media with some of them having an experience of more than three centuries. In fact, the time difference of 215 years between the first newspapers launched in the world and those printed in Iran has prevented the latter from having a chance to experience the various journalistic methods, including investigative journalism.

■ Although the findings of this research show that majority of Iranian journalists have no familiarity with the method of investigative journalism and its prominent examples such as the Washington Post reports on the Watergate, but in the course of filling questionnaires and conducting face-to-face interviews with many Iranian journalists, I realized that during their professional activities they had unknowingly written reports which contained all the elements of an investigative report. But the fact is that the experience of such journalists with investigative journalism has been coincidental and not recurrent. Nevertheless, the educated journalists or in other words, the young generation of Iranian journalists are more familiar with investigative journalism theoretically. The findings of this research show that the practical experience of investigative journalism with the journalists who have started journalism experientially and studied unrelated fields is more than journalists who have joined the press with related education though many of the former did not know that their method of journalism conformed to investigative journalism in special cases.

■ The findings of this research show that the new generation of journalists who have entered the field in the recent decade in Iran and have a work experience of 5 to 10 years, are familiar with the methods and principles of investigative journalism theoretically though many of them may not have had the practical experience of investigative journalism. The inspiring point in the findings of this research is that there is a reverse ratio between the age and desire of Iranian journalists to experience investigative journalism. That is to say that most of those voicing readiness to write investigative reports in Iran despite all the problems and possible restraints are in the age group of 25-36 followed by the age group 20-25. This can be

related to the presence of a growing number of those studying journalism in the editorial rooms of Iranian newspapers

■ The findings of this research show that the risk acceptability and desire of Iranian female journalists for practical experience of journalism is more than men. They also show that there is a meaningful difference between gender and the desire for practical action in investigative journalism in Iran. In other words, 56 percent of men have said they would not follow investigative journalism due to the threats disclosure of information may pose compared to 36 percent of women. Also, 64 percent of women have said they would write about an attractive investigative subject despite all the threats involved. Although some critics may say the desire in Iranian female journalists to experience investigative journalism may originate from their adventure-seeking nature yet other findings in this research show that 24 percent of the female journalists in this study have practically experienced investigative journalism or similar cases. This is while, only 11 percent of Iranian male journalists in this study have written investigative reports during their professional career in the press. Based on these findings, it can be said that female journalists in Iran could be pioneers in developing investigative journalism or at least start off a movement towards formation of this method of journalism.

■ Although based on initial impressions it seems that persistence of state dependent journalism and special political conditions are the most important hurdles preventing formation of system of journalism and subsequently investigative journalism in Iran yet the journalists questioned have said political restraints are the second most important impediment in the way of investigative journalism. In their opinion, educational and guild-related problems have more than political issues discouraged them from writing investigative reports. According to the journalists questioned in this research the most important hurdles in the way of investigative journalism in Iran are: 1. Educational and guild-related problems; 2. Political and security issues; 3. Economic problems and the low income of journalists; 4. A combination of all the said factors; 5. Legal problems in protecting investigative journalists. However, the views expressed by women concerning the obstacles in the way of investigative journalism were different from those held by men. For women the main problems stem from a weak educational system while men believe restrictions in free access to information as well as political conditions are the main factors preventing investigative journalism from developing in Iran. In view of the fact that a larger number of the journalists believe the weakness of educational institutions and programs is the main obstacle in the way of investigative journalism in the country, it seems that improving the educational programs in Iranian journalism universities to train investigative journalists and providing appropriate opportunities to experience this method of journalism would have positive short and long term impacts.

■ The findings of this research show that there is no meaningful difference between the degree of familiarity with investigative journalism of the journalists working with 'reformist' and 'principlist' newspapers. Also, unlike what may seem from first impressions, journalists in principlist press face the same obstacles (such as red lines, financial restraints in paying for travel expenses, etc.) as journalists working at reformist press do. The findings show that there is no meaningful difference between the practical experience of reformist journalists and principlist journalists in investigative journalism. However, the journalist working in reformist newspapers compared to those working at principlist press are more prepared to take the risk of experiencing investigative journalism.

■ The Iranian journalism system requires more practical and scientific experiences in order to be able to follow up investigative journalism in a wider scope and with higher effectiveness: experiences which could complement each other and enhance the efficiency of Iranian journalism community in going through investigative journalism which is in reality an idealistic method of journalism in Iran. It seems that the new generation of Iranian journalists is by far more prepared than the past to undergo professional training and experience new methods of journalism. Therefore, one could be hopeful that young journalists would bring about eye-catching developments in Iranian journalism in the coming years: May be because on the one hand, many of these young journalists have studied journalism and turned to the profession voluntarily and as their main job not second job (something that has been common in Iran for long years) and therefore have higher incentives in complying with the standards and improving journalism. On the other hand, in recent years some political figures and individuals in Iran have launched newspapers and their interests in power definition in the society require them to provide young journalists with more opportunities and risk acceptability so much so that they have a chance to publish reports today that they could not even print partially in the past. The increase in risk acceptability of the new newspapers will undoubtedly open the way for activity of investigative journalists.

■ Although journalists active in various news fields (political, cultural, social and economic) could engage in investigative journalism after undergoing professional training, however, it seems that in view of the existing sensitivities in releasing political reports in all the world countries, including Iran, the initial action towards developing this method of journalism in Iran should start from social areas (where the Iranian society is faced with numerous questions). Development and promotion of investigative journalism in the social (and economic) domains would provide transparent answers to some questions facing the Iranian society in connection with social harms. Moreover, considering that investigative journalists in this field enjoy more immunity in disclosing the findings of their research and field studies and there is lower possibility for investigative reports with social themes to be banned because of insinuating fear and anxiety in public, the society would gradually be more prepared to take revealing reports (not destructive and undermining but constructive reports to serve public conscience and complying with social responsibility of the journalists). Experience has shown that the public opinion and officials in Iran have been very vulnerable in recent years in facing cases of investigative journalism with social and economic themes (such as technical failure of Peugeot 405 cars causing fires in their engines; or the heinous crimes committed by a mentally sick person called “Beijeh” against small children in Pakdasht district).

■ Under conditions that the main portion of news covered by nationwide newspapers pertain to the issues of metropolises, specially the capital city, development of investigative journalism in Iran and training investigative journalists in a country as large as Iran with various tribes and cultures can provide a good opportunity to identify the political, social, cultural and economic realities of the Iranian society in areas which have been somehow neglected in the past years. Investigative journalists can make a difference in discovering touching events that occur here and there throughout this vast territory. Events and realities related to the rural community and deprived towns and remote areas in Iran have not been documented on numerous occasions and there is even not enough information about them. This is while they are so important that each of them could be a good social, cultural, economic or political subject for filing an investigative report. Reports prepared based on documented data – even though revealing and touching – will not only give a clue to the public opinion about the

realities of life in remote and sometimes forgotten towns and cities but also prompt the authorities to feel responsive and seek remedies to the problems and bottlenecks.

Under conditions that the local media in Iran, particularly newspapers, have a passive and weak performance due to lack of professional training and experienced staff, it is the investigative journalists who by traveling to various regions and collecting documented data can reduce the disturbing information gap to a large extent. By publishing documented and field studies, they can also help improve public understanding and reception about the status quo in these remote areas which is among the most important social responsibilities of journalists.

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