**Irish Society for Women in Economics**

**Survey Results on Barriers & Facilitators to Media Engagement**

November 2022

**Background**

In Ireland, women account for 41% of academic economists and 32% of full professors. This under-representation is also present in digital and print media, where the voice of women economists is largely absent. O’Brien and Suiter (2017) find that only 22% of experts on Irish national radio programmes are women.

In 2022 the Irish Society for Women in Economics (ISWE) received funding from the HEA Gender Equality Enhancement Fund to conduct a project on increasing the voice of women economists in the media through training and promotion. The first step in this process was to conduct a survey among Irish economists to elicit the barriers to media participation and potential solutions to increasing the voice and visibility of women economists. The information provided will be used to design tailored media training for women economists in Ireland.

**Survey**

The survey fieldwork period was from the 30th of September to the 21st of October 2022. The survey was distributed through ISWE and Irish Economic Association (IEA) mailing lists and the ISWE Twitter account. The final sample size included 88 responses with 57% of respondents identifying as female and 41% as male, and most respondents (73%) working in higher education institutions.

**Main Findings**

* 80% of respondents have been invited to participate in some form of media engagement activities in the past.
* Men are somewhat more likely to have been invited to participate than women (83% vs 76%).
* Men and women refuse media requests at similar rates (67% vs 64%).
* The main reasons for refusing to participate in the media are:
  + Time: too many competing pressures and not enough notice to prepare for the interview.
  + Skills and knowledge: not enough knowledge on the topic and not confident to engage with the media.
* The reasons for refusing to participate in the media differ somewhat for men and women. For example, 30% of women cited not being confident to engage with the media compared to 14% of men.
* 70% of respondents were invited to participate in media engagement activities in the last year, and almost 50% participated.
* The most common form of media engagement is having your research feature in a newspaper article (76%), followed by being interviewed by a newspaper journalist (62%) and being interviewed on the radio (60%). Participating in a television interview is the least common.
* Male respondents engage more frequently in all forms of media engagement compared to women.
* There is a strong sense of responsibility to engage with the public. Most respondents agree that economists have a responsibility to engage with the public about the implications of their work (85%) and about current affairs (70%).
* 60% agree that gender quotas are a good method for increasing female engagement in the media, while a fifth of respondents disagree.
* 47% feel confident in their media skills. Men are more confident (56%) than women (40%). A quarter of females (26%) are not confident at all in their media skills, compared to 8% of males.
* Both men and women are more comfortable engaging with the media on topics that they are more familiar with:
  + 74% are likely to engage with the media about their own research or work.
  + 49% are likely to engage with the media about current affairs on their area of expertise.
  + 1% are likely to engage with the media about current events not in their area of expertise.
  + Men are more likely than women to engage with the media about their research, but responses are similar on current affairs.
* Benefits: Over 80% of respondents state that contributing to public debates and informing the public or raising the awareness about their research were the main benefits of engaging with the media. Only 2% considered there were no benefits to media engagement.
* Barriers: Almost half of respondents (47%) listed too many competing pressures on their time as the main barrier to media engagement. 39% did not engage in media activities because they had not been asked to do so (38% women vs. 42% men). Other reasons included not feeling confident and not being given enough notice to prepare.
* Notice periods required by women to engage with the media were longer than those required by men (about their own research and about areas outside of their expertise).
* Over 40% said they would be more likely to engage with the media if they were invited to take part, if they received more support from media specialists, and if they were relieved of other work.
* Over 40% of respondents have received some form of communications/media training in the past.
* 69% said they would be interested in receiving training on media engagement specifically for economists (84% women vs. 53% men).

**Sample Characteristics**

Table 1 shows the demographics of the survey respondents (n=88).

Just over half of respondents are women (57%), while male responses account for 41% of the sample. Over 70% work in a higher education institution, while 23% work in a public sector organisation. The remaining work in private sector organisations or NGO/think tanks. Over 80% have a permanent position. Most respondents completed their highest educational qualification 6-10 years ago, closely followed for those who finished 0-5 years ago and 11-20 years ago. In terms of the sample composition, the survey was completed by more early/mid career female economists and later stage career male economists.

***Table 1: Demographics***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Gender: Are you...?* | | | |
| Male | Female | Other |  |
| 41% | 57% | 2% |  |
| *Which of the following organisations best matches your current place of employment?* | | | |
| Higher education institution | Public sector organisation | Private sector organisation | Other |
| 73% | 23% | 2% | 2% |
| *Your current employment is…?* | | | |
|  | Permanent | Temporary |  |
|  | 83% | 17% |  |
| *How many years has it been since you completed your highest educational qualification?* | | | |
| 0-5 years | 6-10 years | 11-20 years | 20+ years |
| 28% | 30% | 26% | 16% |

***Figure 1: Demographics by gender***

**Caveat**

Although the survey was distributed and advertised through mailing lists, it is likely that many respondents received information about the survey via Twitter. As many academics use Twitter to engage in public debate or with the media, this may explain why a large proportion of the respondents have previously engaged in media activities.

**Results**

**Participation in Media Engagement Activities**

Most respondents (80%) have been invited to participate in some form of media engagement activities in the past. Table 2 shows that men are somewhat more likely than women to have been invited to participate in a media event (83% vs. 76%). Most respondents (66%) report having refused a request to participate in the media at some point, with similar rates for men and women (67% vs. 64%).

***Table 2: Previous media engagement activities***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Been invited | Refused to participate |
| Female | Mean | 0.76 | 0.64 |
|  | Sd | (0.43) | (0.49) |
| Male | Mean | 0.83 | 0.67 |
|  | Sd | (0.38) | (0.48) |

**Reasons for Refusing to Participate in Media Activities**

The two most cited reasons for refusing to participate in media activities are too many competing pressures on respondents’ time and not enough notice to prepare for the interview. The next two reasons listed were not having enough knowledge of the topic and not feeling confident to engage with the media. The option “other” was added so respondents could add their own reasons. Some of the reasons mentioned were related to the possibility of their views being misinterpreted or disagreements with editorials or journalists’ perspective. These results are summarised in Figure 2.

The main reason listed by women for refusing to participate in the media is ‘not enough notice to prepare for the interview’ (38%), while this reason was selected by a quarter of men. The primary reason for refusing to participate for men was ‘having too many competing pressures on their time’ (39%). This was the second most cited reason for females (30%).

While 30% of women selected ‘I was not confident to engage with the media’ as a reason, 14% of men chose this option. There was also a gender difference in responses for the option ‘I didn’t have the right skills/training’ (12% women vs. 3% men).

There were also differences according to childcare or caring responsibilities, with 18% of women listed childcare as a barrier compared to 3% of men. Interestingly, only 4% of women mentioned that they did not engage with the media because they did not want to, compared to 17% of men.

**Participation in Media Engagement in the Last Year**

Almost 70% of respondents were invited to participate in media activities in the last year. 20% were invited once and 18% twice. In total, 50% of respondents took part in media engagement activities in the last year, with almost 24% engaging with the media once.

**Types of Media Engagement Activities**

Having your research feature in a newspaper article (76%), followed by being interviewed by a newspaper journalist (63%), and being interviewed on radio (60%) are the most common forms of media engagement. Being interviewed on TV (39%) and writing a newspaper article (48%) are less common.

Table 3 reports the average number of times respondents engaged with different media activities by gender. In every case, men are more likely than women to have engaged. Larger differences are found for being interviewed on radio or by a newspaper journalist. On average, male respondents have been interviewed on radio ~6.5 times, compared to an average of ~3 times for women. The differences are smaller regarding newspaper articles about one’s research (6.6 times vs. 5.3 times).

***Table 3: How many times have you ever done any of the following media engagement activities?***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Been interviewed on radio | Been interviewed by a newspaper journalist | Been interviewed on TV | Written an article for a newspaper or news website (e.g., RTE Brainstorm article) | Your research has featured in a newspaper article |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Female | Mean | 3.0 | 3.1 | 1.5 | 1.9 | 5.3 |
|  | Sd | (5.4) | (5.6) | (4.1) | (4.3) | (6.9) |
| Male | Mean | 6.5 | 7.0 | 4.6 | 4.3 | 6.6 |
|  | Sd | (8.7) | (8.6) | (7.6) | (6.6) | (7.6) |

Half of respondents report engaging in social media in a professional capacity either weekly or monthly, with another 16% using it at least once every three months. Blog posts and podcasts are less popular, with 61% and 52% of respondents never engaging with them, respectively. Speaking at events or public lectures occurred quarterly for 23% of respondents biannually for 11%, annually for 14%, and less than annually for 27%.

**Relevance of Media Engagement**

There is a strong sense of responsibility to engage with the public among economists. Most respondents (85%) either slightly or strongly agree that economists have a responsibility to engage with the public about the implications of their work. Over 70% of respondents consider that economists have a responsibility to engage with the public about current affairs.

In terms of gender quotas, 60% of respondents show slight or strong agreement of quotas being a good method for increasing female engagement in the media, while a fifth of respondents slightly or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Two thirds of respondents strongly agree that their work or research has implications for society, while another 26% slightly agreed. This is in line with the previous responses of economists having a responsibility to engage with the public.

Over half of respondents (57%) believe there are some personal benefits from engaging with the media, while 32% believe that there are few benefits. In terms of confidence on media skills, responses were highly variable with 47% slightly or strongly agreeing that they feel confident in their media skills, while 40% do not feel confident. More than half of men (56%) slightly or strongly agree with feeling confident in their media skills, while 40% of women selected these options. Moreover, over a quarter of females (26%) strongly disagreed with the statement, compared to 8% of males.

Over a quarter of respondents believe that engaging in the media is not very important in relation to other aspects of their working life. 45% stated it was somewhat important, while a fifth of responses indicated that it was fairly or very important. Thus, for most respondents, media engagement is an added extra rather than an essential component of their working life.

**Media Engagement by Topic**

Respondents tend to feel more comfortable engaging with the media on topics that they are more familiar with. Over 70% responded they would likely or very likely engage with the media about their own research or work. In terms of current affairs, if the topic is in their area of expertise, almost 40% are likely to engage with the media. However, if the current affairs topic is not in their area of expertise, 92% of respondents considered it unlikely or very unlikely that they would engage with the media, with most responses being very unlikely.

As shown in Table 4, on the five-point scale, male economists have a mean of 4.0, corresponding to a “Likely” answer, while females have a lower mean of 3.8 in terms of engaging with the media about their own personal research.

In terms of current affairs related to their area of expertise, the mean response of men and women are very similar, e.g., 3.3 (between “Neither unlikely nor likely” and “Likely”). For current affairs not in their area of expertise, responses are also similar with a mean of 1.4 (between “Very unlikely” and “Unlikely”).

***Table 4:***

***Likelihood of engaging with the media***

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Your own personal work/research | Current affairs related to your area of expertise | Current affairs not related to your area of expertise |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Female | Mean | 3.8 | 3.3 | 1.4 |
|  | Sd | (1.1) | (0 .9) | (0.7) |
| Male | Mean | 4.0 | 3.3 | 1.4 |
|  | Sd | (1.0) | (1.2) | (0.6) |

**Benefits of Media Engagement**

An important aspect when considering engaging with the media are the perceived benefits that those activities can bring. Over 80% of respondents listed that contributing to public debates and informing the public/raising the awareness about their research were the main benefits of engaging with the media. Other benefits that received about half of responses were ensuring that their work or research is relevant to society, enhancing their career profile, discussions about social or ethical implications of their work and raising the profile of their institution. Only 2% of respondents said there were no benefits to engaging in media activities.

**Barriers to Media Engagement**

Respondents were asked what is stopping them from engaging more with the media. The primary reason, for both men and women, was ‘too many competing pressures on their time’. For women, the second most prevalent issue was not feeling confident, while for men it was having not been asked. Thus, confidence is a more prevalent issue for women (46% vs. 19%). For women, the notice period was also a major issue, however this was less relevant for men (40% vs. 22%). Moreover, almost a third of women mentioned not having the right skills or training as a barrier to engaging more, compared to only 3% of men. Interestingly, very few respondents stated that they were simply not interested in engaging with the media.

Other reasons given that were not listed above were the possibility of being misrepresented or being asked to talk about topics not in their area of expertise. Another reason stated was that media activities are carried out mainly by managers and not by junior or mid-level staff members.

**Notice Periods for Media Engagement**

Respondents were asked about what notice periods they would need in order to engage with the media, both about their own research and about topics outside of their expertise. As shown in Table 5, the required notice periods are longer when respondents are asked to talk about areas outside of their expertise, compared with talking about their own research. In both cases, women require more notice days than men – 4.4/2.3 days for women and 3.4/1.9 days for men when talking about areas outside their expertise and research respectively.

***Table 5: If you were to engage with the media, how much notice would you need before an interview or media engagement activity to prepare?***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | About your own research | On a topic outside your expertise |
|  |  |  |  |
| Female | Mean | 2.3 | 4.4 |
|  | Sd | (2.1) | (2.3) |
| Male | Mean | 1.9 | 3.4 |
|  | Sd | (2.2) | (2.7) |

**Encouragement to Get Involved with the Media**

Over 40% of respondents said that they would be more likely to get involved with the media if they were invited to take part. A similar proportion stated that they would engage with the media if they received more support from media specialists and if they were relieved of other duties. Furthermore, over a third of respondents would be more encouraged to engage with the media if this work was more recognised, if they had more training and if it helped with their own careers. 10% of respondents declared that no factors would encourage them to engage more with the media.

While 44% of women mentioned that they would be more encouraged to engage with the media if they received training, 25% of men considered this as a motivating factor.

**Knowledge and Skills**

Respondents were also asked how well equipped they feel about engaging with the media about their area of expertise and about areas outside of their expertise. The scale was: “Very well equipped” (1), “Fairly well equipped” (2), “Somewhat equipped” (3) and “Not at all equipped” (4). Table 6 shows that men tend to feel more equipped to engage with the media than women, either about their area of expertise or outside it. The difference is larger for areas within their area of expertise than with topics outside their expertise.

***Table 6: Knowledge and skills to engage with the media***

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Equipped about their area of expertise | Equipped about areas outside their expertise | Comfortable with a topic to engage with the media |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Female | Mean | 2.3 | 3.5 | 1.7 |
|  | Sd | (0.9) | (0.6) | (0.8) |
| Male | Mean | 2.0 | 3.3 | 1.6 |
|  | Sd | (0.8) | (0.7) | (0.7) |

The final column in Table 6 asks respondents how comfortable they need to be with a topic to engage with the media about it. The scale was: “Very comfortable” (1), “Fairly comfortable” (2), “Somewhat comfortable” (3) and “Not at all comfortable” (4). There is a slight difference in the mean scores of men and women for this question. In both cases, the answer is between “Very comfortable” and “Fairly comfortable”.

**Media/Communications Training**

When asked about the type of formal training respondents received, if any, half responded that they have not received any training on communications and have not been offered it. 28% received training provided by an external organisation and 17% by in-house training provided by HR or their professional development department.

69% of respondents said they would be interested in receiving training on media engagement specifically for economists, while 31% said they would not be interested. 84% of females are interested, compared to 53% of males.

64% of those who work on higher education institutions are interested in receiving training on media engagement. For individuals working in other organisations, 83% showed interest in the training.