

KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES OF NIGERIAN JOURNALISTS TOWARDS SAFETY PROTOCOLS IN AN INSECURE AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC NATION

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Abstract

This paper examines the knowledge, attitudes and practices of Nigerian journalists towards safety protocols especially within security and COVID-19 in Nigeria. The study adopted the survey methodology and relied on questionnaire as instrument of primary data collection. The population of the study was 305 journalists under the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Abia and Ebonyi State. Sample size was 152 with 80 and 72 respondents chosen from Ebonyi and Abia State chapters respectively using Quota sampling technique. Data analysis utilized percentages, and tables. Findings show that

47.4% of the respondents have had threat of job loss from their employers while 80% consider job loss and threat to life as the most serious safety issues confronting Nigerian journalists. On safety training, 64.5% have no specific safety training; 57.9% of those who have safety training sponsored themselves, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), sponsored 42.1% while 97.4% believe that classroom safety training does not satisfy the needs of Nigerian Journalists. All the journalists take personal safety measures to protect themselves with 39.5% using self-censorship and 48% hiding their identities. All (100%) agreed that government was not doing enough to guarantee the safety of journalists in Nigeria. The paper recommends stricter enforcement of laws guaranteeing safety of journalists and greater emphasis on safety training by employers and journalism training institutions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigerian journalists, Safety Protocols, Practices, Security, knowledge.

Introduction

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 1010 journalists were killed between 2006 and 2017 (UNESCO, 2018). Of this number, 99 were killed in 2018 alone (UNESCO, 2019). “Attacks against journalists and media workers, and impunity for these violations and abuses, are one of the greatest challenges to freedom of expression worldwide” (Article 19, 2019, 4). Apart from the socio-political environments in which journalists work, there are concerns about the adequacy of safety training of journalists. Reports from UNESCO (2018), and Article 19 (2019) paint a picture of intimidation, threat, harassment, and

ultimately, death of journalists across the world. Previous studies like Hollifield, Becker and Vlad, 2006; Avraham, 2002; Suleiman and Ojomo, 2019, focused only on the policy environment - political, economic, and legal - under which journalists operate but not on the knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP), of the journalists themselves with regards to their safety at work. This has left a KAP gap in the analysis of safety of journalists in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out safety measures Nigerian journalists practice to safeguard themselves at work.
2. To evaluate the training status of Nigerian journalists towards their own safety at work.
3. To ascertain journalists' operating environment in Nigeria with regards to their safety.

Research Questions

1. What are the threats and safety measures adopted by Nigerian journalist to safeguard themselves from emergent safety issues such as COVID-19 and insecurity?
2. Are Nigerian journalists adequately trained to safeguard themselves in their work?
3. What is the operating environment of Nigerian journalists with regards to their safety?

Conceptual Framework

The safety of journalists is a broad category that extends from preventive, protective and pre-emptive measures, through to combating impunity and promoting a social culture which cherishes freedom of expression and press freedom (UN plan of Action on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity). Conceptually, safety

as far as journalism is concerned can be situated in the context of the climate in which the work of the journalist is done. It connotes an operational climate without fear, intimidation, harassment, insecurity, and impunity coupled with requisite safety training, safety equipment, and legal protection.

Theoretical Framework

The Libertarian Theory, otherwise called the Free Press Theory encapsulates the basic ideas that journalism, and by implication, journalists, should thrive under a free society and operate under an atmosphere of freedom where different and competing ideas are allowed to flourish in the free market place of ideas. Thus, truth and falsehood are equally protected. The theory was influenced by the writings of John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and John Milton. The basic tenets of the theory is freedom to publish without legal restrictions and without prior censorship or licensing and the autonomy of journalists and their employers. (McQuail, 2007; Asema, Nwammuo, & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017; Obayi, Anorue, Onyebuchi, Umeokeke, & Etumnu, 2020). The result of this is that journalists work as the watch dog of the society.

Review of Related Literature

According to Marcesse (2017), these are challenging times for practicing journalism safely. Statistics back this claim. For example, the International News Safety Institute (INSI) reported that 111 media workers were killed in 2015, and another 115 in 2016. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), claim that 2012 journalists have been murdered since 1992. Journalists have become mere numbers in the statistics of death worldwide. There is pervasive threat to journalists across all environment of journalism practice. Statistics show that many of the journalists and media workers killed are not in a war or conflict situations (Cottle, 2017; Carlsson & Poyhtari, 2017). Most

victims are targeted in counties that are at peace, but where revealing, sensitive information like drug trafficking, violation of human rights, corruption and sexual harassments are reported. The security and safety challenges confronting journalists are increasing everyday both at the level of non- combat violence and anti- press violence. They have become pervasive and unrelenting. (Dunham, Nelson & Aghekyan, 2015; Arias & Goldstein, 2010).

Journalists are forced to engage in practices that tend to mitigate the security challenges they face but these practices also tend to compromise the quality of their work (Hughes & Marguez-Ramirez, 2017, 505; Relly & Gonzalez de Bustamante, 2014; and Skierdal, 2016). Hughes and Marguez surveyed 377 Mexican journalists and found that 67.4% of them engage in self-censorship and 50% publish without by line. Also, Relly and Gonzalez de Bustamante (2014), found pervasive self-censorship among journalists. This practice manifests in omission, dilution, distortion, and change of emphasis etc. by journalists, and their organisations in order to curry favour and avoid punishment from the power structure (Lee & Lin, 2016). These research findings indicate that journalists are somewhat aware of safety measures to curtail the risks in their daily job, but the studies failed to establish why observance of these rules and the legal frameworks on safety of journalists in society have not improved the safety of journalists.

What are the knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) of Nigerian journalists towards safety protocols? Previous studies have concentrated on the legal environment for journalism work as well as journalism in war and conflict environments. But most crimes against journalists are in countries that are at peace. (Hughes & Maraez-Ramirez, 2017). The legal environment in most cases is adequate for the protection of journalists. What has been the challenge is the reign of impunity. Echoing this, Unegbu (2017), concluded that there is

sufficient legal framework to protect journalists but enforcement is a challenge. Current research focus is on what journalists do to mitigate the safety and security challenges facing them such as safety training and practices. But these trainings are far and few. In a Dart Centre survey of 247 journalists across the world, Slaughter, Brummel, Drevo, and Newman (2017, 67), reported that the cost of training remains a “significant barrier to access. Only 57% of journalists reported their training was paid by their employers”. The rest, “9% paid from their pockets while 33% relied on charitable organisations”. The inadequacy of training is obvious. The survey concluded that even where the training is available, “many journalists safety training is not current”.

What is the magnitude of threat to journalists? Unegbu, (2015), found that 74% of the journalists in Nigeria have faced threats in the course of their work. A media study in Kenya in 2013 found 91% of the journalists have faced security threats; 41% from politicians, 34% from organised groups, 8% from businessmen, 4% from employers and 3% from organised goons and religious groups. The greater safety and security challenge to journalism is official impunity when these threats are eventually carried out. Impunity is the unwillingness to apply the law when breaches occur and which in turn emboldens perpetrators to commit more violations of the law. This has been described as the state of exception where those who are in a positions of political power and authority no longer do their work of guaranteeing the safe exercise of individual rights for certain groups of people. (Pukalis& Harrison, 2018). A study of impunity in Bulgaria, DR Congo, India, Mexico and Pakistan by Pukalis and Harrison (2018), found pervasive impunity in the treatment of journalists. Impunity occurs because most crimes against journalists are committed by those who are legally charged to protect journalists such as police and other security agencies and government officials. For example, "41 percent of aggressions against journalists in 2015 were

perpetrated by public officials, a fairly consistent percentage since 2009 that includes attacks from police officers, soldiers and state or local government officials" (Article 19, 2016, 141).

According to Unegbu (2015), the Global Impunity Against Journalist Index (GIAJI), ranks Nigeria 13th in the world and 3rd in Africa. Nigeria is only better than Somalia and South Sudan and both are in war situations. Also data from International Press Council (2015), show that between November 2014 and April 2015, 47 journalists were attacked in Nigeria. Those killed include Famous Gioboro of Glory FM, Rivers State, Lawrence Okoji of Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), and Ikechukwu Onubogu of Anambra Broadcasting Service (ABS). Harassment of journalists is common in Nigeria. This has been compounded by COVID-19, and the current devastating insecurity in the country. Journalists can enhance their safety through their knowledge, attitude and practices (KAP), but Talabi, Nwokolo, Oloyede, Boluwatife, Adefemi, and Gever (2021), found that Nigerian journalists lack training in safety skills.

Methodology

This study is based on the survey methodology. Surveys provide the most effective means of collating views and opinions of a population. It is one of the most commonly used by behavioural scientists (Sobowale, 2008). The population of this study is 305 registered journalists with the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Abia and Ebonyi State chapters. Abia with 145 and Ebonyi with 160. Purposive sampling was used to select the two states studied from the five states of South East while Quota sampling was used to get the sample size. Thus, 80 respondents were selected from Ebonyi and 72 from Abia, for the sample size 152. The instrument of data collection was structured questionnaire which was administered face-to-face by the researchers while the Government House Press Units of the selected states were

the meeting points for the study. Analysis of the data collected was done using simple statistical tools of tables, frequencies and percentages. The return rate of completed questionnaires was 100%.

Results

Table one below focused on threats to journalists in Nigeria and the measures they apply to secure themselves at work. The table shows that all the journalists surveyed have had one form of threat or another in the course of their work. The table indicates that 15 journalists (9.9%), of the sample population have encountered physical harm at work; 72 (47.4%), have had threat of job loss, and 60 (39.5%), threat to life. Also, 5 (3.3%), of the journalists' families have been threatened. Of all these safety challenges, loss of job, 65 (42.8%), is the most frequent followed by threat to life (27.6%). Journalists consider threat to life (51.3%), and loss of job (19.7%), as more serious safety issues. The table shows that politicians/public office holders (36.2%), and employers (18.4%), constitute major sources of threat to the safety of journalists in Nigeria.

Table 1: Threats and safety measures Nigerian journalists apply to safeguard themselves

Question	Variable	(F)	(%)
Have you ever experienced threat to your safety in the course of your journalism work?	Yes	152	100%
	No	-	
What kind of threat have you experienced?	Physical harm	15	9.9%
	Loss of job	72	47.4%
	Threat to life	60	39.5%
	Threat to family	5	3.3%
Most frequent threat	Loss of job	65	42.8%
	Threat to life	42	27.6%
	Physical harm	24	15.8%
	Threat to family	09	5.9%
	Abuse	12	7.9%
More serious threat to journalists	Physical harm	25	16.4%
	Loss of job	30	19.7%
	Threat to life	78	51.3%
	Threat to family	06	3.9%
	Abuse	13	8.6%
Major sources of threat to journalists	Government	14	9.2%
	Employers	28	18.4%
	Individuals	19	12.5%
	Law enforcement officer	15	9.9%
	Politicians	55	36.2%
	Groups	10	6.6%
	Business men	11	7.2%

Source: Field survey 2021

Table two focuses on the training status of Nigerian journalists towards safety. Data from the table show that 44 (28.9%), have specific training on safety, 98 (64.5%), have no specific training on safety, while 142 (93.4%), had only classroom safety training from tertiary institutions. Journalists who had extra training different from that of classroom, were mainly self-sponsored, and constitute 57.9%

(88), of the sample size. Non-Governmental Organisations(NGOs), trained 64 (42.1%), of the respondents while 148(97.4%), say classroom safety training does not satisfy journalists' safety needs.

Table 2: Training status of Nigerian journalists towards safety protocol

Question	Variable	(F)	(%)
Whether journalists have any specific training and safety protocol on Covid-19, and insecurity	Yes	44	28.9%
	No	98	64.5%
	I can't tell	10	6.6%
Sponsors of journalists training	Yourself	88	57.9%
	Government	-	-
	Union body	-	-
	NGO	64	42.1%
Whether journalists were exposed to safety protocol training in tertiary institutions	Yes	142	93.4%
	No	-	-
	I can't remember	10	6.6%
Whether classroom safety training satisfy needs of journalists in practice	Yes	-	-
	No	148	97.4%
	I can't tell	4	2.6%
Whether safety is an issue to be taken seriously in journalism practice in Nigeria	Yes	125	82.2%
	No	-	-
	I don't know	27	17.8%
Whether journalists have taken any safety measures to protect themselves	Yes	152	100%
	No	-	-
	Not really	-	-
Specific measures taken by journalists to protect themselves	Hide their identity	73	48.0%
	Self-censorship	60	39.5%
	Avoidances of danger zones	15	9.9%
	Evasive maneuvers while going home	4	-
	Others	-	-
How often journalists take safety measures	Often	52	34.2%
	Very often	39	25.7%
	As often as possible	24	15.8%
	When the need arises	37	24.3%
	Seldom	-	-

Source: Field data 2021

Also, 125 (82.2%), consider safety as an issue to be taken seriously in journalism practice in Nigeria. All the respondents take self-safety measures to protect themselves from harm with 73 (48%), hiding their identities, 60 (39.5%), adopt self-censorship, 15 (9.9%), avoid danger zones, while 4 (2.6%), use evasive maneuvers while going home. They take these measures very often.

Table 3: Journalists' operating environment/ measures to improve safety of journalists in Nigeria

Question	Variable	(F)	(%)
Measures by employers to protect journalists	None	152	100%
Whether government is doing enough to guarantee safety of journalists in Nigeria	Yes	-	-
	No	152	100%
	I don't know	-	-
Measures government can take to protect journalists in Nigeria	Create awareness on the need for journalists in the society	22	14.5%
	Assist in the training and retraining of journalists	20	13.2%
	Enact laws to criminalize threats/assaults on journalists	42	27.6%
	Ensure freedom of information	24	15.5%
	Help deal with the issue of quackery and register every journalist for security reasons	19	12.2%
		25	16.6%
	Provide special training institutions for journalists		
Measures employers can take to enhance safety of journalists at work	Life assurance	21	13.8%
	Adequate welfare packages	33	21.7%
	Ensure balanced reports	63	41.4%
	Training and retraining of journalists on safety measures	30	19.7%
	Prompt payment of salary	5	3.3%
Comments on operating environment of journalists in Nigeria	Unconducive	34	22.4%
	Hostile	58	38.2%
	Unfriendly	25	16.4%
	Journalists are seen as trouble makers	35	23.0%

Table three focused on the nature of journalists operating environment/measures to improve safety of journalists in Nigeria. All the journalists 152 (100%), said their employers have no safety measures to protect them and that government is not doing enough to guarantee safety of journalists in Nigeria. Of this, 22 (14.5%), want government to create awareness about the importance of journalists in the society; 20 (13.2%), want government assistance in training journalists while 42 (27.6%), want laws enacted to criminalize threats/assaults on journalists.

Discussion

This study reveals that Nigerian journalists face occupational risks but also adopt mitigating measures to improve their personal safety at work. They face challenges from the government, employers, and influential individuals. This is evident in the findings of this study that public servants constitute major threats to the safety of journalists in Nigeria. Journalists do not have job security as employers constitute the highest threat to loss of job to journalists. Journalists also lack safety training as 64.5% had no specific training on safety including on COVID-19 and insecurity. Nigerian journalists also device self-help measures for their safety such as hiding their identities and self-censorship corroborating the findings of Relly& Gonzalez de Bustamante(2014). Journalists who had extra training different from that of classroom, were mainly self-sponsored, agreeing with the findings of Slaughter, Brummel, Drevo and Newman, 2017) that more than half of the sample size, 88(57.9%) of journalists surveyed trained themselves on safety journalism.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this survey, this paper concludes that journalists and journalism practice in Nigeria face notable occupational risks. They contend with institutional, political, and economic threats to the practice of journalism. Journalists in Nigeria resort to self-help, self-training, self-censorship and other mechanisms to protect themselves from hazards associated with their work. It is recommended that enforcement of laws protecting journalists and their work should be prioritized by the government. Also, employers and journalism training institutions should emphasize safety training for journalists while updating their curriculum to meet with contemporary challenges confronting journalists. This can be done in partnership with the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) and Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria (BON) etc.

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