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An Assessment of the Safety Routine Measures Adopted by Journalists Covering Boko Haram Insurgency in the North East, Nigeria

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Abstract: Journalists around the world face serious safety challenges in the course of doing their job. As such, they have to device means in ensuring they are safe prior, during and after every dangerous assignment. Therefore, this study identified and examined the safety routine measures that journalists adopt in covering Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, It also sought to know whether these safety routine measures work effectively. In achieving these objectives, qualitative research approach was used in generating valuable data; In-depth Interview (IDI) and focus group discussion (FGD) were selected as the research method for gathering relevant information. A sample size of 41 participants was drawn using purposive sampling technique. The research was guided by the Protection motivation and the Risk compensation theories. Thematic analysis was used in analysing data generated. The study found out that journalists' who cover Boko Haram insurgency in the North East adopt various local and international best safety practices laid down for journalists covering dangerous assignments. It also revealed that the safety routine measures adopted by journalists prior to field work reduced risk and improved safety. The research concludes that the issue of safety and protection of journalists in Nigeria must be given due attention. The study further recommends that, Safety and protection of journalists should be made part of journalists' employment contract, there should be a national protection and safety protocol curriculum and training for journalists

Keywords: *Safety, Journalist, Insurgency and Boko Haram*

Introduction

The challenges journalists face in the course of their duty in recent years is a thing of concern among key media players. Most journalists who report in risky environments consider many uncertainties and dangers to be inherent in their work, within the past two decades about 1149 journalists have been killed with confirmed motives. Over sixty percent (60%) of these cases were classified as murder, meaning; the targeted killing of journalists in relation to their work (IFJ 2014, CPJ 2015 and UNESCO 2016). The Committee to Protect Journalists documented 1387 killings of journalists since 1992, 713

out of which were unsolved with perpetrators enjoying complete impunity (Zuffova and Carlini 2021).

This according to Ulla (2016) was as a result of the drastic decline in freedom of information and safety of journalists during this period. Simultaneously, Press freedom index for 2015 declares that press freedom is declining worldwide and points out the targeting and manipulation of media workers as the main cause of this deterioration (RSF, 2015). Two-thirds of the one hundred and eighty (180) countries surveyed for 2015 World Press freedom index, performed less

well than in previous year. The annual global indicator which measures the overall level of violations of freedom of information and that of journalists' safety in one hundred and eighty (180) countries year by year, has risen to 3,719, an eight percent (8%) increase over 2014 and almost Ten percent (10%) compared with 2013. In 2014, Eighty-Seven (87) cases of killings of journalists were recorded. The ongoing armed conflict in Syria has continued to inflict a high toll on journalists' lives with Ten (10) journalists killed in Syria, eight (8) in Palestine, six (6) in Iraq, five (5) in Libya, five (5) in Afghanistan and Seven (7) in Ukraine, this decline affected all continents (UNESCO, 2015, Ming –Kuck, 2015, Ulla, 2016).

According to the CPJ (2017), 'at least Forty-seven (47) journalists were killed in the course of their work in 2017'. There is no uniformity among nations and governments on the treatment of journalists. The CPJ analysis indicates that, Iraq with Eight (8) killings Syria with seven (7) and Mexico with six (6) killings were the worst places for reporters in 2017.

Between 2018 and March 2021, about One Hundred and seventeen (117) journalists have been killed, these killings were confirmed Murder and crossfire in the course of their duty. A year by year distribution of these death shows that 2018 was the worst for the safety of journalists worldwide with Fifty-six (56) deaths, twenty-six (26) cases in 2019, Thirty-two (32) deaths in 2020 and three (3) journalists have been killed in the first quarter of 2021(CPJ, 2021). The 2020 world press Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) showed that the coming decade will be decisive for the future of journalism, with the COVID 19 pandemic highlighting and amplifying the many crises that threaten the right to free report, independent, diverse and reliable information (RSF, 2020). Reporters Without Borders further maintained that journalists and news organisations are indispensable partners in the exercise of this basic freedom. This informs why those who

seek to restrict the public right to information target journalists. This usually jeopardizes their safety as they (those that muzzle the press) go to any extent to silence them. The number of journalists killed while on duty (over 700 since 2006 to 2014) shows the scale of the problem and the difficulty in dealing with it.

In Nigeria, the practice of journalism is not significantly different from the global experience. Nigeria is also committed to protecting and promoting the rights and safety of media professionals. But, that notwithstanding, journalists are still vulnerable to psychological harm, physical abuse and death (including murder). Commonly, they encounter acts of impunity like indiscriminate arrests and detention without charge; intimidation and harassment by security operatives; threats of arrest, and seizures of publications and working tools such as cameras, computers and machines. Other acts include: closure of offices by the police or Department of State Security; abductions and kidnappings by militant groups; violence, battering and killing; bombing of offices and prevention from carrying out duties especially in public places; exploitation and abuse of judicial processes against journalists and judicial harassment (Pate et al, 2017). Wilson (2015) states that journalists working in conflict zones like the North East and politically volatile areas remain highly vulnerable to attacks without investigations or arrest of perpetrators, except for condemnations that usually follow from the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), the most visible media pressure union. Journalists in Nigeria continue to suffer harassment and intimidation even outside the coverage of conflict.

'The Boko Haram terrorism and violent extremism that ravaged the North-East Nigeria from 2009 to 2015 had exposed weakness in the safety policy and protocols for local journalists in times and zones of tension in Nigeria'. However, throughout this period, journalists that covered the zone

demonstrated great resilience to major risks, threats, and death with severe consequences on their freedom and professional integrity. For the five (5) years period of the heat of insurgency, five (5) journalists were killed and many injured in the zone. (Pate and Oso, 2017, Mu'azu 2015). Between 2019 and 2020, two (2) journalists; Onifade Emmanuel of Gboah TV and Precious Owolabi of Channels TV were murdered in the course of their duties (CPJ, 2020). The aim of the study is to assess the safety routine measures journalists adopt in covering Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, its specific objectives is to find out the effectiveness of these safety routine measures.

Literature Review

Safety of journalists is an emerging area of academic research, which has attracted scholarly attention worldwide. This is due to the important role journalists play in ensuring information dissemination. If journalists' safety is threatened, it will affect their role. Most earlier researches on journalists' safety were majorly on posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) Backholm and Idas (2011) for instance, carried out a study among Nordic journalists who covered three crises scenarios of different types (the Tsunami in Asia in 2004, the school shooting in Finland in 2007-2008 and the terror attack of 2011 in Norway). Their study showed that some journalists experience ethical dilemma between behaving like emphatic human beings, on the one hand, and carrying out their assignments on the other hand. Also highlighted in their findings were the possible effects of dilemma on the development of severe long-term psychological impairment that may affect journalist's ability to work and maintain social networks. Practical implications of the research for media organisations were concluded also to include among others, the loss of experienced and professional personnel if adequate safety measures are not provided by media organizations. Also, similar studies on Finnish and Norwegian news journalists who covered large scale

PTAs with a strong rational impact, between seven (7) and fourteen (14) percent of the sample were considered to have PTSD (Backholm and Bjorkqvist 2012, Backholm and Idas 2013, Idas 2013, Idas 2014).

In an effort to develop a trend in more research in this area, the UNESCO in 2014 developed a twelve-point research agenda and promoted this in 2015 at a special session on safety of journalists during the international Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) conference in Montreal and other international conferences. This recognition was based on the reality that a general mapping of academic research conducted in the past 20 years had yielded a relatively small number of published studies. Of the available studies, most focused on 'War reporting or protection of journalists' in armed conflict situations, although more than half of attacks on journalists happened in non-conflict situations (Ming-Kuck 2015). As such, Communication Researchers and some organizations like UNESCO are paying attention on breaches on journalists' safety in different parts of the world.

This section presents the empirical and theoretical issues that influence our understanding of journalists' safety in covering dangerous and risky assignments. It also identified the existing knowledge gap in the study area and makes claim of the appropriateness of the study in the context of the theoretical assumptions of Protection motivation theory and the Risk compensation theory.

Empirical Review

Hoiby and Ottosen (2015) carried out a study on safety of journalists, reporting in conflict and war zones in seven countries; Norway, Nepal, Philippines, Uganda, Nigeria, Tunisia and Nicaragua. The geographical scope of their study cuts across the globe. Seventy-three (73) journalists and twenty-seven (27) editors cutting across all media and the online platforms were interviewed. The researchers conducted the interviews in personal meetings,

for the most part, and filled out the survey forms together with informants. Based on the experiences of the 100 journalists and editors interviewed, it was evident that the past seven years have changed their working environment significantly and for the worse in relations to security. The study also observed that many journalists are suffering from aftereffect of experiences from work, and the means for safeguarding their mental and physical wellbeing are deficient. Hoiby and Ottosen (2015) found out that essential training and protective gear are generally scarce and the field of war and conflict journalism are gradually becoming less attractive due to risk and cost involved.

In another study conducted by Committee to Protect Journalists (CJP) cited in a publication of Kenya Media Working Group (2014) revealed that, usually before journalists are attacked, they are threatened through anonymous phone calls and text messages to intimidate them into silence or self-censorship. The study revealed that, 35% of the journalists murdered were threatened prior to the attack. In Mexico for instance, 12 of the 25 journalists killed in the course between 1992 and 2011 received threats messages before their death. This suggests that their death would have been averted if adequate measures were put in place (INSI, 2014).

A study by Fournier (2014) observed that the future of the safety of journalists in armed conflict should be a continuation in the present focus of the combination of raising awareness for less impunity and practical assistance. This according to Yusuf (2013) is due to high level of impunity. For her, this is what is vogue in many countries which is why the global community is advocating for an end to impunity as well as the promotion of safety among journalists.

In a research conducted by INSI (2014) on threats to media workers and measures to protect them, suggested that journalism safety and the fight to end impunity should take a new dimension by being proactive and less reactive. He argued that planning, preparation

and risk mitigation is beyond responding to an event after the damage has been done. Hence, he contended that a solid crisis management plan developed in advance will be a good starter especially in serious war cases.

Apart from threats on field while covering events and conflicts, journalists face numerous internal threats from stakeholders and their employers. These threats according to Arulchelven (2015) have serious impact on their professional, economic and psychological lives. Most internal threats are less researched and reported. According to a study conducted by Arulchelven (2015) published in Ulla and Poyhtari (2017), they identified the various internal threats faced by journalists in India and the implications of these threats on their daily lives. The study revealed that sudden suspension, dismissal from service, demotion, non-allocation of work, and undue transfer is some of the internal threats faced by journalists.

On the African continent, some researchers have argued that the safety of journalists in Africa is solely the responsibility of journalists themselves. This is evident in a study conducted by Pate and Idris (2016) on professionalism and Risk management among journalists covering Boko Haram insurgency. Journalists covering Boko Haram Insurgency and some stakeholders were interviewed on issues bordering journalist's safety such as physical, economical, psychological and professional safety were discussed. The study presented the background as well as the specific safety violations, threats and killings, and the experiences of individual journalist and media houses in the context of their security and safety while reporting the Boko Haram insurgency. Some of the major findings of the study were that, between 2009 and 2015 four journalists were killed and many threatened, and also that the security and safety of journalists in that region were solely the responsibility of individual journalists. The study also exposed the inadequacies of both the government and media owners in the provision of protection

for journalists at war zones. Another striking issue raised in the study was that of impunity, Nigerian journalists are suffering threats and deaths but no prosecution has ever been recorded. Although, the study did not proffer practical recommendations on how the safety of journalists can be guaranteed in Nigeria.

In another study conducted by Hajara, Sanda and Aondover (2018) on journalistic practices on the professional safety among journalists in Oyo state. The findings of the study revealed that journalists in Oyo State were aware of their safety. They agreed that journalism safety is the freedom the press has to perform their professional task without fear or intimidation. The study concluded that the issue of safety and protection of journalists in Nigeria must be given due consideration. The way and manner in which journalists lost their lives in trying to serve human needs on what is happening in the society is alarming. Furthermore, there is a need for media houses in Nigeria, especially in Oyo state to have safety policy that may guarantee the smooth operation of journalists. Training and retraining of journalists on safety issues is another measure that will create awareness on safety tips for journalists. The study recommended that media organisations in Nigeria and Oyo state in particular should have safety policy. By so doing, the safety and protection of journalists will be guaranteed. There is also a need for training and retraining of journalists on safety issues in the media houses they are working for. Their study found out journalists' awareness of their safety but did not go further to investigate their safety challenges and measures to ensure their safety.

In a similar study conducted by Gachie (2013) on journalists' perception of their safety and protection in Kenya, he concluded that, 'Journalists and media workers in Kenya face a lot of challenges in their professional lives' and that the most trying moment for journalists in Kenya in terms of their safety is political electioneering periods and when covering social vices. He further argued that

journalists, editors, and media owners are responsible for taking all possible measures to safeguard the physical safety of journalists and media workers in conflict and war zones. The study recommended that the safety and protection of journalists should be part of their employment contracts and that a national protection and safety protocol, curriculum and training be developed.

In conclusion, the review of literature highlighted some of the global cases on the safety of journalists and the inadequacies in terms of specific studies that will digest specific issues on practical framework in protecting journalists in the course of their duties.

Research Procedure

The Research Procedures for selecting participants and collecting and analysing data are described in this section. A qualitative research approach was used in getting valuable data for this research. A qualitative research approach was chosen because it is especially useful in discovering the meaning that people give to events that they experience (Merriam, 1998). Focus Group Discussion was used for data collection. It was used to elicit information from practicing journalists who cover Boko Haram insurgency in the three States which the scope of this research covers; Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. This method was considered most appropriate in view of the research topic.

The research adopted Focus Group Discussion in generating data. According to Carolyn (2006) it is "a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents not less than 6 and not more than 12 to explore their perspective.

Analysing the data, the study adopted a thematic analysis approach, this involves becoming immersed in the material, producing a thematically ordered account supported by material quoted from transcripts. The recorded information from the participants was transcribed manually into

documents to facilitate thematic analysis. For analysing the findings, the audio recordings, field notes with descriptions of any non-verbal cues and other observations were reviewed.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The primary purpose of this study was to assess safety routine measures journalists adopt in covering Boko Haram insurgency in the North East. Participants' experiences and feedback added insight to the research questions posed in this study. By listening to and analysing the experiences of these journalists, valuable information was obtained about safety and intimidations, threat, harassment etc. they face in the course of their duties. As such, the data obtained from the interviewee on two research questions were presented with supporting evidences, including both quotations and feedback. The data was analysed as follows:

Safety routine measures put in place by journalists covering Boko Haram insurgency prior to field work

From the FGDs held with participants in the three states that this study covered, the data revealed that; Journalists adopt various international safety protocol prior to covering Boko Haram Insurgency and these measures yield positive results by reducing risk and ensuring safety of journalists. Among the interviewees, thirty-five (35) out of the forty-one (41) participants for the FGDs are actually engaging in security routine trainings prior to field work. Participant 11 noted that, "I have gone to Ghana and Ivory Coast on my own financial expense to attend trainings on safety and war reporting, and it has helped me most in covering insurgency like Boko Haram." Participant 18, who is currently undergoing a safety course in Kenya buttressed what participant 11 said; "I actually took it as a duty for this profession to use my money in attending a course on reporting from conflict and sensitive environments, in Kenya, it was in Kenya that I learnt that as a journalists living in conflict zone, you do not

stay in one place. So, I had to rent three houses at different locations in the city, yet terrorists would write to me and fellow journalists that they knew our houses'. He added; it was in that training that I learnt that I needed protective gear comprising a bulletproof jacket, helmet, first aid box, transit kits, and others. Participant 3 mentioned that, "I undergo regular Hostile environment and first aid training conducted by Ex-military officers, which I pay from my little savings". Also, participants 5 added, "Thorough and regular risk assessments which include; emergency communication protocol with colleagues, family members and my work place is one safety measure that is helping out". He added, 'I will say that all the measures I learnt from the various safety trainings I attended are very effective and reduced risk for most of us. Some of the safety routine measures according to the participants include:

Hostile environment and first aid training:

Participants were asked during their FGDs if they were more secured in the field after they must have undergone this training. From the non-verbal observations and field notes taken during each session of the FGD recorded that participants tended to pause before answering this question. The delay in responses to this question seemed to be more about the wording of the question than the responses from the participants. The researcher often provided wait time for the participants to think about this question and sometimes rephrased the question to delve into their experiences. During one of the FGDs, Participant 20 reported, "I almost feel more prepared (for assignments) after every safety training than when I had to go to field without the training because I feel I could overcome any danger and risk" This participant also mentioned that he felt he could report during cross fire between the Army and the insurgents without being hurt. Participant 20 went on to say, "I feel this has given me an advantage over some reporters who have not undergone any safety training or who do not

have safety routine before assignments and have fallen victims of attack and death.”

Risk assessment: Conducting thorough and regular risk assessment was said by the participants to be one of the safety routine measures adopted by journalists covering Boko Haram insurgency. Majority of the participants of the FGD (32 out of 41) said the risk assessment include; emergency communication protocol with colleagues, family members and their organisations which on several occasions has reduced risk factors even if risk could not be completely eliminated. Participants were asked during the FGDs if the emergency communication protocol was effective and if it reduced potential risk in covering Boko Haram insurgency. Participant 4 reported,

It was effective, I think, so yeah, I would say it reduced potential risk for me on several occasions, most times when I am about been trapped especially in locations I am not familiar with, such emergency communication with colleagues who are familiar with the environment give me direction on areas to avoid and areas to go with such risky environment.

Risk analysis and contingency planning: This is a detailed strategy for protecting journalists against risks and emergencies. Creating contingencies and risk assessment plan involves identifying the potential risk areas to create an effective response, should those risk develop. Participants were asked in all the sessions of the FGD how they perform risk analysis and contingency planning and how effective was the implementation. In response, some of the participants of the FGD (38 of 41) highlighted that, “I begin by identifying the risk then define the level of uncertainty, estimate the impact of uncertainty, after that, I complete the risk, analyse the result and I begin implementation of the result” on how effective the implementation was they unanimously said, “I thank this is the most effective safety measure ever developed.” Participant 15 added that, “It is systematic,

yeah it is easy to follow, easy to implement and in all result yielding.”

Wearing of Bulletproof and Helmet: The only time journalists covering Boko Haram insurgency dress like military personnel as safety measure is when going on assignment when there is a bomb blast or attack on villages or communities. When asked during the FGD sessions, all the participants admitted that, “Bullet proof and Helmet are safety and protective measures against stray and targeted bullets.” Participants 1, 17 and 33 said, “Bullet proof and Helmet have on several occasions protected me against stray bullets” Participant 12 added, “I was running to capture a scene of a bomb blast in a community along the boundary of Maiduguri on the west of Maiduguri, I suddenly had a strange sound on the back of my head and when I turned round I saw a life bullet on the ground, my colleagues and I ran and took cover, it was later we discovered it was a stray bullet from an unknown direction.” When the participants were asked whether Journalists in the field were targeted, participant 3 responded. “Sure, some of us are targets of the insurgents, because they feel we under report their own angle or we take side with the Nigerian state in our news frame and reportage.” Other participants nodded their heads in affirmation of participant 3 response.

Findings

The study found out that, journalists adopt various local and international best safety practices laid down for journalists covering dangerous assignments.

The study found that, the safety routine measures adopted by journalists prior to field work reduced risk and improved safety.

Discussion of Findings

In this paper, data analysis and findings of the research questions were reported. Hence, the Focus Group Discussions were analysed. Data analysis related to the research objectives revealed two themes, and four categories which formed our basis of discussion below:

The first finding of the study which relates to the first research objective which seeks to identify the safety measures journalists who cover Boko Haram insurgency put in place. The finding revealed that, journalists adopt various local and international best safety practices laid down for journalists covering dangerous assignments. This finding highlighted four distinct safety measures adopted by journalists covering Boko Haram Insurgency. These measures include; (i). Undergoing Hostile environment and first aid training conducted by ex-military officers. (ii.) Conducting thorough and regular risk assessments which they say include; emergency communication protocol with colleagues, family members and their Organisations. (iv.) Risk analyses and contingency planning, (iv) Situational awareness and they say when going on field especially when there are bomb blasts or attack on villages or communities, they wear bulletproof and Helmet as safety and security measures. (vi) Risk Assessment. Two themes from the data supports this finding.

This finding validates a similar study conducted by Pate and Idris (2016) on professionalism and Risk management among journalists covering Boko Haram insurgency, which they concluded that, “between 2009 and 2015 four journalists were killed and many threatened by Boko Haram insurgents, that the safety of journalists in that region was solely the responsibility of individual journalists’. However, their study did not uncover details of how journalists themselves were responsible for their safety. This study filled that gap by identifying the safety measures put in place by these journalists on their own to ensure they carry out their duty of covering the activities of the Boko Haram insurgents.

The second finding of the study resolved part of the gap in the literature, because most studies in the area concentrated on identifying safety measures for journalists covering conflict and war, the nature of safety challenges, others looked at the after effects

of this challenge on journalists. Enough studies have not been done on examining the efficacy of these safety measures and protocols developed for journalists. This study was able to measure the efficacy and workability of the safety protocols. Journalists in the field who adopted these protocols confirmed during the FGDs that, these safety routine measures they carryout reduced the perceived risk of covering Boko Haram activities, that the more safety measures they put in place the more confident and safe they become and as such the measures were effective and reduced risk.

There also lies a connection between this finding and one of the assumptions of the Protection motivation theory posited by Rogers (1983), Rogers asserts that, “People protect themselves among other factors based on the perceived severity of threatening events and the efficacy of recommended preventive protocol and self-efficacy” Efficacy is the individual expectancy that carrying out recommendations can remove the threat. Self-efficacy is the believe in one’s ability to execute the recommended course of action successfully. Participant 21 described his perception of reduced risk and improved safety after the safety routine measures in the following words, “These skills have made me remained hopeful, and resolute, my fear has gone because with all the skills, knowledge, and experience gotten from the safety protocols and the safety kits with me, I am sure that at least risk has reduced and I feel safe when I have no much cause to fear while in the field.”

Conclusion

This research has enriched the literature in this area by providing useful professional and academic information on the state of journalists’ safety and the lapses in the provisions of our laws on freedom of expression and that of journalists’ safety. Further studies may look at the theoretical underpinning of this area of research as most theories do not adequately explain the phenomenon.

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