

Compromised Independence of Print & Electronic Media Journalists: A Case Study of Lahore

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: Journalism is the fourth pillar of the society and journalists are the voice of the voiceless communities in a democratic society. In the developing countries like Pakistan democracy and journalism keep struggling. A common man believes that journalists are the powerful creatures but in fact they are still unable to protect their basic rights including job insecurity, health insurance and a respectable living. This research study focused on exploring the issues journalist face in Lahore city, the capital of Punjab the most populous province of Pakistan.

Methodology: Basically, the researcher has employed a qualitative approach and carried out in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to collect data, from the experienced working journalists of Lahore. This study employed purposive sampling from the journalists having 10 years professional experience. It involved an interpretive and descriptive thematic analysis.

Findings: Results indicate that none of the participants was satisfied with his/her job routine. Moreover, both male and female expressed low satisfaction and growing exploitation they have to face. All the journalists expressed similar experiences including concerns related to low salaries, job insecurities, lack of professional independence and protection from the threats of pressure groups.

Conclusion: Journalists have to be united to protect their independence and perform their role as the fourth pillar of the society.

Keywords: Journalists, Work Routine, Media Industry, Challenges, Insecurity, Independence.

Introduction

Media scholars across the world deeply study the profession of journalism and work routine of journalists (Daum & Scherer, 2018). International press bodies regularly observe working routines of journalists in Pakistan and also compare journalistic practices to the rest of the world (Agarwal & Barthel, 2015). Independent journalism is essential, 'the future of journalism depends on the journalists (Shrivastava, 2022).

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The journalists are the most influential group in any society. Journalists as employees do their best to serve the profession, but in return (with a few exceptions) the media institutions pay meager salaries (Murschetz, 2020). In short, we can say that this job rarely provides any security to its workers especially in the developing countries like Pakistan. It does not offer journalists high salaries and decent wages to meet both ends (Adnan et al., 2019). Hardly any media organization offers monetary benefits, pensions, health care or any kind of job security. Having no other option many of the journalists work from dawn to dusk without earning sufficient money to support their families (Jamil, 2020). In Pakistan journalists have to work on part time projects or jobs so that they can deal with low and delayed salaries issues (Adnan et al., 2019).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to;

- a. Assess the independence of journalists in Pakistan
- b. Analyze the work routine challenges of the journalists
- c. Evaluate the job satisfaction of the journalists

Research Questions

1. What is the level of independence for journalists in media organizations of Pakistan?
2. What are the constraints journalists have to face?
3. What are the threats journalists have to face?
4. How media routines and job insecurities affect wellbeing of journalists?

Literature Review

Gul et al., (2017) maintains the liberalization of media in Pakistan has brought many challenges to the media industry which include the political economy of mass media, concentration of media power in few hands and ultimately compromising independence of journalists (Qamar et al., 2020; Raza et al., 2022). Throughout its history Pakistan has rarely enjoyed democracy in its real sense. There have been different constraints like dictatorship regimes and compromised freedom of press (Hassan, 2017). Both male and female journalists face much kind of challenges in the media industry of Pakistan (Jamil, 2020). Usually their respective organizations do not stand by them in the time of any crisis. Accepting professional and international standards of journalism is a serious challenge for the media (Aslam, 2015). In the case of Pakistan, journalism is not thriving due to the uncertain environment. Government and media owners ignore the personal well-being and self-esteem of journalists (Akhtar & Pratt, 2016).

The media is an indispensable weapon of democracy. The media has a responsibility to show what democracy really looks like, but now is the time to revive the spirit of journalism and journalists (Mahmood, 2020). In the subcontinent journalism started devotedly. Journalists have been revolutionary and courageous against many of the black laws imposed on them (Jamil, 2020). India gained independence and a lot of new news organizations claimed that they would create a generation to be the true representative of the fourth pillar of the state (Pintak & Nazir, 2013).

The most controversial law against the freedom of the press and journalists was the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, which banned the fourth pillar of democracy and a voice of the common people (Pandow & Kanth, 2021). After the advancements of increased writing and research, there seems an increased need of interpretive qualitative research to know the view point of journalists regarding the issue they have to face (Ittefaq et al., 2021). In subcontinent there is a history of constraints which journalism has to face (Bockino, 2016).

Leading psychiatrist Dr. Sanjay Chug explains that in spite of a lot of emphasis on the fixed working hours, journalism cannot be a 9 to 5 job which cause mental stress to the journalists (Dutta et al., 2013). Journalists

in Pakistan experience low self-esteem due to their work routines and the challenges they face (Shah et al., 2022).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach which involved descriptive and interpretive data analysis techniques. Data has been collected with the help of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

Population & Sampling Technique

The study population comprised of the Lahore based journalists. The sample was selected from the journalists having 10 years professional experience. The sampling technique was purposive.

Data Analysis and Findings

The researchers used thematic analysis technique by developing different important and frequent themes from the data and analyzed those themes.

Results from the Focus Group

Journalists' concerns about Personal problems

The focus group believes that Punjab, especially Lahore, is very important for journalism. Even the journalists attached with BBC and CNN recognize Lahore as important city of Pakistan. All journalists expressed concerns related to their low salaries. The participants stated journalism is not a well-paid job and many times their hard work goes unacknowledged. In response to a query related to the heavy workload and long working hours, professional journalists think, "due to the media work routines, we have no personal or social life. We have to work in the odd hours even late night, sometimes we cannot go to home".

Talking about the office environment, the focus group found that "it is difficult to work in conflict areas due to the lack of security". They further emphasized that many of the journalists have no professional training and such people create problems for genuine media workers". When it comes to the job security, journalists say they are satisfied with their journalism career how the job insecurity keeps them worried. Participants believed that an employer fires the experienced journalists without assigning any valid reason.

Journalists' Concerns about Professional problems

All professional journalists agree that obtaining complete information from government agencies is very difficult so they have to employ the illegal means. The participants added, "Clerical staff takes bribe for providing information". The focus group participants mainly complained that "there is no protection or safety to journalists in Lahore". According to the participants, "we are facing personal and family life threats from government agencies, politicians, proscribed organizations, pressure groups and the employer as well".

Focus group participants believed that "they have to act according to the policies of the organization otherwise they will be fired". The owners use journalists as puppets. Furthermore, the participants felt that "many times they were threatened by government agencies, politicians and terrorist groups after publishing their information". focus group participants argued that "some media carry out illegal activities through journalists". According to the participants, the media owners are "mafias" and "blackmailers".

Discussing the official status, the majority of focus group participants believed, "in spite of all the threats we continue our job, but this has never been acknowledged at the organizational or state level." They further described that the journalists have no rights. Moreover, the freedom of publishing stories, journalists say that there are "few media organizations which have a little freedom". Focus group participants further maintained that "they are passionate about their profession as they have opted it with preference. Despite the pressure, they strive to provide real facts and honest reporting because journalism is a sacred profession. Journalists must work in the public interest and remain neutral.

Results from the In-depth Interviews of Senior Journalists from Lahore

Individual Apprehensions of Journalists

The first segment of an in-depth interview agenda consists of personal concerns. All-time professional journalists have criticized about their inadequate salaries; one journalist registered following view: 'Journalists live a miserable life, having no privileges and salary is also very low' (frontier post). Another journalist shared his views that 'salary is confined to four to ten thousand and not paid in time' (Daily Naw-i-waqt). Journalists complain that the wages board award was an excellent step, which was established by the Supreme Court but has not yet been implemented. As one journalist shared that 'only two or three organizations have good salaries' (Capital News). The last journalist has expressed that 'Journalists work on daily wages not on as a regular employee' (GEO News). Moreover, talking about the extra working hours, a journalist recorded his views that 'the duty of a journalist is not confined to 8 hours, he works till late night and has no social life' (frontier post). However, in a similar context, two journalists shared their opinions that 'The journalists are not living a normal life in Pakistan. They have no time for the family due to excessive workload' (GEO News, Daily Naw-i-waqt). The last journalist expressed his views that 'I have an administrative post still I have to work 7/24 hours' (Capital News).

Professional journalists' views about the Lahore's office and field environment and concluded that 'it is challenging to work in Lahore; we are working in a war conflict zone' (frontier post). Another participant expressed his opinion that 'both field and office environment are not compatible; we are passing through an evolutionary stage and needs some more time' (Daily Naw-i-waqt). Similar observations are registered by the journalists that 'this profession is very different from many other professions as it's challenging to survive in it' (Capital News). However last journalist expressed a contrasting opinion that 'Work routine is relatively good compared to other cities' (GEO News). Another key concern expressed by the journalists was the unpleasant working environment in the office. Similarly a journalist maintains that 'A media owner or "Saith" influence both in offices and fields (Frontier Post). In a similar manner, another journalist expressed his views that 'both have a suitable environment and need some more time' (Daily Naw-i-waqt). A journalist noted his judgment that 'the work environment is not up to the mark, lobbying in offices and leg-pulling of others' (Capital TV). Whereas, the last journalist mentioned, 'Office environment is also good and working with freedom also' (GEO News).

Responding to job security, experienced journalists stated different opinions about the insecurity of losing a job and career satisfaction in Lahore. A journalist expressed his view that I have joined this profession in 1999 still have no job security. I wrote against state enemies and lost my job. My organization did not support me (Frontier Post). However, in a similar context, two journalists expressed their views that 'they are not satisfied due to job uncertainty' One Big media organization dismissed journalists from the job who have more than 20 years of experience' (Daily Naw-i-waqt, Capital News). In a little variance, the last journalist shared that 'I am satisfied with my job but unsatisfied due to job security' (GEO TV).

Career Apprehensions of Journalists

Professional journalists view approaching to official evidence in different organizations as an uphill task. A journalist expresses his views that 'it's not easy to take information-for that we have to spend money' (Capital TV). Another journalist conveyed his judgment, 'to take information from public institutions is like a 'jihad' (Daily Naw-i-waqt). Experienced journalists registered their interpretations, 'for gathering information, journalists have to make paid sources in public institutions' (Frontier Post, GEO News).

Journalist's Concerns about Anxiety at Work

Responding to organizational policy, one experienced journalist registered his opinion that 'owners plan such an organization policy which directly influence journalists' (Daily Naw-i-waqt). In a similar manner, one journalist shared his view that 'many times as a bureau chief even I have to follow the editorial policy (capital TV). In a similar context, two other experienced journalists contributed their views that 'A journalist works hard for the story, but it is not published due to policy' (Frontier Post, GEO news).

Views about threats from powerful, one experienced journalist expressed his opinion that he wrote against terrorism and 'He is one of those 16 journalists who have been threatened or assassinated by terrorists' (Frontier Post). Another journalist told that 'he had been threatened by a politician for developing a corruption story against him' (Daily Naw-i-waqt). In this way, two journalists presented relevant and similar views that 'stories about government agencies and big personalities cost life and remove job threats' (GEO News, Capital TV).

A few journalists maintained that media owners are not professional and basically the editors job is protect mafias with the guidelines provided by the owners (Daily Naw-i-waqt). Similarly, two journalists added their views that 'the owner of every channel only thinks about his business. Owner of GEO Mir Shakeel ur Rehman explicitly Claimed about running a business model not the journalism' (frontier post, capital news). The last journalist expressed his opinion that 'owners protect their advertiser at every cost' (GEO TV).

Truthfulness of Journalists

About the professional honesty of journalists, an expert journalist stated, 'journalist need to communicate facts to audience or readers' (Frontier Post). In a similar context, one journalist contributed his view that 'journalism is authority, news must be published in original shape' (Capital News). So as one journalist presented his opinion that 'journalists should work with honesty being impartial' (GEO News). The last journalist expressed his true opinion that 'we are giving our life to this profession because this is for a cause, if we are doing journalism with a cause then we are great' (Daily Naw-i-waqt).

Journalists hardly get any acknowledgment at state level and many time promises and announcements go futile (Daily Naw-i-waqt, capital news). As one journalist contributed his view that the 'journalist community IH Rashid, Hussain Naqqi, Minhaj Burna, IA Rehman sacrificed for journalism but did not receive recognition (frontier post). The last journalist also shared the same observation that 'he is only working for his country with determination' (GEO News). A seasoned journalist believed that Pakistani media lacks independence of journalists and it is a way behind if compare it to the BBC (Frontier Post). So as two journalists have contributed similar opinions that 'they cannot do it without organization permission' (Capital News, Daily Nawewqat). And with a little variance, the last journalist shared his views that 'I have freedom of news, but I have to discuss before publish' (GEO News).

Views of Female Journalists (In-depth Interviews)

Personal Concerns of Female Journalists

The personal concerns of the anchors and reporters reflect may issues like the reporters complaint about having very low salaries' (Ab Tak News). As another female journalist registered the same opinion that 'females are given a low salary as compared to males' (NEO News). One last female journalist shared her views in a similar vein that 'salaries are not compatible like that of international media. We work hard but are given no reward in return' (GEO News).

Moreover, about extra workload, a female journalist contributed her view, 'I have faced resistance to the family for working in media due to long working hours. I get no time for family or children' (NEO News). However, in a similar context, two other female journalists contributed their opinion that 'there is no timetable; when you are with family, you usually get calls from office for work. And due to work-load, you have to work hard to sustain your job' (Ab Tak News, GEO News).

Female Professional journalists' views about Lahore's office and field environment have expressed her opinion that 'in the field, females have to face criticism in front of the camera and here is gender discrimination as well' (Ab Tak News). Another journalist described that 'I have faced resistance from family to work in media, especially in the field. A female is used to adorn the screen' (NEO News). Last female journalist shared the same observation that 'I face difficulty in networking or news source. I have to make switching or balance with feminism for making news.' (GEO News).

Unpleasant work environment cause low self-esteem and poor psychological and physical wellbeing. According to them, an estimate of only 20% of females is in this profession These are not in streamline. One journalist shared her opinion that 'We face jealousy from male journalists. If we have potential, then leg-pulling starts' (GEO News). On the contrary, with little variance, one female journalist has an opinion that 'desk work is better to some extent, but we face 'sexual' harassment in the office also' (neo news). Some female journalists also reported satisfactory work environment (Ab Tak News). Responding to job security, experienced female journalists stated dissimilar opinions about job security and professional satisfaction in Lahore. A journalist reproted 'I am very satisfied as a profession, but I have no job security by the owners' (NEO News). Though, a journalist articulated her view, 'I am completely satisfied as a journalist but not sure about my job. But journalism is my passion now' (Ab Tak News). Conversely a female journalist maintained that 'no one has job security in media' (GEO News).

Professional Concerns of Female Journalists

Female journalists stated regarding acquiring information from different organizations, 'it's challenging for a female, people abuse us, many believe that a female journalist is a public property (Ab Tak News). Similarly, another female journalist argued that 'I have to make switching or balance feminism to gathering information (GEO News). The last journalist expressed her view that the 'law of the right of information is the only slogan by the government. I have to bribe for getting information' (NEO News). Female journalist expressed their concerns regarding security issues. One journalist has expressed her opinion that 'there is no security or safety for male and female journalists (GEO News). However, in a similar context, two female journalists expressed their views that 'Lahore journalists are facing serious security issues and both government and media organizations are doing nothing' (Ab Tak News, NEO News).

Female Journalist's Concerns about Anxiety at Work

One has to follow orders in order to be in the good list of media owners (Ab Tak TV). In spite of all the hard work and research sometimes our stories are killed when found contradictory to the editorial policy of the channel (NEO News). The last journalist shared her opinions with a little variance that 'high-up's mold news and stories in the name of policy' (GEO News).

Responding to threats from pressure groups, a female journalist stated her opinion that 'I never faced threats' (GEO News). However, in a similar context, two female journalists registered their views, 'both male and female have serious threats, but we never received any threats till now' (Ab Tak News, NEO News).

Female Journalist's views about wrong-doing in media organizations, One journalist expressed her opinion that 'owners or bureau chief direct order to mold news in favor or against anyone' (GEO News). According to one female journalist, 'mostly female are appointed for screen glamour only, bosses orders, they only act as a model during reporting' (NEO News). And one last journalist expressed her opinion that 'we work hard for news but do not publish business interests' (Ab Tak News).

The Idea of Integrity of Journalists

An experienced journalist maintained, 'journalists should be responsible and always speak and write truth' (GEO News). In a similar context, a female journalist stated, 'should be responsible for conveying truth to society' (NEO News). The last journalist described her voice that 'journalist should be impartial' (Ab Tak News). Seasoned female journalist complaint, they worked diligently in all circumstances however the state bodies did not provide them their due acknowledgement. Further, a journalist stated, 'media organization does not support in any matter' (GEO News). However, in a similar context, the last two female journalists expressed their views that 'no awards are given by any union or media organizations' (Ab Tak News, NEO News).

Responding to professional independence, female journalists expressed that most of the media organization lack independence of journalists. Further, a journalist maintained her views that 'I have the freedom to some

extent, but according to the policy' (GEO News). In the same manner, another female journalist expressed her opinion that 'there's almost 60% professional independence in her organization' (Ab Tak News). The last female journalist contributed that 'to some extent, it depends on organization policy' (NEO News).

Conclusion & Recommendations

In Pakistan Journalists are yet to find their independence along with a mission to perform their role as a fourth pillar of the state. It is ironic that most powerful anchors and reporters have to surrender against the exploitations of media owners. As a community even journalists are not entirely united. Few are highly paid whereas majority of them live a career full of uncertainties and insecurities. In such kind of environment rare are the journalists who can probe the real issues and corruptions in the society. A quantitative study can employ a large sample to analyze maximum responses. Secondly a new study can focus the freedom and independence, the digital media offer, as compared to the conventional print and electronic media.

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