

Mental Health Challenges in Journalism: Exploring Trauma, Coping Strategies, and Support Dynamics among Pakistani Journalists

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Abstract

This research delves into the occupational stress experienced by journalists in Pakistan while reporting on traumatic events, employing in-depth interviews as the primary methodology. The objectives were to explore the journalists' traumatic experiences, understand their coping mechanisms, examine the interplay between passion and compulsion in their profession, evaluate their reflections on job continuation, and assess the level of organizational support. A diverse sample of journalists from different regions, including Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit Baltistan, provided rich insights. Findings indicate that journalists faced significant challenges, witnessing and reporting on events such as bombings, accidents, and crime scenes. The physical and mental health impact was substantial, leading to health issues like diabetes and high blood pressure. Coping mechanisms varied, from resilience and passion to the thin line between passion and compulsion. Reflections on job continuation revealed a deep commitment to the profession despite challenges. Limited organizational support emerged as a common theme, with a disparity in the resources and training provided. The research contributes to the occupational stress theory by offering nuanced insights into the experiences of journalists, emphasizing coping mechanisms and organizational support. Practical implications include the need for improved mental health resources within media organizations, while recommendations suggest region-specific interventions and heightened awareness to foster a healthier work environment for journalists in Pakistan. This study serves as a valuable resource for media organizations, policymakers, and researchers interested in understanding and mitigating the occupational stress faced by journalists in challenging environments.

Keywords: Occupational stress, Journalism, Traumatic experiences, Coping mechanisms, Mental health impact, Media professionals, Pakistan

Introduction

In the challenging world of journalism, professionals often find themselves on the frontline, navigating traumatic events, and reporting on crises that shape the socio-political landscape. Individuals from various walks of life encounter numerous challenges in today's fast-paced and demanding society, which can adversely affect their mental health (Dworznic, 2020). Journalists frequently deal with variety of difficulties in both their personal and professional lives, which can be detrimental to their mental health. These difficulties could include being exposed to tragic events, continual deadline pressure, lengthy workdays, job insecurity, internet harassment and emotional strain of covering touchy and upsetting themes. It's important to comprehend how problems in life affect journalist's mental health for number of reasons. First of all, it emphasizes how critical it is for media industry to address mental health issues (Charlson, et al, 2019).

Earlier studies looked at how pressure from job affected journalists, this study focused explicitly on larger life difficulties that journalists experience and how those challenges affect their mental health. It is critical to comprehend how difficulties in life affect journalist's mental health because it not only impacts their general well-being but also has repercussions for accuracy and objectivity of their reporting. Journalists may be less able to carry out their duties as professionals and appropriately educate public if they are unable to deal with stress and trauma.

They are at a higher risk of encountering violent incidents, distressing situations, and hardships, among other challenges. This elevated likelihood raises the probability of them developing mental health disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. Covering sensitive and often distressing events such as natural disasters, conflicts, accidents, and criminal incidents is an integral aspect of the fast-paced and high-stress field of journalism.

Because of the nature of their work, individuals in this profession are consistently exposed to unsettling information, and this exposure can significantly impact their mental well-being.

In addition, journalists frequently encounter horrific events again, which can result in accumulated stress and probable psychological repercussions over time. Environment for journalism in Pakistan is complicated and continually changing. Development of digital media has created both novel possibilities and challenges for journalists, enabling them to reach larger audiences but also aiding in dissemination of false information. With their commitment to reporting truth and promoting educated public dialogue, journalists play crucial role in distributing information and influencing public opinion. They act as watchdogs, exposing major concerns and holding those in authority responsible. Journalists deliver accurate and trustworthy information to public, empowering them to make informed judgments through careful

research, investigation and fact-checking (Ananthan, 2017). By spotlighting neglected issues and providing underprivileged people voice, journalists frequently start to promote public dialogues as well as increase public empathy. These difficulties include restrictions, pressure from authorities and limitations on press freedom, which limit their capacity to report on sensitive issues and keep those in authority accountable. State actors, militant groups, and wealthy individuals target journalists with threats, abuse, and assault, endangering their physical safety. Assault on journalists frequently goes unpunished, which contributes to culture of fear and self-censorship. Cyber-attacks and digital spying pose additional risks to their employment. Economic difficulties, such low pay and employment insecurity, jeopardize their independence. Editorial biases may result from political influence and concentrated media ownership. In field of journalism, mental wellness is crucial. Particular difficulties and demands that journalists experience can have big impact on their wellbeing (Dworznik, 2011).

For journalists to carry out their tasks successfully, maintaining good mental health is essential since it affects their judgment, decision-making and capacity for ethical and sensitive communication. It guarantees their own perseverance and long-term viability in field. To emphasize well-being of their journalists and ultimately improve quality and integrity of their reporting, media companies must offer support networks, self-care services and an environment that encourages an open discourse about mental health. Long-term and serious effects of stress and trauma on mental health of journalists are possible. Journalists frequently work in stressful situations, reporting on delicate and upsetting events like conflicts, tragedies or crime scenes (Aoki et al, 2013). This anxiety and ongoing pressure can cause elevated levels of stress and worry about their safety, which can have long-term psychological repercussions. Journalists are exposed to witnessing human suffering, injustice and atrocities due to nature of their employment, which can cause moral harm and feelings of shame or powerlessness (Dworznik, 2006). Failure to care for their mental health may result in less job satisfaction, less productivity, as well as possible adverse effects on individuals concerned and on society as whole. Second, examining how daily struggles affect journalist's mental health might help build focused interventions and support networks. Measures to lessen detrimental effects on journalist's mental health can be put into place by understanding unique stressors and risk factors they deal with. This can entail offering instruction in stress management and resilience, encouraging work-life balance, creating supportive workplace environment and putting organizational policies that put mental health first into practice. Journalists who uphold their ethical obligation to present factual and impartial information enable people to establish their own opinions and actively engage in democratic procedures. Pakistani journalists must overcome variety of particular difficulties that make it difficult for them to report freely and independently. Both

individuals and organizations may help create healthier and more sustainable environment for journalists in demanding field of journalism by recognizing and addressing these concerns. Pakistani journalists encounter several obstacles in their efforts to expose truth and defend values of press freedom. Danger to their physical safety is one of major obstacles (Aoki, et al, 2013).

Significance of the Study

Study on effects of life problems on mental health, with an emphasis on how journalists handle stress in particular, is noteworthy in number of ways. First off, journalists face variety of stressors in their line of work, including pressure to meet deadlines, traumatic experiences and need to provide timely and accurate information. Understanding how journalists handle these difficulties can help us develop efficient methods for reducing stress and fostering mental health in high-stress professions. Besides, by highlighting particular experiences and coping techniques of journalists, results of this qualitative study can add to body of knowledge already available on mental health. They differ from other professions in that nature of their employment frequently entails reporting on sensitive and upsetting situations, which calls for specific analysis of their mental health issues. By examining coping mechanisms used by journalists, researchers might pinpoint both beneficial and harmful mechanisms that affect outcomes of mental health, thereby shaping interventions and support systems catered to their particular requirements. This study can provide insights into the broader societal implications of the mental health of media professionals. The mental well-being of a journalist is crucial for ensuring accurate and objective reporting, given their significant role in shaping public opinion and disseminating information. Identifying potential obstacles to effective journalism and implementing measures that promote resilience, work-life balance, and psychological support within news organizations can be beneficial. This involves understanding how life challenges impact individuals' mental health in order to foster a healthier and more supportive work environment.

Research Objectives

This research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the mental health challenges faced by journalists in Pakistan following their coverage of traumatic events. The first objective is to investigate how journalists perceive and experience the impact of reporting traumatic events on their mental health, exploring the emotions involved and potential variations based on individual differences. The second objective is to identify the coping mechanisms employed by journalists to manage psychological stress and trauma, evaluating their perceived effectiveness. The third objective is to assess the extent to which media organizations in Pakistan provide support and resources to help journalists cope with the mental health challenges associated with reporting traumatic events. The fourth objective is to analyze the role of workplace environments in either exacerbating or alleviating mental health

challenges for journalists covering traumatic events. The fifth objective is to explore the long-term psychological effects of repeatedly covering traumatic events on journalists in Pakistan, considering factors such as organizational support and coping strategies. The sixth objective is to examine cultural and contextual factors specific to Pakistan that contribute to unique mental health challenges in the journalism profession. Lastly, the seventh objective is to identify preventive measures and training programs that journalists in Pakistan believe would be helpful in minimizing the negative mental health impact of reporting on traumatic events. Through these objectives, the research aims to contribute valuable insights that can inform interventions, policies, and support systems for journalists in Pakistan.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do journalists in Pakistan perceive and experience the impact of reporting traumatic events on their mental health?

RQ2: What coping mechanisms do journalists in Pakistan employ to deal with the psychological stress and trauma resulting from reporting on traumatic events and how effective they are?

RQ3: To what extent do media organizations in Pakistan provide support and resources to help journalists cope with the mental health challenges associated with reporting traumatic events?

RQ4: What role do workplace environments play in either exacerbating or alleviating mental health challenges for journalists reporting on traumatic events?

RQ5: What are the long-term psychological effects of repeatedly covering traumatic events on journalists in Pakistan?

RQ6: Are there cultural, contextual or regional factors specific to Pakistan that contribute to unique mental health challenges in this profession?

Pakistani Journalism and Media

Since 2002, the Pakistani media has experienced rapid and substantial growth. As of now, Pakistan boasts over 200 radio networks, approximately 2,000 daily, weekly, and annual publications, and more than 100 television channels. Pakistan has experienced an atypical growth in the newspaper printing sector, with circulation numbers doubling from 3 million in 2002 to 6 million in 2015. This is noteworthy considering the global trend of declining print consumption. New entrants in the "war on terror" are placing significant stress on media organizations and journalists, especially in rural Pakistan. These new entrants are extremists and terrorists, effectively turning journalism into a perilous profession (Shah, et al, 2020). Pakistan has been consistently ranked among the top ten countries with the highest rates of retribution against those who have committed offenses against journalists by the global press safety organization, the Council to Protect Journalists (CPJ). This has been the case in twelve of the last fifteen years (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2018). Estimates suggest that Pakistan has a total of

20,000 journalists, with 1,622 of them being employed in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), (Ashraf, 2018). Pakistani journalists can be classified into three distinct groups: (1) those operating from major cities like Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad; (2) those stationed in bureaus in smaller towns throughout the country, including provincial capitals in more remote areas such as Peshawar and Quetta; and (3) those who report on news from more distant and outlying regions (Khan, 2011). As per Siddiqi's research in 2016, approximately 70% of these journalists are either untrained or lack formal journalism qualifications. It's important to note that journalists working in metropolitan areas generally receive better training, educational opportunities, employment conditions, and compensation (Buchanan & Keats, 2011). Conversely, reporters based in rural districts tend to have lower levels of education, training, and receive comparatively lower pay. The advertising landscape in Pakistan is characterized by prominent urban-rural distinctions and is marked by its multilingual and diverse nature. While the media tends to be concentrated in urban areas, it's important to note that over 67% of the population lives in rural regions.

However, thanks to the extensive network of correspondents employed by newspapers, including those stationed in rural areas, news from across the country generally finds its way into the media. Newspapers also reach far-flung regions of the country simultaneously. It's worth mentioning that the government and the military continue to wield significant influence over the media, even amidst its rapid expansion (Badour, et al, 2012).

PTSD and Journalism

The field of journalism is well-known for its high-stress environment, which exposes journalists to a spectrum of challenges, including traumatic events, censorship, job instability, and worries about their personal safety (Brady, et al, 2012). These challenges can have a significant adverse impact on the mental health of journalists, elevating their stress levels and increasing the risk of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is crucial to understand how adversity affects the mental health of journalists in order to develop interventions and support systems to mitigate these issues. Crime, accidents, and disasters often compel journalists to report on them. While covering such topics is considered a routine part of a journalist's job, there are significant risks involved. Firstly, exposure to such events has the potential to cause psychological distress and mental health problems (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005).

This study represents the first effort to explore the exposure of Pakistani journalists to work-related trauma within a broader context. The objective is to evaluate the prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms among Pakistani journalists and identify the factors linked to the occurrence of PTSD. This study uncovers that the participants were regularly exposed to events capable of inducing trauma and frequently experienced psychological

distress. Each participant had encountered at least one potentially traumatic event in the past year, with an average frequency of exposure to such events occurring approximately once a week (Lee, et al, 2018).

Because of the 'war on terror,' the Pakistani military launched a campaign against extremists and terrorists within the country, focusing particularly on regions bordering Afghanistan (Khalid & Roy, 2016). These actions led to thousands of individuals being forced to leave their homes and become Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), relocating to different areas (Ehsan, et al, 2019). Our study participants conveyed that covering the forced displacement was particularly distressing for them. Another noteworthy finding in this research is the acknowledgment of how journalists' coping mechanisms when dealing with stress influence the frequency and intensity of PTSD symptoms they undergo. It's important to highlight that in Pakhtoon communities, as well as in Pakistan overall, mental health is often not recognized as a significant health concern. The country grapples with a shortage of adequate resources for the diagnosis and treatment of mental health issues, including conditions like PTSD (Shah, et al, 2014). Moreover, journalism schools do not provide any training or education related to mental health. As a result, a considerable number of these journalists may not even be able to identify the presence of PTSD symptoms.

The cultural devaluation of mental health concerns, combined with limited awareness and resources, Khan (2019) might explain why these journalists often resort to avoidant emotional strategies, such as self-distraction, denial, behavioral disengagement, self-blame, and substance use. Interestingly, it was noted that even active emotional coping strategies, such as venting, positive reframing, humor, acceptance, and seeking emotional support, showed a positive relationship with the presence of PTSD symptoms. This finding is significant, given that these coping methods have traditionally been viewed as adaptive in Western settings, including within the field of journalism (Smith, 2018).

Lack of Resources and Difficult Working Conditions

Pakistani journalists encounter threats from both governmental and non-governmental entities while carrying out their professional responsibilities (Mezzera & Sial, 2010). According to the Pakistan Press Foundation's 2019 report, 72 journalists in Pakistan have lost their lives since 2002. In fact, a significant number of our study's participants mentioned that they had received verbal threats due to their journalistic activities. Existing literature also suggests that on a stress continuum, exposure to war and frequent terrorist attacks leads to substantial stress, while domestic stressors are comparatively less impactful (Osmann, et al, 2020).

Due to the nature of their work and the subject matter they cover, reporters as a profession are vulnerable to developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Pakistani journalists often find themselves on the front lines of war,

reporting on events such as terrorist attacks, political upheaval, and natural disasters. Research indicates that exposure to such stressful situations can lead to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges (Browne, et al, 2012). Pakistani journalists often work in challenging conditions characterized by financial constraints, inadequate training, and inadequate safety measures. Research indicates that these factors contribute to the enduring stress and burnout experienced by journalists.

Extended working hours, insufficient compensation, and a lack of opportunities for professional growth all contribute to mental health challenges among Pakistani journalists. The journalism industry faces several significant issues. Five key problems dominate the media's discourse: invasion of privacy, aggression, sensationalism, exploitation, and societal engagement (Backholm, 2010 & 2012).

Theoretical Framework

The **Occupational Stress Theory**, also known as Job Stress Theory, is a framework that explores the relationship between work-related factors and the physical and psychological well-being of individuals in the workplace. This theory is applicable to various professions, including journalism. The central premise of the Occupational Stress Theory is that certain aspects of the work environment can lead to stress, which, in turn, can have a significant impact on an individual's health, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life.

In the context of journalism, where professionals often face demanding and challenging work conditions, the Occupational Stress Theory can be applied to understand how the nature of the job contributes to stress and its associated consequences. Here are key components of the Occupational Stress Theory and their relevance to journalism, firstly journalists often encounter high job demands, including tight deadlines, the pressure to deliver accurate and timely information, exposure to traumatic events, and the need to adapt to rapidly changing situations. These demands can contribute to stress, especially when coupled with the unpredictability of news reporting. The theory emphasizes the importance of employees having control over their work and decision-making processes. In journalism, the level of control journalists have over their assignments, the stories they cover, and the decisions they make in high-pressure situations can influence their stress levels. Social support from colleagues, supervisors, and the organization is a crucial factor in mitigating stress. The theory suggests that having a supportive work environment can buffer the negative effects of stress. In journalism, the camaraderie among colleagues, supportive editorial teams, and organizational policies that prioritize employee well-being play a significant role. Job strain occurs when there is an imbalance between job demands and the resources available to meet those demands. For journalists,

this could mean facing overwhelming demands without adequate support or resources, leading to increased stress and strain. It often considers burnout as an outcome of prolonged exposure to stressors. Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Journalists who continuously cover traumatic events may be susceptible to burnout due to the emotional toll of their work. The theory recognizes that individual characteristics, such as coping mechanisms, personality traits, and resilience, can influence how individuals respond to occupational stress. In journalism, journalists' personal characteristics and coping strategies play a role in how they manage the challenges associated with reporting on traumatic events (Vampola & Hilt, 1996).

Research Methodology

This qualitative research employs semi-structured interviews as the primary data-gathering method to comprehend the impact of life challenges on the mental health of journalists in Pakistan. A total of 25 journalists from diverse regions are interviewed through a combination of random and snowball sampling techniques. The interviews, conducted either in person or through voice messages on WhatsApp, follow a semi-structured format, allowing participants to express themselves freely. The unit of analysis comprises journalists, reporters, and individuals affiliated with news channels. The interview protocol consists of open-ended questions and prompts designed to encourage participants to candidly discuss their experiences, challenges, and strategies for managing stress in both personal and professional spheres. Probing questions are employed to delve deeper into responses, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of individuals' coping mechanisms. Thematic analysis is applied to the qualitative data obtained from the interviews. This process involves familiarization with the data, creation of initial codes, identification of overarching themes, review and refinement of these themes, labeling, and synthesis into a comprehensive report. By immersing researchers in interview transcripts, capturing key concepts through codes, and identifying emergent themes, this methodology ensures a robust exploration of the nuanced aspects of journalists' psychological well-being. The research employs a random sampling method to select journalists who have faced significant life challenges and stress related to their work. This approach ensures a representative and unbiased selection of participants. The interviews are structured to cover key topics related to life challenges and stress comprehensively, with an emphasis on open-ended responses to capture the richness and complexity of journalists' experiences. The combination of random and snowball sampling, along with in-depth interviews, aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how journalists with varied life challenges perceive, experience, and cope with stress. This comprehensive approach contributes valuable insights to both the academic understanding of occupational stress in journalism and the development of

practical strategies for well-being within the profession.

Findings and Discussions

From recounting the harrowing scenes of bombings, accidents, and crime scenes to reflecting on the enduring physical and mental health impacts, each interviewee offers a unique perspective on the challenges and adversities faced in the pursuit of their profession. The multifaceted nature of trauma comes to the fore, transcending geographical boundaries and encompassing regions such as Karachi, Quetta, and Peshawar, Lahore and Islamabad each marked by its distinct set of challenges. This exploration not only sheds light on the stark realities faced by journalists but also underscores the profound psychological toll, evident in health issues ranging from diabetes to high blood pressure.

Traumatic Experiences

Multiple interviewees shared experiences of reporting on traumatic events such as bombings, accidents, and crime scenes. Witnesses to disturbing scenes, like burnt bodies or injured individuals, had a significant impact on the mental state of the journalists. A Karachi-based crime reporter shared his experiences and their impact on his life, "I covered numerous events, including Nishtar Bagh blast, major explosions, and fire cases in Karachi. I have also faced challenges of street crimes, with 128 people killed in the year and I also underwent three operations due to an explosion, with shrapnel remaining in my body." A female respondent from Sindh said, "I have covered humanitarian emergencies, climate change, and child protection. I have faced challenges during 2022's reporting on emergency tragedies in Sindh. I also confronted harassment, took a stand, and my case is still in progress." A Quetta-based reporter articulated, "Reporting in Baluchistan is not that easy, I have covered various events, including crime-related incidents and personally experienced severe injuries, enduring eight shell impacts and two bullet wounds.

I have been reporting during the conflict in Baluchistan and this is very challenging."

A reporter from Peshawar expressed her fear in articulating words during the live coverage of Army Public School (APS) incident, back in 2014, "I am primarily focused on health, sports, and social issues. I also covered significant explosions, including the APS tragedy and experienced mental stress from covering traumatic events. APS incident intensified fear and mental stress, I even faced challenges in speaking clearly during live coverage." A Lahore based political beat reporter said, "I have covered police operations, faced stone pelting, and violence during the Zaman Park political scene. I have reported on explosions at Data Darbar and experienced traumatic scenes and I recall those traumatic events that still linger in my memory."

Another respondent told, "I have covered a spectrum of events, beginning with

the first Afghan war during the Taliban's presence in Afghanistan and the subsequent occupation by coalition forces. My initial foray into Afghanistan occurred amidst the Taliban regime, and I have continued to report from there over time. In Peshawar, I extensively covered incidents, including bomb blasts, communal riots, and political events. Notably, during the Tehreek-e-Insaf rally led by Imran Khan towards Islamabad, I reported on instances of police violence. Additionally, I covered the tragic APS attack and the Meena Bazar explosion in Peshawar, resulting in the loss of over 100 lives. My reporting extended to incidents such as attacks on Christian churches in Kohati and violence against Shias in Islamabad's Imambargahs." A Swat-based reporter shared a terrifying experience, "In an inner Lahore residence, an entire family succumbed to a devastating fire, and I personally witnessed the charred remains of each family member. This was an entirely unprecedented and unbearable experience for me. Being inherently sensitive, I had never confronted such a situation before. However, the demands of my organization and professional obligations compelled me to report on this tragic incident. I went live with the distressing details, making it an exceedingly harrowing experience for me." Another reporter expressed, "We were situated in the outskirts of Peshawar when we received information about a bomb threat in Mashu Nagar at nine o'clock. Responding to the alert, we reached the location, and at that time, the bomb disposal unit was not as active. Our DSNG and we were present there, witnessing the bomb lying in plain sight. Additionally, in another instance in Peshawar, while standing with a DSP, we found ourselves amidst gunfire. Miraculously, we managed to escape unharmed from these perilous situations. Similarly, we faced a terrorist siege at a particular location, surviving the gunfire. Regardless of my emotional state, whether happy or sad, I maintain mental preparedness. Nowadays, I make an effort to stay close to the office, taking leave only for Umrah; otherwise, I rarely take time off."

Physical and Mental Health Impact

Many journalists mention the physical and mental toll of their profession, including health issues such as diabetes and high blood pressure. The demanding nature of the job, constant exposure to traumatic events, and the pressure to report accurately contribute to heightened stress levels. A Lahore-based reporter shared, "I still remember an incident during the Model Town tragedy where I was grabbed, and people attempted to force me into a car. The physical confrontation and the restrictive environment during such events may contribute to potential physical harm.

I also become disappointed and frustrated, because of the lack of freedom of press and the restrictions on reporting." While recounting different incidents another reporter told, "I have been reporting during emergency situations in KPK, including bombings and explosions. Such incidents pose potential physical risks to journalists covering them. I had a very bad psychological impact of witnessing horrific scenes, such as naked women affected by

explosions. But there is a gradual desensitization of such events.” Another interviewee responded, “Engaging in continuous reporting on emergency situations, particularly when covering distressing cases such as the girl Zainab rape and murder in 2018, has significant impact on me on both emotional and professional levels. The intense emotional distress I experienced stems from my empathetic connection with victims, leading to secondary traumatic stress symptoms akin to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). And the emotional burden carried from work spilled into my personal life, affecting my relationships and overall well-being.” A respondent from interior Sindh said, “The demanding nature of crime reporting, including facing threats and injuries from explosions, has led me to the physical consequences such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Mental pressure and stress resulting from reporting on traumatic events have taken a toll on my health, prompting consultation with a doctor. Reporting on traumatic events has led to heightened stress due to the demanding nature of the job. The responsibility of delivering accurate news without room for error, especially in crime reporting, contributes to significant psychological strain.”

These insights provide a glimpse into the physical and mental health challenges faced by journalists in Pakistan while reporting on traumatic events.

Coping Mechanisms

The journalists interviewed in Pakistan shared insights into their coping mechanisms while navigating the challenging landscape of reporting on traumatic events. A reporter from Karachi emphasized the resilience and dedication of crime reporters, highlighting their commitment to monitoring cases despite the risks involved. Another respondent underscored the importance of anticipation and preparation, citing training workshops and the support of press clubs as crucial tools for journalists dealing with difficult situations. A reporter, with 10 years of experience, reflected on the balance between passion and compulsion, with moments of contemplating leaving the field but acknowledging it as part of life. He also discussed the enduring impact of reporting on his mental state, citing memories of chaotic and violent situations that become ingrained in one's life. A female journalist with 10 years of experience, described the shock and dizziness she experienced after reporting on a terrorist attack that targeted children, emphasizing the importance of courage in dealing with such situations. An experienced journalist with 18 years in the field, discussed the psychological impact of bombings and the need to maintain normalcy during difficult reporting situations. He described the fear associated with reporting in emergency situations and the constant effort to control it while continuing the work. He shared his experiences of reporting during emergencies, emphasizing the need to remain calm and focused to handle difficult situations effectively. In contrast, a respondent, with 16 years of experience, revealed the psychological effects of reporting on traumatic incidents, acknowledging the difficulty of

overcoming the mental toll. Despite this, he highlighted the resilience and maturity developed over time, learning from mistakes and supporting each other within the reporting community. Another female interviewee in Peshawar discussed the emotional toll of reporting traumatic events and acknowledged the role of training workshops and press club support in helping journalists cope with such situations. A female reporter in Lahore opted for a career shift to teaching, seeking a less stressful job as a coping mechanism. One of the respondents shared experiences of mental stress during reporting, reflecting on the difficulty of covering traumatic events, including explosions and communal riots and also discussed the duty of journalists to face challenging situations and the impact of reporting on his psyche. One of the respondents from KPK recounted experiences in war zones and emergencies, acknowledging the psychological impact of reporting traumatic events and the challenges in articulating the emotions associated with such incidents. These interviews collectively highlight the diverse coping mechanisms employed by journalists, including personal resilience, institutional support, and adaptive strategies, to navigate the demanding and often traumatic nature of their work.

Passion vs. Compulsion

A recurring theme was the distinction between reporting as a passion and as a compulsion. While some expressed a genuine passion for journalism, others acknowledged it as a professional duty and obligation. The line between passion and compulsion blurred, especially in situations where the job required reporting on distressing incidents. A senior reporter explained, "Passion is the driving force, for without it, courage dwindles; as courage diminishes, the essence of one's purpose falters, leading to a sense of loss in the journey of life. It compels individuals to contemplate whether they are attaining what they originally sought in this world." Another respondent added, "Passion diminishes when it comes to professional duties, as obligations and responsibilities take precedence. There is no compulsion while on the job, and passion plays a significant role. I began with a strong passion, and financial rewards only entered the scene later. Whether money comes or the salary increases, the work is driven primarily by passion."

One of the female reporters explained, "Reporting is not obligatory; even in Gaza, journalists work with passion, and that passion remains strong today. Initially, journalism was a passion, but now in Pakistan, it has become mandatory. When higher-ups set the policy, we are compelled to follow suit. At first, journalism was something I loved, but nowadays, it's a requirement in Pakistan. We have to follow the directives of our superiors and adhere to the established policies." A reporter based in South Punjab exclaimed, "I worked as a beat reporter, and for me, it wasn't a matter of compulsion or passion. It was like any other job—if I had the role, I had to carry it out. Being a reporter involves reporting, and I saw it as a duty, similar to a soldier's commitment to their responsibilities. Just like a soldier follows

orders, I saw my role as one that required me to fulfill my reporting duties diligently.” One of the interviewees stated, “It's a requirement; you must report for the program. Doing your duty is not the same as having passion, but when you fulfill your duty consistently, it turns into a kind of passion.”

Reflection on Job Continuation

Some journalists admitted to questioning whether they should continue in the field after particularly challenging experiences. Despite the difficulties, the sense of duty, professionalism, and, in some cases, financial considerations played a role in the decision to persist in their jobs. As a senior reporter explained, “Often, my family urged me to quit, but I kept going. Even when I worked hard and faced challenges, not receiving recognition felt disheartening, especially when you're passionate about your work and want to make a positive impact for the people.” Another interviewee said, “No, I never thought of quitting journalism. Even now, despite being a teacher, I actively engage in journalism whenever I can. Journalism is not just my job; it's my life and passion. I never get tired of it and would continue doing it with enthusiasm.” A female reporter added, “These days, I've shifted to teaching as a visiting faculty at a university. I find it to be a delightful job with minimal stress, especially when I'm lecturing to the students. It brings me a sense of fulfillment and joy.” A journalist exclaimed, “When you opt for journalism, especially reporting, it becomes a responsibility to confront challenging situations. As a journalist, it's your duty to provide accurate information during emergencies.” These responses reflect the deep commitment of journalists to their profession despite the psychological and emotional toll it takes. The quotes underline the unique challenges journalists face and their resilience in continuing their work, often driven by a sense of duty and dedication to informing the public, even in the face of traumatic events.

Organizational Support

Limited support from institutions and organizations was a common theme. While some received support in terms of resources and training, others felt a lack of mental health assistance or advocacy. A reporter stated, “We don't receive support from any organization, and they don't help us. Our well-being and happiness depend on the help we receive from individuals, like yourself, who care about us and are trying to help us live a good life.” Another Lahore-based field journalist said, “We rely on an insurance policy, and our families receive financial assistance if something happens to us, like in the case of our death. The organization doesn't help us at all. They don't give us safety gear, and the working conditions they create are very challenging. Reporters don't receive proper training, making the situation even worse.” Another respondent from Peshawar added, “Keep in mind, institutions won't provide much assistance; they might just use you and discard you later. Those who pay your salary might consider it more than enough, stating that they can only afford to give you money and nothing

more. They won't offer additional support or help.” A reporter from Faisalabad said, “Currently, leading media organizations have taken the initiative to offer life insurance to their staff. In the unfortunate event of a natural demise, the bereaved families are entitled to receive compensation ranging from Rs. 30 to 50 lakhs. In cases of accidental death, the coverage extends further, providing compensation in the range of Rs. 60 to 80 lakhs. This demonstrates a proactive measure by these organizations to ensure financial support and security for the families of their employees during difficult times.” A female reporter from Sindh shared, “Both the Sukkur Press Club and Sukkur Union Club consistently stand by journalists, actively hearing out their concerns, and making genuine attempts to resolve issues. However, it's important to note that such extensive support is not universally prevalent, and numerous journalists encounter challenges with lingering problems that remain unresolved. This highlights the distinctive and commendable support systems provided by these specific clubs in Sukkur, emphasizing the rarity of such comprehensive assistance in the broader context of journalism.”

Unique Regional Challenges

The interviews reflect the unique challenges faced by journalists in different regions of Pakistan. For example, the interview from Quetta mentions the limited workforce, while the interview from Peshawar highlights frequent explosions becoming part of daily reporting. A Quetta-based reporter explained, “Baluchistan, a province in southwestern Pakistan, has faced persistent challenges in maintaining peace and stability. The conflict in this region became notably intense around the early 2000s and further escalated after the years 2005 or 2006. The complex nature of the issues has contributed to a volatile environment, impacting the lives of residents and posing substantial challenges for journalists, who operate in such tumultuous conditions. The heightened conflict has created a unique set of circumstances that journalists in Baluchistan must navigate while reporting on events and incidents in the region.” A Peshawar-based female reporter pointed out, “Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, has unfortunately become a region marked by frequent explosions and security challenges. For journalists, reporting in Peshawar means confronting the harsh reality of daily explosions, which have become a routine part of the news coverage. The city's journalists have adapted to these circumstances, developing a readiness to face any challenge that arises due to security concerns.” This highlights the resilience and preparedness required for journalists reporting from regions where the threat of explosions and other security issues is a constant presence in their professional lives.

Conclusion

The findings of this research shed light on the experiences of journalists in Pakistan who regularly report on traumatic events, providing valuable

insights into the occupational stress they face and the coping mechanisms employed. The findings highlight the profound psychological and physical toll, journalists face when reporting on events such as bombings, accidents, and crime scenes. The narratives underscore the pervasive nature of traumatic experiences, ranging from witnessing burnt bodies to surviving bomb threats and gunfire. These encounters contribute to heightened levels of stress, manifesting in both physical health issues, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, and profound mental health implications. The respondents recount instances of trauma, including the Army Public School attack in 2014, with emotions ranging from fear and mental stress to lasting traumatic memories. Beyond the individual level, the research also explores coping mechanisms employed by journalists, the complex interplay between passion and compulsion in their work, and the crucial role of organizational support, or the lack thereof. The diverse range of challenges faced by journalists in different regions of Pakistan, such as Baluchistan and Peshawar, further emphasizes the need for nuanced and region-specific approaches to address occupational stress in journalism. The research has significant theoretical and practical implications for the field of occupational stress theory, as well as for media organizations and policymakers.

Theoretical Implications:

The experiences narrated by journalists align with key components of the Occupational Stress Theory, reinforcing its applicability in the context of journalism. The theory's emphasis on job demands, control, social support, job strain, burnout, and individual factors resonates with the challenges faced by journalists in their day-to-day reporting activities. The narratives provide a nuanced understanding of how exposure to traumatic events, such as bombings, accidents, and crime scenes, contributes to heightened stress levels among journalists. The theory's focus on the impact of specific job demands on stress finds validation in the vivid descriptions of traumatic experiences shared by the interviewees. The coping mechanisms discussed by journalists, including personal resilience, anticipation and preparation, and the role of training workshops and press clubs, align with the theoretical framework of coping strategies within the Occupational Stress Theory. This highlights the importance of individual and organizational factors in mitigating the negative effects of stress.

Practical Implications:

The research underscores the need for enhanced organizational support for journalists, both in terms of mental health assistance and tangible resources. Media organizations should prioritize the well-being of their employees by providing adequate training, safety gear, and mental health resources to cope with the demands of the profession. Acknowledging and addressing the unique challenges faced by journalists in different regions, such as Baluchistan and Peshawar, is crucial. Organizations should tailor support

systems and training programs to the specific demands of these regions, recognizing the distinct stressors associated with reporting in conflict-prone areas. Media organizations should strive to foster an environment where journalists can maintain their passion for the profession while fulfilling their duties. Recognizing the interplay between passion and compulsion in journalism can guide organizations in creating supportive and fulfilling work environments. Continuous training programs, as emphasized by journalists, should be an integral part of media organizations. These programs can equip journalists with the skills and resilience needed to navigate traumatic events, enhancing their ability to report effectively while minimizing the potential negative impact on their well-being.

Recommendations:

Media organizations should invest in mental health resources, including counseling services and workshops, to help journalists cope with the psychological toll of their work. Creating a supportive environment that prioritizes mental health can contribute to long-term well-being.

Enhancing safety measures, such as providing safety gear and training for journalists covering hazardous events, is imperative. Organizations should prioritize the physical well-being of their employees to minimize the risks associated with on-field reporting.

Organizations should adopt a region-specific approach, recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by journalists in different areas of the country. Tailoring support systems to the specific demands of regions marked by conflict or frequent traumatic events is crucial for the overall well-being of journalists.

Journalists expressed frustration with the lack of freedom of the press and restrictive environments. Media organizations and industry associations should advocate for press freedom, ensuring that journalists can fulfill their duties without undue interference or threats.

In nut shell, this research contributes valuable insights to the Occupational Stress Theory and provides practical recommendations for media organizations and policymakers. By recognizing the unique challenges faced by journalists reporting on traumatic events in Pakistan, organizations can work towards creating healthier, more supportive work environments that enable journalists to fulfill their professional duties while safeguarding their physical and mental well-being.

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