



The Perceptions of Journalists Regarding Issues in Conflict Reporting

Mahboob Ali, PhD

International Islamic University, Islamabad

Email: mehboob22@hotmail.com

Abstract: Covering conflict reporting in Pakistan in general and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular is an overwhelming challenge for the journalists. Securities, lack of adequate information, authenticity of information, are the problems, among others, which badly affect journalists of the area under consideration. This study explores the perception of the journalists regarding the issues in reporting from conflict zone of district Swat, Pakistan. In order to investigate the major problems faced by the journalists of district Swat while covering conflict reporting, this study focuses on the quantitative survey of journalists registered with different press clubs of district Swat. The results of the study show that journalists working in conflict zone face several problems such as: vulnerability due to associated threats and killing of reporters, no access to information and its sources, Justice component in information collection and investigation, high risk in fact finding and reporting, risk in accessing insurgents for information, insufficient instruments for covering conflict reporting etc. The results of this study enable us to import better policy recommendations for the improvement of covering conflict reporting in conflict zone.

Key words: Journalists, Reporting, Conflict zone, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

1. Introduction

Conflict refers to a violent dispute or an incompatibility between or among groups arising from the disagreement with an abrupt suspension of dialogue or negotiation. Conflict may be symmetric or asymmetric. It is evident from the past experience that both freedom of speech and expression sometimes lead towards conflict. On the name of national interest and security this freedom is suppressed and the insurgent groups even target journalists.

In the global village of information, technology is helping media and media houses to provide in time information to the world. Today information can be spread and transferred from one corner of the world to other, without any meaningful barriers. Due to this fact access to information in twenty first century is no more a dream. Distances are no more hurdles in the way of communication and information and therefore, this era is considered to be an era of change and revolution. Experts in the field of journalism attributed three major functions to media, i.e. education, information and entertainment. Free and neutral media is an important factor for modern democracy and development. Media provides an opportunity to the people to express and convey their messages to the concerned authorities. Journalist and journalism today is considered to be the voice of oppressed and helpless people and not the voice of the ruling class only. It is pertinent to note that media also plays a role of watch dog and keep the people aware of corruption, injustice, violence, harassment and hostilities committed within the state particularly in the conflict zones. In this way the media plays a role as a fourth pillar of the state by serving the society at large.

A conflict is a contradiction of opinion, thinking, views which are not acceptable to opponent groups. As noted by pioneer in the field of Peace and conflict studies, Johan Galtung stated that unresolved conflict(s) always results in

violence. Journalist needs to understand that how to report in conflict situations. As we know that with the passage of time the number of conflicts is increasing and hence journalists face the music along with other victims. This conflict can be seen in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and Syria. But when it comes to Pakistan, the Operation Zarb-e-Azab started in North Waziristan almost one and half year ago, but the local journalists have no access or have very limited access to the conflict zone.

Conflict in Pakistan is going on since 2001. Even before that there were problems but after 9/11 and the US invasion in Afghanistan, the conflict spelled over to Pakistan. Initially it was in FATA, the tribal areas, then it spread to Swat and the rest of Malakand Division. So the people in this area and the journalist of this area have been affected more. That is why the highest number of casualties, were suffered, by journalist in FATA and KP. Almost 14 journalists were martyred in these two areas, KP and FATA. Conflict is of different kinds. We have sectarian conflict, ethnic conflict, and Baloch Separatist movement. In Karachi we have these different mafias, criminal mafia, drug mafia, land mafia and political parties using force to put pressure on the people. So I think the biggest threat to journalist is a threat to their life. More than 100 journalists have been killed in Pakistan since 2001. The people have to leave their home towns, they were displaced and people gave up journalism, they could not practice journalism because of the threat. I think the government has not been able to provide security. Rahimullah Yousufzai further explains that media organizations have also not been able to provide security to protect their workers. Media organizations should give their workers proper protection and security trainings because they are asking their reporters to work in these difficult conflict areas. Rahimullah Yousufzai also adds that impunity with which the attackers are killing journalists, and then they are not caught or punished, that actually emboldens them to launch more attacks against the media workers. We keep telling our colleagues that no report is import than your life. But we can do it and I also take risks because this is part of our job and we journalist want to get the best story, we want to get it before everybody else, we want to have a scoop; that's why we take risks. I keep telling young journalists, that no news, report or interview is precious than your life.

Pakistani electronic media got momentum in General (R) Musharraf regime when as policy licenses were given to private satellite news and entertainment channels. The media industry has been witnessed an immense growth and the number of journalists is increased from 2000 in 2002 to 20,000 in 2015. However, with this increase, the associated threats and challenges have also been increased with the passage of time. Almost, 100 journalists are killed since 2002. Number of journalists are kidnapped and about 200 injured in different incident. According to "Committee to protect journalists" (CPJ), Pakistan is among the list of 20 deadliest countries for journalists in the world.

This study explores the perception of the journalists regarding the issues in reporting from conflict zone of district Swat, Pakistan. Further, this study inquires role of the media in conflict in building credibility and trust. This study has been conducted in district Swat only. Due to limitation of time and resources, the study is limited to district Swat only. The female representation in the sample size is very low (only 8 percent). This study includes the journalists registered with Swat Press Club and no journalist is included from State run Media.

2. Methodology

In order to investigate the major problems faced by the journalists of district Swat while covering conflict reporting, this study focuses on the quantitative survey of journalists registered with different press clubs of district Swat. The journalists are working with print media; electronic media, radio and web radio are the target respondents for the survey. In the first phase, primary data is collected from journalists. Secondary data on quantitative variables are gathered from secondary sources. The main purpose of collecting secondary data is to show the state of media in Pakistan and the casualties of the journalists while covering reporting in conflict zone.

4. Findings

4.1 Respondents' Characteristics

A total of 100 respondents were interviewed in four selected press clubs of district Swat. In Mingora (Male=51; Female=04), in Barikot (Male=10), in Matta (Male=16, Female=2) and in Khwazakhela (Male=15; Female=02). The findings indicated that the sample respondents reported to be literate.

Table 1: Distribution of the Sample respondents on the basis of Gender & Area

Sex	Name of District				Total
	Mingora	Barikot	Matta	Khwazakhela	
Female	04	00	02	02	08
Male	51	10	16	15	92
Total	55	10	18	17	100

Source: Author's own calculation

Majority of the sample respondents, who were interviewed have no relevant education (74 out of 100). Out of 68 respondents who have got professional training, 47 have no relevant education

Table 2: Distribution of the Sample respondents on the basis of Relevant Education and Professional Training

Relevant Education	Professional Training		Total
	Yes	No	
Yes	21	5	26
No	47	27	74
Total	68	32	100

Source: Author's own calculation

It was found from the results of the study that majority of the sample respondents are married and have salary package below 10,000.

Table 3: Distribution of the Sample respondents on the basis of Salary Package and Marital Status

Marital Status	Salary Package						Total
	Below 10,000	10,001- 20,000	20,001-30,000	30001-40000	40001-50000	More than 50000	
Single	13	10	1	2	0	0	26
Married	38	17	10	2	2	5	74
Total	51	27	11	4	2	5	100

Source: Author's own calculation

The results regarding the association of respondents to different media form and their job description show that half of the respondents were associated to print media (50 out 100). 31 out of 100 were associated to both form of media i.e. print and electronic. Moreover, the results further show that majority of the respondents (46 out 100) were reporters.

Table 4: Distribution of the Sample respondents on the basis of Media Form and Job Description

Job Description	Association to Media Form			Total
	Print Media	Electronic Media	Both	
Reporter	18	09	19	46
Correspondent	19	01	06	26
Editor	10	01	02	13
Cameraman	00	08	02	10
Bureau Chief	03	00	02	05
Total	50	19	31	100

Source: Author's own calculation

The descriptive statistics show that majority of the respondents are associated national level organization (42 out 100). It is evident that most of the journalists have covered militancy (78 out 100).

Table 5: Distribution of the Sample respondents on the basis of Nature of organization and type of conflict you covered

Type of conflict you covered	Nature of organization				Total
	Local	Provincial	National	International	

Militancy	28	09	38	03	78
Ethnic Conflict	01	00	01	00	02
Religious	00	01	00	00	01
Political	07	01	01	00	09
Domestic Conflict	04	04	02	00	10
Total	40	15	42	03	100

Source: Author's own calculation

4.2 Problems Faced by the Journalist While Covering Conflict Reporting

Table 6 shows the perceptions of the sample respondents about professional issues faced by the journalists while covering conflict. It is evident from the results that 91 out of 100 respondents agreed with the notion that deadlines imposed on journalist while covering the conflict is difficult to meet. Table 6 shows that majority of sample respondents that is 99 out of 100 agreed with the notion that journalist are vulnerable because of the associated threats and killing of reporters. Most of the respondents 55 out of 100 agreed that journalist have no access to information and its sources. Most of the respondents; 84 agreed with the notion that justice component is there in information collection and investigation. Most of the respondents i.e. 99 out of total 100 agreed that there is high risk in finding facts and reporting. Most of the respondents 91 out of 100 agreed that there is high risk in accessing insurgents for information. Most of the respondents 93 out of 100 agreed with the statement that there are insufficient instruments for covering conflict reporting. Majority of respondents i.e. 96 agreed with the notion that most of the journalists that are operating in the area do not have proper equipment to meet the demands of reporting in conflict zones.

It is clear from the results of table 5.7 that journalists face professional issues while covering conflict.

Table 6: Sample Respondents' Perceptions about Professional Issues Faced by the Journalists while covering conflict

	Agree	Disagree	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig.
Deadlines imposed on journalists while covering this conflict is difficult to meet	91	09	67.240 ^a	0.00
Journalists are vulnerable due to associated threats and killing of reporters	99	01	96.040 ^a	0.00
Journalists have no access to information and its sources	55	45	1.000 ^a	0.317
Justice component is there in information collection and investigation	84	16	46.240 ^a	0.00
There is high risk in fact finding and reporting	99	01	96.040 ^a	0.00
There is risk in accessing insurgents for information	91	09	67.240 ^a	0.00
Journalists have insufficient instruments for covering conflict reporting	93	07	73.960 ^a	0.00
Most of the journalists operating in the area are not properly equipped to deal with the demands of reporting from conflict zones	96	04	84.640 ^a	0.00

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 50.0.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Concluding Remarks

Covering the conflict reporting in Pakistan in general and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular is a daunting challenge for the journalists. Securities, lack of adequate information, authenticity of information, are the problems, among others, which badly affect the journalists of the area under consideration. This study explores the perception of the journalists regarding the issues in reporting from conflict zone of district Swat, Pakistan. Further, this study inquires role of the media in conflict in building credibility and trust. A well-structured questionnaire is designed in order to collect the data from the registered journalists registered with various press clubs at Swat. In order to investigate the major problems faced by the journalists of district Swat while covering conflict reporting, this study focuses on the quantitative survey of journalists registered with different press clubs of district Swat. A total of 100

respondents were interviewed in four selected press clubs of district Swat. The findings indicated that the sample respondents reported to be literate. Majority of the sample respondents, who were interviewed, were found to be below graduate (47 out of 100). Majority of the sample respondents, who were interviewed have no relevant education (74 out of 100). Out of 68 respondents who have got professional training, 47 have no relevant education. It was found from the results of the study that majority of the sample respondents are married and have salary package below 10,000. The results regarding the association of respondents to different media form and their job description show that half of the respondents were associated to print media (50 out of 100). 31 out of 100 were associated to both form of media. The descriptive statistics show that majority of the respondents are associated with national level organization.

The perceptions of the sample respondents about professional issues faced by the journalists while covering conflict, it is evident from the results that majority of the sample respondents agreed with the notions that deadlines imposed on journalist, vulnerability because of the associated threats and killing of reporters, justice component in information collection, high risk in finding facts and reporting, high risk in accessing insurgents for information, insufficient instruments for covering conflict reporting and lack of proper equipments affect quality reporting in conflict zone. Except the statement of "Journalists have no access to information and its sources", the values of Chi-square for all remaining statements in table 5.7 are greater than the critical values, which mean that there is a significant difference between the actual data and the expected.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, it is recommended that

- The authorities should take into account the professional challenges faced by the journalists while covering conflict. The media organizations should provide necessary equipment including safety tools to the journalists. It is State's responsibility to provide protection and environment for work.
- While making editorial guidelines, media organizations should take into confidence the journalists working in the conflict zone.
- Media freedom should be ensured and the Government should not intervene and put unnecessary pressure on journalists and media organizations. Similarly, the Government should not blackmail media organizations through Government aids. Media being the fourth pillar of the state should be honored and should be recognized as watch dog.

References

- Saul, B. (2009a). The International Protection of Journalists in armed conflict and other violent situations. *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, 99-140.
- Schneider, A. K. (2009). International Media and Conflict Resolution: Making the connection. *Marquette Law review*, 93, 07.
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (1996). *Mediating the message: Theories of influences on mass media content* (2nd Edition ed.). New York, USA: Longman Publishers.
- Sjøvaag, H. (2005). "Attached or Detached? Subjective Methods in War Journalism". Master thesis submitted to Department of Information Science and Media Studies at the University in Bergen, 2005.
- Smith, A., & Higgins, M. (2012). Introduction: Reporting war-history, professionalism and technology. *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 5, 131-136.
- Sonia Gutiérrez Villalobos (2005). Pro-conflict and pro-cooperation coverage: The San Juan River conflict. *Conflict & Communication online*, 4(1).
- Valdés, C. S., & Lorite, J. S. (2006). War Journalism: Instrumentalizing media in Iraq (2003-2004). In A. I. Gray, I. Al-Marashi, A. I. Gray, & I. Al-Marashi (Eds.), *Peace and Conflict: Europe and Beyond*. Bilbao, Spain.
- Valentina Bau (2014). Building peace through social change communication: participatory video in conflict affected communities. *Community Development Journal Advance Access published May 2, 2014*. Oxford University Press and Community Development Journal.
- Zubascu, FV. (2013). Media independence and democracy: influential relations between journalists, politicians, ownership and advertisers in Romania. MA dissertation, Department of Political Science, Central European University.