

Face-to Face with COVID-19: Experiences of Ghanaian Frontline Journalists Infected with the Virus



Kodwo Jonas Anson Boateng and Redeemer Buatsi

Abstract Journalists around the world have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, media houses have had to make drastic adjustments to the impact of challenges wrought by the pandemic on their operations. Ghanaian media houses also faced similar challenges and disruptions. News reporters and journalists felt the impact of these disruptions with many Ghanaian journalists losing their jobs. This study used affective-emotive theoretical perspective to examine how the possibility of contracting COVID-19 could affect or trigger emotions of fear and anxiety among Ghanaian journalists. The study set two main objectives (1) what workplace safety policies and protocol guidelines were established in newsrooms to mitigate the spread of the virus and (2) to what extent did journalists fear for the safety and well-being of close family members because of their journalism work. The study conducted in-depth unstructured interviews with five journalists who had recovered from the COVID-19 infections. The study found that despite high degrees of fear and anxiety among respondents about on-assignments and workplace infections, respondents still maintained ‘emotional detachment’ to attain objectivity in news reporting. Respondents also expressed high degrees of fear of exposing family members to the virus.

Keywords COVID-19 · Emotional detachment · Emotional stress · Ghanaian journalists

Introduction

The narrative above (abstract) culled from Ghana’s leading online news portal typifies the experiences of most frontline journalists in Ghana who contracted the COVID-19 virus in the line of duty. Though no official records exist, the Ghana

K. J. A. Boateng (✉)

Department of Integrated Social Sciences, Ghana Institute of Journalism, Accra, Ghana

R. Buatsi

School for Graduate Studies and Research, Ghana Institute of Journalism, Accra, Ghana

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Journalists Association (GJA) estimates that over 50 Ghanaian journalists contracted the COVID-19 virus since March 2020. It is difficult to ascertain the true numbers since most journalists, especially freelance journalists failed to disclose their status for fear of stigmatisation.

As in many other countries including Ghana, news organisations, media houses and journalists faced daunting challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the peak of the pandemic in Ghana, many news organisations adopted stringent work policies that enabled them to stay financially viable. Most newsrooms reduced staff, adopted shift systems or remote reporting, and in more severe instances, laid off staff. In a comparable situation in the Philippines, Bernadas and Ilagan (2020) reported that many journalists worked from home while under nationwide lockdown. An interesting outcome of this remote work was the creative adaptation of mobile journalism (MOJO) and social media applications for newsgathering and reporting (Bolledo 2020; Tantuco 2020). Most Ghanaian journalists and media houses improvised and adapted to social media apps like Zoom and WhatsApp for live interviews. A challenging feature of the pandemic, however, was the toll it took on the psychology and physical well-being of journalists around the world. Various scholars have reported on the high degrees of physical stress and emotive anxieties that most journalists suffered during the pandemic (Posetti et al. 2021). Ghanaian journalists and frontline reporters reported similar anxieties as their Filipino colleagues who contracted the virus (Bernadas and Ilagan 2020).

As of December 2019, the news media in Ghana had created false impressions about the spread, infectious nature and patterns of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impression among Ghanaians was that the spread of the pandemic was confined to China and a few western countries with the hope that Africa was immune to the virus due to hot temperatures on the continent. However, by the beginning of the New year, 2020, Ghana had recorded significant COVID-19 infections. By March 21, 2020, health authorities reported 3 deaths and 21 confirmed cases (Citi news 2020). Ghana's air, sea and land borders were subsequently closed on March 22, 2020 in a measure to restrict the spread of the virus. In an address to the nation on March 27, the President of Ghana, Nana Addo-Dankwa Akuffo Addo, announced a mandatory quarantine for 78 persons infected with the virus. Schools, churches, and night clubs were shut down and aban on public gathering was included. As further measure to slow the spread, the Government imposed a two-week partial lockdown on two major cities and municipalities in Accra and Kumasi. Only medical, security personnel, and other essential service officials, designated 'front-line workers', had special permissions and passes for free movement. In addition, a comprehensive contact tracing regime was established to identify possible persons who had come into contact with infected persons. Nevertheless, by the end of April 2020, the infection rate had spiked to 152 cases with 5 deaths, 22 recoveries and 125 active cases (World Health Organization 2020b). Compared to other African countries like South Africa or Nigeria, the infection rate in Ghana stabilized leading to lifting of the mandatory two-week lockdown. By May 2020, Ghana had over 95 COVID-19 recovered cases.

Additional precaution included the distribution of essential Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to medical personnel and designated frontline workers. Interestingly, journalists and allied media workers at the spearhead of COVID-19 awareness creation campaigns were sidelined, ignored, ‘forgotten’ or overlooked. According to Høiby and Ottosen (2019) this was a widespread practice in most countries. They pointed to the ‘lack of safety and security for reporters’ (p. 70). Despite the likelihood of contracting the virus, newsrooms continuously assigned reporters to pandemic-related events. Frontline reporters bravely visited and reported from isolation centres. Posetti et al. (2021) noted similar situations in other jurisdictions. Aside from the risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus, frontline journalists also faced threats of physical assaults, and harassment from either government officials, security personnel, prominent news actors and the public. In Ghana, a local radio station manager for *Deutsche Welle*, on a COVID-19 related assignment, was assaulted by security personnel, instead of sympathising with the journalist, one editor used the moment to reproach Ghanaian journalists for being timid in the face of such assaults. He believes that journalists should stand up and defend their rights:

I think it is high time Journalists registered their public displeasure on matters of their conditions of service and legitimately use their arsenals to press home their demand for what rightfully belongs to them. We cannot continue acting the same old same and expect different results. The corona Pandemic is here with us and Journalists are at a crossroads, but we have no option than to cover it to the letter because it is our civic responsibility, failure of which would mean we are renegeing on the main tenets of our profession. (Mawugbe 2020)

According to media scholars like Ojebode (2020), though such assaults threaten media freedoms, in most African countries it increased the anxiety, fear and insecurity for journalists (Ojebode 2020; Orgeret and Tayeebwa 2020; Høiby and Ottosen 2019). The Deputy Director-General of UNESCO had earlier warned that:

Safety for journalists is a matter of public concern that is wide-ranging. It is vital for those who practice journalism, for their families and for their sources. It is essential for the wellbeing of media institutions, civil society, academia, and the private sector more broadly. If we value the free flow of information for citizens, their governments, and their international organisations, then the safety of journalists is central. (Henrichsen et al. 2015)

The aim of this chapter is to explore the emotive stress experienced by the Ghanaian frontline reporters who contracted COVID-19. The study set two main objectives (1) what workplace safety policies and protocol guidelines were established in newsrooms to mitigate the spread of the virus and reduce the emotional stress for frontline journalists and (2) to what extent did the safety and wellbeing of close family members of frontline reporters increase their stress and anxiety.

The chapter examines these questions through the affective-emotive lens. The chapter argues that affective and emotion discourse presumes that a journalist who witnesses tragic, traumatic accidents and incidents of human suffering and distress may be affected by such incidents. It is therefore likely that such distressing incidents can trigger anxieties, fear, and other mental/psychological emotions in these journalists which may lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Monteiro and Marque-Pinto 2017). Thus, aside from the risk of contracting the virus, frontline

reporters are more likely to suffer mental stress, anxiety and fear which may lead to PTSDs (Bolton n.d.). The study reports experiences of five Ghanaian frontline journalists who contracted the COVID-19 virus in their line of duty. The narratives that are shared in this chapter provide African media researchers insights into studying the relationship between emotional stress assignments and threats against the mental well-being of African journalists. The study also affords opportunities for Ghanaian journalists to ventilate their views on wide ranging issues surrounding work conditions during the pandemic. The research replicates Peseckyte's (2020) multimedia project that provided a digital platform for selected journalists in the UK to share their work experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Affective Perspective: Journalism and Emotional Stress

Discourses on the media and its affectations have centred on audience and media use, ignoring the impact of content generation on media workers. Various media effects theories—agenda-setting, uses and gratification, cultivation theories etc., have examined the direct and indirect effect of media content on audience behaviour, actions and attitudes (Valkenburg and Oliver 2019). The assumption is that media content affects audience psychologically, triggering or inciting certain emotional reactions and responses. Media content tends to induce mood arousals, which trigger emotional feelings such as pleasure, pain, passion, melancholy and others. Thus, the media and its content become an 'embodied force that influences the mind' of its audience. Such assumptions dovetail into Baruch Spinoza's definition of 'affect' as 'the modifications of the body whereby the active power of the said body is increased or diminished, aided or constrained. . .' (Shepard 2004).

Theoretically, the discourse surrounding affect and its emotive trigger is complex. A number of scholars associate affect with emotions or use them interchangeably (Choi 2018; Anderson and Harrison 2006; Thien 2005). Choi's analyses of Gustafson, Aquinas and Edwards' interpretations of the dichotomy inherent in the notions of affectation and emotion provide some useful pointers. On the one hand, Choi emphasises that 'affectations are bound to but functionally distinct from the emotions' (p. 114). On the other hand, emotions are perceived as reactions to and responses to external stimuli that cause affectations which in turn trigger internal emotions. By this interpretation, external affective forces stimulate emotions like love, fear, anger, anxieties and stress.

Although risk assessment studies of journalists tend to concentrate on physical risks, assaults, and issues of physical threats on journalists, studies by Høiby and Ottosen (2019) and Bolton (n.d.) find that the coverage of tragic, traumatic events and disturbing images have stressful impact on the emotions of journalists or reporters. Høiby & Ottosen argue that aside the risks of getting killed or injured in conflict zones, frontline war reporters are also likely to experience bouts of post-traumatic stress. Bolton adds that like first responders, reporters who cover disaster stories, fire and accidents assignments involving human suffering are likely to

experience similar post-traumatic stress disorders. In another study, Feinstein et al. (2002) reported that war correspondents tend to experience higher levels of psychological distress than their counterparts who work on normal assignments. Other studies (Kotisoa 2019; Stephen 2017) report that journalists develop emotional detachment as a means of coping with bouts of PTSD. However, in some cases, young and inexperienced reporters regard accident and fire assignments as exhilarating experiences and a crucial part of professional growth and achievement. Such beliefs buck assertions that the journalism professional ideology considers accident, war as well as crises reporting as the pinnacle of achievement in the profession (Kotisoa 2019). Stephen (2017) for instance recounts his experiences covering sensational and traumatic events during his young days in journalism. In his doctoral thesis titled *'Affective Journalism—uncovering the Affective Dimension of Practice in the Coverage of Traumatic News'*, Stephen explores how journalists cope with the stress and strains of covering news incidences related to war, accidents and turmoil. According to Stephen, journalists are obliged to maintain a 'cool detached' professional sense and mentality in covering such assignments. Journalists such as Fergal Keane (BBC), John Laurence (CBS) and Margaret Bourke-White (a private female photojournalist) are among the few war correspondents who have documented the psychological impact war coverage had on them in their line of duty. Thus, Peters (2011) claims that journalists are continuously engaged in 'emotion management' which is central to the emotional nature of their work. Despite these studies, Kotisoa calls for more critical studies in the area: 'Not only have media scholars started to pay attention to the fact that media is an emotionally charged environment and to suggest that personal, affective, and emotional engagement with news work needs to be considered carefully' (p. 16).

Kotisoa posits that all aspects of journalism including digital journalism are an *'emotional labor'* that may create mental health challenges and may ultimately evolve into serious PTSD.

Indeed, symptoms of PTSD are evident not only among on-the-spot reporters, but also among the staff working on a frontline which is no longer geographic but digital. One of the reasons might be that post-traumatic reactions are not determined solely by being on the scene and directly witnessing human suffering, but are also related to increased exposure to dilemmas, feelings of guilt, or tension between journalists' beliefs about professionalism and its practice in the field. (Kotisoa 2019)

Like other crimes and accident scene reporters, war correspondents, crises reporters and frontline COVID-19 reporters are certainly amiable to emotional and psychological risks. Posetti et al. (2021) reveal that though most journalists have conflicting impressions of the impact of the pandemic, an outstanding impression relates to high levels of psychological and mental strain of COVID-19 on frontline reporters.

70% of our respondents rated the psychological and emotional impacts of dealing with the COVID-19 crisis as the most difficult aspect of their work. A similar number (67%) identified concerns about financial hardship as a significant difficulty, while the intense workload was ranked the third biggest challenge, ahead of social isolation and the risk of actually contracting the virus. (Posetti et al. 2021, p. 2)

The fact that most journalists expressed fear and anxiety of contracting the virus and going into self-isolation provides sufficient evidence to support Reinardy's (2011) hypothesis of the high stress levels experienced by most journalists on the job. An International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) 2020 survey also claims that 'half of all journalists were suffering from stress and anxiety' as a result of the pandemic. PEN America reports that some journalists, especially, White House correspondents expressed similar fears and anxieties reporting from the White House which had been declared a Coronavirus hot zone after President Donald Trump contracted COVID-19. The White House Press Corps Association issued a precautionary notice to its members:

That means that we as a press corps, and each of us individually, must be cleareyed about the potential risks of COVID-19 exposure on the job, taking every precaution we can to fulfil our coverage obligations while being prepared for situations with which we may not be comfortable. (PEN America—Freedom to write 2021)

Workplace Safety Guidelines

Newsrooms around the world instituted elaborate regulatory guidelines and safety protocols to curb the spread of the virus in newsrooms and among media workers. In June 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued a warning bulletin that the workplace posed a substantial risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus. The WHO recommended implementation of protective measures and guidelines to protect workers around the world (World Health Organization 2020a). These recommendations consisted of basic safety protocols including provisions of wall-mounted hand sanitizers, introduction of frequent handwashing protocols, frequent cleaning of workstations with alcohol-based wipe tissues, the compulsory wearing of nose masks and transparent shields, introduction of remote reporting, social distanced sitting arrangements in addition to reduction in newsroom personnel and location crews.

The Ministry of Health in Ghana, in collaboration with the Public Services Commission issued an eight-point contingency safety measures in March 2020 for workplaces. Key among the measures was the directive to Human Resource units to issue education pamphlets, on office notice boards and on organisations' internal social media platforms stipulating various 'Dos and Don'ts' in line with COVID-19 safety protocols (Public Services Commission 2020).

In places like East Africa, Kenya media houses worked with the BBC, Protect Consortium and some UK-based news organisations to develop and implement comprehensive safety guidelines and protocols. The guidelines recognised the risk to exposure and infection by journalists and other media workers. It recommended frequent reassessment of newsroom situations to forestall spread of the virus in newsrooms. The guidelines listed the following assessment areas; Identification of clinically vulnerable people, work patterns/shifts, breaks during the day and potential changes, studios and studio operations, crews and deployments—how many

people should be on any given assignment, including use of local correspondents to reduce travel, newsroom sitting arrangements, equipment handling and storage and hygiene measures, including provision of water and soap, and/or alcohol-based hand sanitisers at vantage points in the workplace.

Impact of the Pandemic on Journalism Work

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affected all spheres of the global economy. As of January 2021, over two million people had died from COVID-19 related complications (New York Times 2021). The pandemic had a devastating impact on the media industry and journalism profession around the world affecting an already dwindling business. The pandemic came at a time when most media industries were adjusting business models to accommodate the destabilising intrusion of Internet technology and social media. For instance, in the United States, several news outlets were grappling with low advertising revenues due to low readership and a decline in audience ratings among other challenges. Writing in an op-ed in *Sowetan Live*, Daniels (2020) argues that the combined forces of digitalisation and COVID-19 reshaped newsroom work in South Africa leading to massive retrenchments and salary-cuts even in state-owned media houses like the SABC. In Ghana, the media industry [was] already in dire straits (Asante 2020). Most media houses responded to the dwindling advertising market by adapting and implementing drastic cost-cutting measures to stay afloat in an already competitive media market. The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) reported that as of 2015, over 160 newspapers had vanished from newsstands in Ghana. The intrusion of digital news platforms shifted news consumption patterns especially among the youth. Massive government investments in Internet infrastructure increased Internet connectivity to almost all parts of Ghana. Comparatively Internet data is relatively affordable, all of which helped to deepen the penetration rate of Internet use in Ghana (Media Federation for West Africa 2018). The onset of the pandemic destabilised an already challenging media economy in most countries including Ghana (Alexandre et al. 2020). A result of a survey conducted by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in April 2020 supports assertions made here. The IFJ survey of over 1300 journalists from 77 countries, reveals the extent to which freelance journalists faced massive job losses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings also reiterate Reinardy (2011) and positions that there was growing anxiety and fear among journalists over job losses due to the negative effects of the pandemic. According to Asante, over 5000 journalists had so far lost their jobs in South Africa.

Against this backdrop and with the onset of the pandemic, the IFJ pointed to the high levels of stress and anxiety most frontline journalists experienced covering COVID-19 related assignments. In most countries, some journalists expressed anxiety over insufficient provision of Personal Protective Equipment—PPEs—expected to ensure the safety of frontline reporters on COVID-19 related assignments. Posetti et al. (2021) reported that the fear and anxiety of contracting the virus

ranked high on the list of significant psychological and emotional fears journalists harboured in relation to coverage of the pandemic. The Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) also argued that all results indicated that frontline journalists were all eager to ensure maximum safety during COVID-19 related assignments, yet it was apparent that frontline journalists were stressed by the high probability of contracting the virus in the line of duty. To forestall this, the CPJ issued a safety advisory caution to all frontline journalists asking them to ensure their work activities did not threaten the health and well-being of themselves, their immediate family and friends (Committee for Protection of Journalists-CPJ 2020). Despite these cautions, the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) speculated that over 50 journalists had been infected and recovered from the virus.

Ghana Media Landscape

Reliable data of the population of journalists in Ghana is difficult to come by (Asante 2020). At the time, the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), was the only entity compiling the most reliable and up-to-date register of members in good financial standing. Data of the number of journalists in Ghana was released in February 2021 by the GJA, in preparation of the general assembly and elections of new executives, indicated that the Association had 656 registered members (Ghana Journalists Association 2017).

Ghana had been one of the poster-boys of media freedoms on the African continent. Ghanaian private editors and media scholars were active in the processes, culminating in the formulation of the 1991 Windhoek Declaration in Namibia, a process which finally kick-started media and press freedoms on the African continent. Since 1992, Ghana instituted a largely free media system giving preference to private participation in a vibrant media economy ensuring establishment of free and plural media without much restrictive regulation on freedoms of speech and expression (Asante 2020). For instance, Chapter 12, article 162 sub-sections 3 and 4 of Ghana's 1992 Constitution stipulates that:

There shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media; and in particular, there shall be no law requiring any person to obtain a licence as a prerequisite to the establishment or operation of a newspaper, journal or other media for mass communication or information.

Editors and publishers of newspapers and other institutions of the mass media shall not be subject to control or interference by Government, nor shall they be penalized or harassed for their editorial opinions and views, or the content of their publications. (Constitute 2020, p. 87)

One consequence of this broad mandate makes Ghana's media landscape one of the most highly deregulated and most competitive in Africa. Consequently, the country's 30 million people are served by a plethora of media houses. By 2017, Ghana's National Communication Authority (NCA) had granted frequency licenses to 128 organisations to establish and operate television broadcast services across

cable, terrestrial wireless and satellite platforms. As of June 2020, 437 commercial FM radio stations, 33 public service stations, 81 community and 21 campus radio stations were operational in Ghana (National Communication Authority 2020). The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) argues that while newspaper consumption is on the decline, most Ghanaians consume information mainly from radio and online media.

Many notable Ghanaian journalists hold either diploma, Bachelor or master's degree certificate but a majority still practise without any qualification or training in journalism. This is partly due to the inability of media owners to pay qualified journalists. On average, trained and qualified journalists earn between \$300 and \$500 a month (Paylab-Ghana 2021). This makes the journalism profession one of the least paid professions in the country. In addition to the low salary levels, the profession in Ghana is very volatile with high levels of attrition and low employment possibilities (Asante 2020).

Study Design

Unofficial records of the GJA reported that over 50 journalists contracted the COVID-19 virus. On June 18, 2020, one of Ghana's high-profile sports journalists working with Multimedia Group Limited became the first journalist to publicly reveal his COVID-19 infection status. In a short live video on his Facebook page, he walked viewers through the quarantine isolation centre, narrating his daily ordeal and suffering of the disease. He cautioned the public to follow the protective protocols faithfully in order to avoid infection. He was part of five other journalists at Multimedia that had tested positive for the virus. By October, his courageous act of public disclosure punctured the wall and veil of silence among journalists, forcing some infected journalists to publicly disclose their COVID-19 status. Even though media houses engaged in anti-COVID stigmatisation awareness campaigns, a large majority of journalists hid their infection status.

This study reports on in-depth conversational interviews with five frontline reporters from Multimedia Group and Media General. These two media houses are Ghana's leading private broadcast media outlets. The five respondents had recently recovered from the virus infection and returned to reporting duties in their respective newsrooms. The study also conducted a content analysis and reported narratives of journalists infected with COVID-19 from online news portals. In addition, names of some of the respondents were changed to ensure anonymity.

Frontline Journalists: Of Experiences and Anxieties

Lily (*not real name*), a 30-year-old radio news reporter with nine years of working experience in journalism was a key frontline COVID-19 reporter. Lily was part of

the media team embedded with the Zoomlion Ghana Limited's sanitation team on a nation-wide disinfection exercise. Lily, married with two children, travelled mostly around the country reporting on the disinfection and sanitation exercise.

During the interview, Lily described the early symptoms of the infection to include fever, cold and strong dry throat and cough. She noticed these symptoms after the first phase of the exercise (the disinfection exercise occurred in distinct phases. As of January 8, 2021, the third phase of the exercise had begun. The exercise was started as a way of reducing the spread of the Coronavirus through disinfection of public spaces by Zoomlion Ghana Limited contracted by the government of Ghana through the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Sanitation). After a few days of persistent dry throat and cough and especially the loss of sense of taste and smell, she suspected she was showing symptoms of the virus and decided to test. The test came out positive. Lily recounts her fear, anxiety and traumatic experience over contracting the virus. 'As a victim of COVID-19, I must say it's very terrible to be in that situation which makes life extremely uncomfortable and scary to even associate yourself with others.'

Lily's experience mirrored that of Grace, a 26-year-old radio and television news reporter and an anchor with one of Ghana's leading private media houses. Grace reported from the frontline of COVID-19 isolation centres. During the peak of the pandemic, Grace reported from isolation centres interacting constantly with infected patients around the country.

She claimed she was constantly scared and anxious anytime she visited these isolation centres. Interestingly, she and other journalists were consistently advised by health officials not to express their fears due to stigmatisation. The admonition for journalists to maintain emotional detachment from stories affirms Stephen's assertion that '*detachment was a hallmark of professionalism*' in journalism (p. 168). Kotisova maintains that the principle of achieving objectivity in journalism reports imposes obligations on journalists to maintain emotional distance and detachment from the subjects and individuals of their reports. This sense of 'detachment' is amplified in Grace's philosophical declaration of 'achievement and a sense of unity of purpose' after her recovery.

Personally, COVID-19 came to make me brave, because after visiting most of the isolation centres, the fear of the disease as well as other fears were gone, and it gave me more confidence in myself that I can do a lot of things. It also unified us as a people, as everyone came together with the sole aim of fighting and defeating the virus.

First, it is important to note how Grace contracted the virus and secondly is necessary to recognise how Grace's narrative provides significant insights into how, despite all the recommended workplace guidelines, journalists could easily contract the virus from outside sources. Grace's experience affirms the notion and possibility of on-assignment infections.

At a point when I came back from my normal assignments at the Korle Bu Teaching hospital, my eyes were red and itching and I was coughing and that was the same time WHO had announced that the eye was another entry point for the virus. I however did not test positive for it at the time, although I had the symptoms.

Another frontline journalist of the Multimedia Group, Raymond, discussed his misery, fears and anxieties on public radio after contracting the virus. But Raymond's Facebook and Twitter posts on January 9, 2021 provided the public valuable insights of his emotive state of mind. He gave vivid accounts of the extent of his fears and anxiety. His narrative also reflected similar emotions and fears expressed by most journalists who recovered from the infection.

Gratitude Saturday: My Covid Story! I rise this day to thank the Almighty for keeping me alive! COVID-19 battered, bruised, and brought me to the lowest ebb! There was a point, when the going got tough and they kept upgrading my respirators for oxygen with more complex machines, I just asked God to take my life away and put me out of my misery! But God came through for me. I am also eternally grateful to my wife MzGee Ghana, who braved the storm to help me pull through it all! To my doctor Dr Tanko, those wonderful doctors at Nyaho Medical Centre especially, Ofori Anti and Dekpor and their lovely nurses! I say ayekoo! Finally, friends I lived most part of the year in the UK without COVID-19, got it in Ghana and it almost killed me without any underlying medical condition! Please be careful!

Workplace and Safety Policy

The interview narratives reveal the workplace as an incubator for the spread of the virus. At least the narratives of Israel clearly indicate that some workers pass on the virus to their colleagues in the newsrooms. Generally, media houses instituted precautionary measures, insisting their workers follow religiously full safety protocols. Multimedia Group for instance introduced news presentations via Zoom and instituted shift systems for journalists. Alexandre et al. (2020) reported that similar systems were established by most newsrooms in the Philippines.

In the meantime, in Ghana, most media organisations ensured that radio studios and interview consoles were partitioned by glass while all staff and visitors wore mandatory face and nose masks. News crews were supplied with telescopic microphones to ensure reasonable social distance. Meanwhile, newsroom gadgets were regularly sanitised by cleaning staff.

As pointed out above, the Public Services Commission's eight-point Coronavirus (COVID-19) workplace contingency measures recommended the following; a ban on local non-critical conference/seminar/workshops/face-to-face/meetings/gatherings, provision of basic preventative items and measures such as hand sanitisers, alcohol, access to soap and running water, paper towels and proper waste disposal items, encouraged employees who felt unwell to stay out of work and seek immediate medical attention, public health education in the form of simple 'Dos and Don'ts' displayed on notice board, emails and other vantage points (The Office of the Public Service Commission 2020).

Despite these measures, there is ample evidence that some journalists were infected through workplace contacts. Israel's narrative below affirms this idea of the workplace as a possible infection point:

Do I know how I may have been infected? I have a few suspicions. When I had to resume work physically to the office after working from home for a few months at the height of the pandemic, I didn't take chances at all. I packed my meals and drink to the office from home and had my lunch in my car. No canteens, no restaurants, and no eating together with colleagues. I wouldn't let a "stranger" drive my car to even repark it, because I was scared of possible contamination. I stopped going to the make-up room. I made-up myself before going on air. I sanitized my hands and space before I took off my mask in the studio. I stopped going to the barber. He rather came home. I ensured I washed my hands, disinfected, and had my mask on. Admittedly, after a significant decline in the number of cases though, I eased my strict preventive protocols somewhat and visited the office canteen. I ate in restaurants even though I tried to keep a good distance away from people. I allowed others to repark my car in the office and took off my mask to have a drink or a snack at my desk when I was alone. So yeah, I dropped my guard in quite a few instances, making it difficult to determine at which point I got infected.

Like Israel, Brachie who works in the same news organisation could not be specific as to where and when he contracted the virus. He, however, claimed that though he was much more stringent in following the safety protocol measures, he, like Israel, may have lapsed in his vigilance on one occasion. His testimony also reveals the extent of failure of some of the precautionary measures some news organisations took to limit the spread of the virus in their newsrooms.

I got the virus at work as I went about my normal day to day duties. When it was detected that I had the virus, everyone at work was immediately asked to proceed on self-isolation after which everyone was tested for any possibility of infection. I suspect I had the infection despite the many information available through the disposal of my nose masks at a point. Many times, as we go about our normal duties, we sometimes forget to dispose our masks regularly. Maybe in one of those instances in the process of disposing my mask, I got into contact with an infected person and probably got infected too.

Though most news organisations in Ghana were hit by infections, they continued to operate. In most instances, most newsrooms operated on meagre budgets. Despite these bleak economic prospects, a majority of respondents were impressed with the comprehensive safety protocols their organisations put in place. In addition, some media houses provided insurance policy cover for their workers.

Grace for instance was particularly impressed about her management's provision of an insurance scheme and other motivational packages to assure staff of their safety. For instance, she praised the Management for... 'Frequent testing of suspected cases at the office and assurance was given all workers that anyone who contracted the disease in line of duty was going to be properly taken care of.'

Family and Relations

Previous studies about journalists' work-life balance have proven an imbalance between the journalist's work life and their social life. A recent study by Bhalla and Kang (2019) in India also found related results showing the extent to which journalism work is largely unfriendly and extremely intrusive into the family lives of

most Indian journalists. In the light of the spreading pandemic, how did journalists' work life impact on their family's well-being?

Once again, Grace who lives with her parents explains that her family constantly expressed fear for her health and safety. Grace's family relied on a combination of traditional herbal concoctions and orthodox therapy in addition to the recommended safety protocols to ensure they did not contract the virus from her.

My family were equally scared, and my family calls me to be very careful especially my mommy. My mummy makes sure she gets hot water ready for me whenever I came home so I move straight to the bathroom after work before joining the family. On safety protocols, we had water and soap Infront of our house so that any who entered washed the hand. Sanitizers were also around. We also frequently engaged in some traditional therapy such as using the neem tree to prepare hot water.

Even though Israel worked consistently throughout the COVID-19 period both in the newsroom and from home, he is convinced he contracted the virus from contact with other work colleagues. Israel claims he followed all recommended protocols stringently and was fastidious in the use of sanitisers and face masks. What is also significant about Israel's previous narrative and with his narrative below was his emotive anxiety and fear of infecting his family and the measures he took to ensure his family's safety and well-being.

I tested positive for COVID19. This was after a colleague named me as a contact. I immediately had to get my sample taken and tested. This was Wednesday, January 27, 2021. I quarantined in the outhouse at home and only accessed the main building when it was necessary. When I did, I made sure I sanitized anything I touched, especially the door handles. Being in the outhouse was kind of lonely—even though comfortable and had everything I needed.

According to the ICJ survey report (2020), journalists were more likely to be committed and appreciative of their family and close relations than before the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, Grace, Lily, Raymond and Israel expressed extreme appreciation to their spouses and family for support. Israel was highly emotional and appreciative of the loving relationship that developed between him and his wife despite the strain of infection and added stress of self-isolation.

Being in the outhouse was kind of lonely—even though comfortable and had everything I needed. I missed my wife. We spent the nights chatting away on phone, as if we were just starting to date. Fortunately, the rest of my household tested negative—that is my wife and my middle son, who is the only child currently at home, schooling online, as the other two are in boarding school. I do not have any other contacts to name as I ensured to keep my mask on in the presence of others to prevent a spread.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the emotive experiences of frontline journalists who contracted the Coronavirus from an affective-emotive viewpoint. It has tried to argue that research in media especially in Africa and Ghana failed to explore how

traumatic assignments could affect journalists and induce high levels of emotions leading to post-traumatic stresses. The study, through the narratives, established that the respondents who contracted the virus lived with fear and anxiety which could have impacted on their psychological well-being. More importantly, the study finds that the emotive anxieties and fears of these journalists extended to fears of infecting close family members.

The study also established that newsrooms and media houses around the world including ones in Ghana instituted safety measures and precautions meant to protect and ensure the safety of their journalists during the peak of the pandemic. Despite these precautions, some key journalists contracted the virus. A far-reaching revelation came from Grace's appreciation of her outfit's efforts to assure the well-being of newsroom staff.

We can safely conclude from Grace's responses that most major news organisations provided extra workplace safety protection for their staff during the pandemic. Unfortunately, it was difficult to ascertain whether small news organisations provided staff members with similar medical insurance policies to cover COVID-19 infections. For instance, though Raymond worked with a major media organisation he expressed on his Facebook wall, how he had to personally finance the purchase of extra oxygen canisters to sustain his life during his isolation.

Another interesting finding relates to two dimensions of 'emotion of labor' hypothesis of journalism profession. First, as Grace explains the demand by medical officers to suspend their emotions affirms Stephen's allusion to professional journalists to have the capacity to detach their emotions from the stories and by far, these emotions have a bearing on media content.

Finally, it is significant to highlight how this study provided respondents the opportunity to vent their sentiments and appreciation for surviving the traumatic COVID-19 infection. This finding is in consonance with ICJ's finding that 42% of respondents became appreciative of life after recovery from the infection. Raymond shows such sentimental appreciation in his gratitude to God for his life.

COVID-19 brought me to the lowest ebb! There was a point, I just asked God to take my life away and put me out of my misery! But God came through for me. I am also eternally grateful to my wife MzGee Ghana, who braved the storm to help me pull through it all! (January 9, 2021 Twitter)

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