

Chapter 10

An investigation Into Risks to Mental Health of Bangladeshi Journalists

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ABSTRACT

Mental health in workplaces is a global concern today, and Bangladesh is not an exception to that. It is a big concern in journalism as good journalism depends on healthy journalists and news organizations. Most of the scholarships on the topic have been done from the perspective of western and developed countries. Little is known about it from the context of developing countries like Bangladesh. As such, the present study aimed at assessing mental health and well-being of professional journalists in Bangladesh. Data were collected through a survey using a semi-structured questionnaire from 191 Dhaka-based journalists reached with the aid of snowball sampling method. Psychometric instruments such as improvised depression scale, the perceived stress scale, Beck hopelessness scale (BHS), and satisfaction with life scale were used to collect data. The results show that most of the journalists perceive their job as highly stressful, suffer from depression up to some extent, are extremely dissatisfied with their life, and severely hopeless about their life and future.

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health at workplaces is global concern today (Thomas, and Hersen, 2002; Quelch, Knoop, 2018; Gray, 1999). Compared to other workplaces, it is more serious concern in journalism as good journalism depends on healthy journalists and news organizations, and ironically journalism is one of the most high-pressure and stressful professions in the world. Due to the very nature of their work, journalists are vulnerable to exposure of work-related tragic and traumatic events such as victims of violence, accidents, natural disasters, deaths, conflicts and wars, death penalty executions, random shootings, terrorist bombings, sexual assaults including sexual abuse of children, domestic violence, suicides, bullying etc. on regular basis (Dworznic, 2011; Feinstein et al., 2014; Feinstein et al, 2002; Newman et al., 2003; Pyevich et al., 2003; Simpson & Boggs, 1998; Smith et al., 2017; Teegen & Gotwinkel, 2001; Dworznic, 2011; Feinstein et al, 2002; Newman et al., 2003; Pyevich et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2017; Teegen & Gotwinkel, 2001). Moreover, factors those may negatively affect mental health of journalists like chasing deadlines, perfecting the craft of producing content, constant competition with other media organization for satiating audience with quality content, dealing with horrifying graphic or pictorial elements, lack of job security and irregular salary, longer (often irregular) working hours, having less (or no) time for family-interaction and socialization etc. In recent years technological disruptions have been transforming the very nature of journalistic works; emerging business models and audience behavior triggered by ICT innovations are forcing journalists to be in a process of continuous adaptation- adding another layer of factors that may affect their psychological well-being negatively. Several studies (Aoki et al., 2012; Osmann et al., 2020; Ananthan, 2017; Drevo, 2016; Backholm & Björkqvist, 2010; Newman et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2017; Teegen & Wrotwinkel, 2001; Backholm and Björkqvist, 2010). Backholm and Björkqvist, 2012; Riyad, Ramadan, Alkhadrawy, 2019 and Seely, 2019) indicate that journalists suffer from a variety of psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post traumatic disorder (PTSD), drug or alcohol addiction, insomnia, food disorder, high professional burn out, feelings of guilt, failure to handle daily pressures. The professional work cultures and training make journalists believe that they are immune to the impact of violence and tragedy and resilient to whatever they face in their professional life. But the reality is quite different. On the other hand, their constant effort to remain distant from the issues and events they cover sometimes prove to be counter-productive leading to develop a sense of guilt which eventually affect their psychological well-being negatively (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek, 2007; Brayne, 2007)). Mental health issue of the journalists cannot be ignored by any means, because the need for quality journalism is more than ever in this age of technological disruptions, information overload, misinformation and disinformation to help people making better decisions about their life and society and ensuring accountability and transparency of the government (Lacy and Rosenstiel, 2015).

Most of the scholarships on the topic have been done from the perspective of western and developed countries. Little is known about it from the context of developing countries like Bangladesh. Informal interactions with a number of journalists in Bangladesh indicated that in most cases they suffer from some form of mental illness like perceived high stress, different levels of depression, lack of satisfaction with life and hopelessness. But there is a dearth of academic research in this regard and very little is known about these issues. To fill the gap, the study assessed the mental health and well-being of professional journalists in Bangladesh. More precisely, this study aimed: (1) to assess the status of mental

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