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Assessing safety of journalism practice in Ghana: Key stakeholders' perspectives

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Abstract: This study sought to use the self-reporting method of survey as well as key informant interviews to investigate the depth and spread of the problem. A total of 115 respondents took part in the survey. Additionally, eight interviews were conducted with key stakeholders. The study found that the most common infraction was verbal abuse. Colleagues, police, political fanatics, politicians, security operatives and government officials, were among the top perpetrators of safety violations against journalists. A sizeable portion (albeit fewer) were dissatisfied with their workplace safety provisions and minimal confidence in the concern of their employers for their well-being. About half of respondents indicated their media organisations did not make provisions for safety gear for covering potentially dangerous beats. Many of the respondents thought that the posture, attitude and

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This study applied the mixed methods approach to ascertain safety risks that journalists in Ghana faced and to explore the perceptions of important stakeholders regarding the safety of journalists. The motivation for the study was due to the anecdotal evidence that has predominated over empirical evidence in supporting the decline in the safety of journalism practice in Ghana. The study found that the commonest safety breach among journalists was verbal abuse, with colleagues, police, political zealots, politicians, security operatives, and government officials being among the top perpetrators of journalist safety violations. A significant number of journalists were unsatisfied with their workplace safety provisions. They were equally unsatisfied with the stance, attitude, and actions of important state actors in securing their safety. The study makes the case for recommendations that cover provisions at the systemic, organisational and individual levels to secure the safety of journalists in Ghana.

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actions of key state actors, law enforcement agencies as well as their own asso-
ciation (GJA) concerning their safety were unsatisfactory. The study recommends
that the government ensures the security and safety of journalists and media
organizations. Media organizations must ensure a safe and toxic-free work envir-
onment through codes of practice, policies, and enforcement; and journalists
become familiar with the various types of safety breaches and corrective measures
that can be taken.

Subjects: Mass Communication; Media Communication; Media & Film Studies

Keywords: Ghana; journalism; safety; safety of journalists; safety violations; media

1. Introduction

Democracy thrives on the principles of transparency, accountability, citizens' participation in public
life, probity, control over abuse of power (Day, 2022), etc. What facilitates the realisation of these is
the free flow of information (Ruijer et al., 2017). Thus, the normative functions of the media,
including surveillance and education, as well as the media's agenda setting role, which influences
the shaping of audiences' minds and perceptions (McCombs, 2014), are imperative. This is because
the media, through their programming content and the work of journalists, inform, mould, and
promote democratic values by educating the populace about their rights, public policies, and civic
obligations (Kamary, 2018), and offer opportunity for citizens to participate in public discourse,
keep track of public policies, and hold duty bearers accountable. By providing access to information
and exposing irregularities, such as corruption, journalists seek to foster accountability and
responsive governance. Journalism and the media are consequently essential to democracy.

   The worth and power of journalism is evidenced in how some public office holders, security
personnel and thugs with vested interest attempt to influence, harass and intimidate them with
the hope of gagging journalists or influence what they do (Schiffrin & Lugalambi, 2017). It is for
this reason that the Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression and Access to Information
in Africa (the Declaration) was adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
(the African Commission) to, among other things, secure the general economic environment of the
media, stem attacks on media professionals, promote freedom of information, diversity and non-
interference and the development of public and private broadcasting.

   The constitutional guarantee of pluralistic media, media freedom, and freedom of expression in
Ghana are supported by the same ideas. Safety for journalists includes avoiding physical harm
harassment, as well as threats to their livelihood and careers (Hasan & Wadud, 2020, p. 27).
Although many democratic environments promise to protect journalists, it is unfortunate that
journalists and media institutions experience various forms of abuse and repression, including
persistent efforts to curtail media independence and undermine critical (investigative) journalism
(Repucci, 2019; Article 19, 2020). This trend has worsened over the past ten years, with author-
itarian regimes as well as societies that have previously championed freedom of speech, democ-
racy, and human rights spawning new forms of repression (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022).

   It appears that Ghana is also succumbing to this trend. This is evidenced by Ghana's consistent drop
in rank in the World Press Freedom Index over the past few years, something many have attributed to
persistent threats to the lives of media workers performing their jobs (Reporters without Borders, 2020,
2021, 2023). Some have also suggested that the establishment of an office and a coordinated
structure to oversee the safety of journalists by Ghana's National Media Commission (NMC) in 2021
verifies perceptions and assertions of a decline in the safety of journalism practice in Ghana.

   Harrison et al. (2020) make the case for a set of tools and a robust and reliable events-based
methodology to better understand the contextual factors and processes that lead to attacks

against journalists. Berger (2020) also argues that these tools could assist in tracking progress on SDG target 16.10, which calls for "public access to information and fundamental freedoms". More so, Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023) argues that for most countries, there is still a gap in the literature regarding how safe journalists perceive themselves to be, how they evaluate their coping mechanisms, and how much support they receive from advocacy, education, and policy-making groups. The study's lacuna is that anecdotal evidence has predominated over empirical evidence in supporting the decline in the safety of journalism practice in Ghana. This research makes an effort to close this gap.

It is hoped that by examining the safety breaches journalists have experienced or experience, the perpetrators of the breaches, and their perceptions of what is being done to secure the safety of journalism practice by important stakeholders like media owners, managers, security agencies, and the judiciary, this study could provide the data and empirical evidence which is highly needed to answer some important questions regarding the safety of journalism practice in Ghana and potentially inform appropriate measures to secure the safety of journalists.

The specific objectives that guided the study were to: ascertain the most common safety infractions journalists face; identify those responsible for safety violations; find out how safe journalists feel performing their jobs; and explore perceptions about the stance, attitude, and deeds of significant actors in protecting the safety of journalists. The following research questions guided the study:

(1) What kinds of safety violations do Ghanaian journalists encounter?
(2) Who are the primary culprits behind safety violations?
(3) What remedial actions are being offered by media owners and managers to safeguard journalists who suffer safety violations?
(4) How do journalists regard the actions of relevant key stakeholders in promoting their safety?
(5) How do journalists perceive the actions of civil society in the promotion of journalists' safety?

2. Literature review

2.1. Safety of journalists, press freedom and accountability
The protection of journalists' lives, dignity, and the objectivity of their reporting are unquestionably closely related to press freedom, but regrettably, attacks on journalists are increasing (Orgeret & Tayeebwa, 2020). As a result of this, press freedom has worsened over the past five years in almost 85% of nations worldwide, according to UNESCO's 2021/2022 global assessment on trends in freedom of expression and media development (UNESCO, 2022).

In the context of the Internet's explosive growth, both male and female journalists experience internet surveillance, harassment, and abuse that is intended to frighten, stigmatize, and silence them (ARTICLE 19, 2020). However, female journalists, particularly, experience new types of online abuse and sometimes tolerate the harassment, while many of them stay away from social media platforms to avoid abuse (Koirala, 2020). Female journalists are also more likely to be sexually harassed than other media workers, most of which do not show up in empirical investigations (Boateng & Lauk, 2021; Idås et al., 2020).

Hasan and Wadud (2020) view a journalist's safety as encompassing protection against harassment, physical damage (including imprisonment and forced disappearance), and risks to their livelihood and career. They contend that without safety provisions, the objectivity of news will be compromised, particularly in regimes where the security apparatus and pro-government journalists collaborate to monitor and intimidate unbiased journalists. They also contend that public trust in the media is undermined, and the media prevented from serving as a watchdog.

When journalists face risks, among several coping strategies adopted (including maladaptive ones), they may seek support from trusted colleagues, adjust by concentrating on their vital journalistic duties, taking part in collaborative reporting, and teaming up with civil society to seek protection from the state apparatus (González-Macías and Reyna-García, 2019; Hughes et al., 2021).

2.2. Safety risks and initiatives to promote journalists' safety

The foundation of maintaining human rights is freedom of expression (Fernando et al., 2022). As a result, it is critical to protect this right by ensuring that journalists who inform the public and give a platform for this right to be expressed are protected. Ironically, attacks on journalists and other difficulties journalists encounter are frequently brought on by their sincere efforts to fulfil their duties. In satisfying the public's right to know, investigative journalists have been subject of criticisms, death threats, and legal battles for defamation (Bodine, 2022). Sometimes, the evasive strategies they use to dig for information (Darko & Simons, 2020) have come under fire, delegitimizing their profession and jeopardizing their credibility.

A representative survey of journalists in Sweden, a country with strong safeguards of journalistic freedom and autonomy, found that a third of the respondents had experienced threats, while an overwhelming majority had received offensive and insulting comments for their work (Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016). These threats had professional and personal implications, and in some cases resulted in self-censorship. The study presented compelling evidence for advancing the topic of safety in both strong democracies and non-democratic and authoritarian countries, as well as transitional/emerging democracies.

Journalists are increasingly reporting incidences of surveillance (Jamil, 2021) and online harassment, resulting in feelings of exhaustion, worry, and detachment from social media as well as their vocation (Holton et al., 2023). In the relatively few empirical research undertaken on the subject in Ghana, there is evidence of similar infractions, but physical attacks appear to be the most common, with perpetrators frequently going unpunished (Diedong, 2016). Journalists' mental health and well-being may be at stake, especially at a time when more journalists are expressing fatigue, burnout, and a desire to leave the industry (Holton et al., 2023).

The safety risks journalists encounter underscore the growing need for news organizations to treat harassment as a systemic issue rather than just an individual one. Mensah and Ricart Casadevall (2019) argues that all countries must develop and implement social policies that promote tolerance, social cohesiveness, and justice as pillars of social relations. This is applicable when it comes to ensuring the safety of journalists. Rightly so, Diedong (2016) proposes combined strategic measures by the public, civil society organizations, foreign organizations, and state institutions to allow journalists to operate without fear of their safety.

In line with this, a number of gender-specific international anti-violence digital safety strategies have been proposed for female journalists. This focuses on safety training programs that emphasize promotional, preventative, procedural, or prosecutorial actions, as well as individual, collective, or networked, and managerial responses to these attacks (Martin, 2018). On a more inclusive level, the International Media Support (IMS) has proposed a number of measures that relevant actors could consider in securing the safety of journalists (IMS, nd.). The measures include training (in the areas of conflict sensitive journalism, risk analysis, first aid skills); practical measures, such as installing an emergency phone line that media workers can call when in danger, safe houses, safety funds for emergency assistance and provision of safety equipment and advocacy in the areas of media law reform initiatives and campaigns promoting the safety of journalists.

Adhikary and Pant (2016) note that in order to address the risks journalists encounter, complementary measures are required because no one organization can do everything to ensure their safety. The above-suggested measures will, thus, require a concerted effort of all stakeholdersIn

this study, the perceptions of journalists toward some of these stakeholders in relation to their efforts to safeguard journalists' safety are examined. Subsequently, the study provides an opportunity to learn what measures are being taken in Ghana to ensure the safety of journalists and whether they are satisfactory.

3. Conceptual framework: journalists' safety conceptual model

The conceptual model for journalists' safety proposed by Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023) is grounded in viewpoints from the sociology of journalism, political theory, psychology, media economy, risk analysis, and broader safety research literature. The model defines journalists' safety based on a knowledge of a variety of dangers to safety (risk factors), then identifies the sources of threats, which Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. consider as being rooted in the power struggles that take place between journalists and the political elite or other social groups asserting their dominance. The model finally outlines the responses and actions that journalists take when they are faced with risks (coping). Below is a physical representation of the model.

In the model above (Figure 1), threats to journalists' safety are defined as the actions and conditions that increase the risk of physical, psychological, digital, and financial harm to journalists as human beings and as institutional actors (Brambila & Hughes, 2019). They result from the societal, institutional, and personalized views of risks encountered. Importantly, the various risks are intertwined. This is because the working conditions of journalists as well as the institutional and systemic provisions of safety measures have an impact on journalists' subjective assessments of the existential threats as individuals and institutional actors (Hughes et al., 2021).

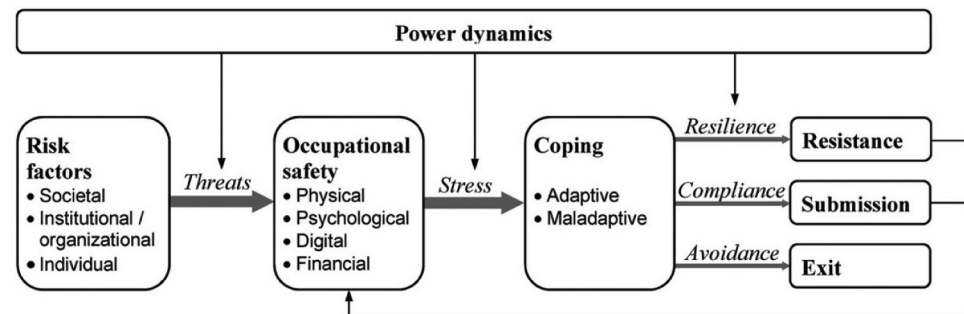Figure 1. Journalists' safety conceptual model by Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023).

Figure 2. Specific perpetrator of the violation suffered.

Source: Survey data.

According to the conceptual model, threats to financial, psychological, digital, and physical health are all part of occupational safety. However, the degree to which journalists feel safe, be it material and perception levels, is affected by societal (macro), institutional (meso), and individual (micro) risk factors. Threats may therefore result in work-related stress, necessitating the use of coping mechanisms. If done well, coping increases resilience and equips the person to survive a dangerous scenario even when their perceived safety is constantly under jeopardy. Depending on how much editorial autonomy is protected or reduced by coping mechanisms, coping may enable journalists to continue carrying out their duties and contributing to society (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023). If the coping strategy is maladaptive, journalists will likely quit the profession. This is likely the case when the risk faced is high.

The theory also alludes to the importance of social capital, which journalists derive from their professional networks of solidarity for coping and developing resilience (Brambila Ramirez, 2018) as well as the actions and the voice of policy makers and other members of society (including civil society organisations and even educational institutions) in extending the space in which journalists can manoeuvre. Thus, this study investigated the safety concerns faced by Ghanaian journalists and examined how journalists viewed the attitude and involvement of several important stakeholders (some of which the model identifies) as maintaining their safety as well as how safe journalists perceive themselves to be.

4. Methods

The procedures and techniques used in the conduct of research as well as studying a research problem is termed research methods (Kothari & Gaurav, 2019). The research method adopted in this study was the mixed methods design. Using mixed methods enables the researcher to use both narrative and numerical data in the course of a single investigation (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). Comparative to studies that simply use qualitative or quantitative methodologies, this methodology has the advantage of contributing to a deeper and broader understanding of the phenomenon (Hurmerinta-Peltomäki & Nummela, 2006). Additionally, it makes it possible to gather various, complimentary facts on the same subject to better comprehend the research issue at hand (Morse, 1991, p. 122). The aforementioned factors influenced the mixed methods technique used in this investigation.

The study used survey and in-depth interviews as data collection tools. The interview guide and survey questions were self-generated, guided by the study's aims and research questions.

4.1. Quantitative: survey

The survey method was utilised to investigate the frequency, kind, patterns, and offenders of safety violations as well as impressions of the stance, attitude, and actions of law enforcement and state actors toward the safety of journalists. The target group included freelance journalists and journalists working for various types of media, including traditional and digital media. Potential respondents were given access to online and offline survey instrument. The online survey was available for around six weeks, and in-person surveys were also given out at some media outlets. At the conclusion of the sixth week, an excel document was obtained. Data retrieved were cleaned up and moved to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) programme, after which they were coded and a quantitative analysis conducted to measure the perceptions and scope of the problems.

4.2. Profile of survey participants

A total of 115 respondents answered the survey. There were more male participants (66, or about 57.4%) than female participants (49 or about 43%). The majority of respondents were reporters and journalists from traditional media. However, the majority of them (37.3%) were employed in radio. Print (15.7%), television (21.7%), and converged media (18.3%) came after this. The least represented groups were freelance journalists/reporters and journalists/reporters who worked only for online news sources (7% of respondents overall).

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4.3. Qualitative: key informant interviews

Purposive sampling, a common choice for qualitative studies, involves the choice of subjects who are supposed to possess the information the researcher needs (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). Using this technique, the researcher selected participants who were determined to be able to offer answers to the research questions (Williams, 2007). A total of eight (8) interviews were conducted based on the availability and convenience of participants. In accordance with the study's objectives, interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then thematically analysed, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-step framework for conducting thematic analysis.

4.4. Selection criteria for interview participants

Key informants were drawn from media organizations, state institutions and representatives of identifiable journalists associations to elicit their perceptions of safety of journalism practice and the role that the government and civil society play in promoting the safety of journalists in Ghana.

The following criteria were critical in ensuring that we got the right people to speak about the subject under study: an interviewee must work in the media as a journalist, be a member of an identifiable journalists association, or work in an area that promotes the welfare and safety of journalists. The reason for selecting these groups of participants was that, as practitioners who work directly with journalists, they would understand journalists' safety concerns and be able to speak about interventions being done to ensure journalists' safety.

4.5. Data presentation

The integrative (or convergent) mixed methods approach, which maintains that combining more than one source of data will be beneficial than using only one source or type of data, has an impact on how the results are presented (Bazeley, 2018). This helped in providing a comprehensive analyses of the research problem.

4.6. Ethical considerations

In order to perform social science research on human subjects, participants' autonomy, dignity, and privacy must be maintained, while participation risks must be kept to a minimum and benefits maximized (Resnik, 2020). In order to comply with these, all participants were briefed on the study's purpose in order to obtain their informed consent. Before interviews are recorded, the permission of interviewees were sought. Furthermore, during data collection and analysis, all individuals who desired anonymity were respected.

5. Findings

In order to determine whether the respondents or their fellow journalists had come across any safety infractions, a broad question was posed using the previous year as the time range. Table 2 has the details of results. The table below (Table 1) shows the gender distribution of participants.

The majority of respondents (61.7%) reported having no experiences with safety breaches in the line of duty in the last one year. However, slightly more than that number (67.8%,) confirmed having knowledge of colleague journalists who had experienced safety violations in the line of duty.

While 3 in 10 respondents (38.3%) affirmed having experienced some form of safety or security violations while carrying out their duties, a greater number (67.8%) knew about a case of safety violation suffered by other journalists. This means that a similar number who had not experienced any safety breaches had, at least, had a report of a colleague experiencing such fate. Table 3 has details of the nature of violations experienced by participants.

In a multi-select question to explore the nature of violations respondents suffered, results showed that verbal abuse was predominant amongst violations suffered (27.3%), followed by intimidation (23.6%); physical abuse (20.9%); threats (14.5%); online trolling (9.1%); cyberbully

Table 1. Gender presentation of participants		
	Frequency	**Percent**
Male	66	57.4
Female	49	42.6
Total	**115**	**100.0**
Type of media represented		
	Frequency	**Percent**
Radio	43	37.4
Television	25	21.7
Print	18	15.7
Digital media	7	6.1
Freelance	1	0.9
Converged media	21	18.3
Total	**115**	**100.0**

Source: Survey data.

Table 2. Experiences of safety violations in the line of duty in the last one year		
Have you suffered any form of safety or security violation in the line of duty recently (the last one year)?	**N**	**%**
Yes	44	38.3
No	71	61.7
Total	**115**	**100.0**
Do you know of any colleague(s) who may have suffered safety or security violations in the line of duty recently (the last one year)?	**N**	**%**
Yes	78	67.8
No	37	32.2
Total	**115**	**100.0**

Source: Survey data.

(6.4%); public shaming (5.5%); spying (1.8%); while internet stalking and tapping of phones recorded 0.9% of cases each.

Interestingly, there was also the view that if proper working conditions are not put in place for journalists to do their work, that could also be counted as violation. This is because poor working conditions are a great disincentive to journalists whose work is paramount to guaranteeing the socio-economic wellbeing of society and ensuring accountability across different facets of society. Interview participant form a state institution said:

> We also have situations where journalists are punished in house because if their remunerations are held on to, are not paid at all or they're underpaid it's a form of abuse. Some media houses just pick them and let them work on commission basis. It's all part of what I call abuse of journalists.

6. Perpetrators of safety violations against journalists

As seen in Table 4, state actors were named as the culprits in the incidents of violations against journalists in the majority of cases (53.1%) that were recorded. This was followed by non-state actors, who made up

Table 3. Nature of violation experienced			
	N	**Percent**	**Percent of Cases**
Physical abuse	23	13.5%	20.9%
Verbal abuse	30	17.5%	27.3%
Online trolling	10	5.8%	9.1%
Internet stalking	1	0.6%	0.9%
Tapping of phone	1	0.6%	0.9%
Spying	2	1.2%	1.8%
Intimidation	26	15.2%	23.6%
Public shaming	6	3.5%	5.5%
Threats	16	9.4%	14.5%
Cyberbullying	7	4.1%	6.4%
Other	0	0.0	0.00%
Not applicable	49	28.7%	44.5%
Total	171	100.0%	155.5%

Source: Survey data.

Table 4. Perpetrator of violations			
	Responses		**Percent of Cases**
	N	**Percent**	
State actor(s)	52	46.4%	53.1%
Non state actor(s)	45	40.2%	45.9%
Others	1	0.9%	1.0%
Not applicable	14	12.5%	14.3%
Total	112	100.0%	114.3%

Source: Survey data.

Table 5. Attitude of key sectors/stakeholders					
	N	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev.**
How would you describe the attitude/actions of security services towards safety of journalists?	115	1.00	4.00	1.5304	.84107
How would you describe the attitude the judiciary towards safety of journalists?	115	1.00	4.00	1.8870	.99794

45.9% of reported cases. There was also an open-ended query to determine the specific perpetrators for each group. The responses are displayed in the word cloud below (Figure 1), where the size of the word represents how frequently the term or phrase (identifying a specific offender) appeared in the text utilized for analysis.

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Table 6. Perceptions about media organisations and CSOs					
	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Does your media organisation provide you with safety gears when covering a potentially dangerous story?	115	1.00	3.00	1.7217	.65625
Does your media organisation have the relevant counselling services for you or your colleagues that suffer violations or trauma in the line of duty?	115	1.00	3.00	1.8000	.62408
Has your media organisation made provision for medical care coverage for you or your colleagues that caters for violations in the line of duty?	115	1.00	3.00	1.6000	.68569
Does your media organisation provide or support you with legal aid when your safety or security is violated in the line of duty?	115	1.00	3.00	1.5739	.74998
Do you think relevant civil society is/are actively involved in ensuring or advocating the safety of journalists?	115	1.00	3.00	1.6696	.73415

Source: Survey data.

Figure 2 shows that colleagues, police, political fanatics, politicians, security operatives and government officials, were among the top perpetrators of safety violations against journalists. Among the top-three cited were colleague journalists, police and political fanatics. Thugs, business owners, social media influencers, demonstrators, social groups, Illegal miners ("galamseyers") and contractors also made the list of perpetrators.

Table 7. Opinions on personal safety					
	N	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev.**
How safe do you feel doing your work as a journalist?	112	1.00	5.00	2.6071	1.29696
Do you think you have a safe work environment (in your organisation)?	112	1.00	2.00	1.2857	.45378

Source: Survey data.

The results of the study were interestingly consistent with the opinions of interviewees, who also believed that security agencies were frequently to blame for infractions against journalists when their reporting is unlikely to favourably portray them. According to interview participant who is Ghana Journalists Association executive member:

> Police officers brutalize journalists, politicians also mistreat journalists. Businessmen who feel threatened or who feel that journalists are prying into their businesses or trying to expose their misdeeds also threaten journalists.

To some, behind violations meted out by fanatics and the public is politicians inciting their party members and followers to deliberately attack journalists in order to swerve transparency and accountability imposed on them by the constitution:

> [...] politicians are deliberately setting people, citizens up against journalists, in order to swerve the accountability and transparency requirements that is imposed on them, by governance systems and the Constitution. [...] There are very few occasions where the attacks are not related to politics. (Interview participant, Reporter and political show host)

The mean scores in Table 5 show that respondents had a rather unfavourable perception about the attitudes and actions of security services and the judiciary towards their safety. Both organizations received scores that were below the median score of 2.5 and were closer to the minimum possible score. The police were earlier pointed to as one of the key perpetrators of violations against journalists and could have led to the unfavourable view about them. In the case of the judiciary, The slow judicial procedures may also be to blame for the respondents' unfavourable view of the judiciary. An interview participant who is an investigative journalist alluded to this:

> Those who have been assaulted in their line of work, it is only a few that have seen successful prosecution. So, I was saying that it doesn't appear that we see enough proactiveness from the security agencies or government in ensuring that journalists who have been assaulted get successful prosecution or get compensated. I can cite our own Latif Iddrisu who was assaulted by some police officers, till date he hasn't received any compensation; the case is still pending at the court.

Months after the above interview, the Accra High Court granted the state one month to negotiate a settlement with Latif Iddrisu and his employers, who are seeking 10 million cedis in damages for assault, after the state requested settlement negotiations on 31 January 2023. When the matter was summoned on 3 April 2023, the Attorney General's representative informed the court that the Inspector General of Police did not want to settle but instead wanted a full trial. The case is to be heard again in court on 12 May 2023.

Table 6 shows the participants' perceptions of media organizations and CSOs' initiatives to ensure journalist safety. All the mean scores eliciting opinions about actions and of media organisations and relevant civil society in ensuring journalists' safety point to a low perception rating. Concerning media organisations, provisions of healthcare, security, medical coverage, safety gear all scored between 1.5 to 1.8, which were all below average, indicating that those provisions are lacking in most instances. Civil society also scored 1.6. Some civil society organizations, however, were cited throughout the interviews as being proactive in promoting journalist safety, including Media Foundation for West Africa and CDD-Ghana. Nonetheless, Media Foundation for West Africa stood out among the civil society organizations cited because, in the opinion of the participants, they have been proactive in their advocacy work. A journalist participant had this to say:

> I think Media Foundation for West Africa has been very vibrant when it comes to cases of assault of media practitioners. They have been very consistent in gathering data. In some cases, if your safety is under threat, I know that they've gone to the rescue of some journalists whose safety was under threat, they provided support and, in some cases, they send those journalists to safe houses and a number of interventions that they readily make available.

Participants observed that contrary to what some civil society organisations do, the journalists association (the GJA) as an institution rather than being proactive, tended to issue press releases after safety violations have occurred and after pressure is mounted on them to do something: " … *when there is public pressure, the GJA tends to at first issue a statement", (*Interview participant, journalist).

In terms of how secure they feel overall while working as journalists, respondents were pretty evenly split. The mean and standard deviation scores (2.6 and 1.3) in Table 7 for the question enquiring their general sense of safety show that most respondents expressed some degree of ambivalence about their workplace safety. The score was less than 50% when it comes to workplace safety, showing a poor perception.

7. Discussion

The freedom of journalists to carry out their duties without interference or worry about attacks from the powerful and influential is crucial from a structural standpoint. If those who have the authority to enforce the law do nothing as journalists' rights are being violated or become the abusers of journalists, impunity will result (Unaegbu, 2017; Harrison & Pukallus, 2021). Regrettably, the survey found that the police are significant offenders when it comes to abuse of journalists, which makes the situation worse. It is unthinkable that police and security operatives, who are responsible for the protection of journalists would be the perpetrators of violations against journalists.

Even though findings indicate that attacks are not as common as it is for individuals who have not been the target of assaults and threats, even the least number of assaults should not be tolerated, since one key effect of the persistent threats to journalists' safety is impunity. Unaegbu (2017) describe impunity as the emboldening of perpetrators of crimes to commit more breaches of the law due to the unwillingness to prosecute them by law. That is why the citing of the polices as an abuser of journalist and the unfavourable image of the judiciary and security agencies leaves much to be desired.

Besides, the conceptual model for journalists' safety makes references to how advocacy, policy-making organizations, and educational institutions can all play a vital role in expanding the space in which journalists can operate (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023). Thus, the judiciary's zero-tolerance policy may have a deterrent effect. However, respondents expressed dissatisfaction with how law enforcement and security authorities have acted in regard to the protection of journalists. Only a few respondents said that the security was acting in a way that prohibited

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endangering the safety of journalists. This demonstrates a gap in the ideal system in which diverse actors, including state institutions, like security agencies, coordinate strategic steps to secure journalists' safety (Diedong, 2016). Although they do better, the judiciary is also seen as being unfriendly to journalists' safety. This is because of the seeming slow or inaction of the judiciary regarding cases of abuse of journalists pending at the law courts.

It is good to know that even though not all CSOs received favourable rating, the work some CSOs do was recognised as important in ensuring the safety of journalists. In contexts where structured support is frequently missing, journalists' social capital—which they draw from their professional networks of solidarity—is also crucial for coping and building resilience (Brambila Ramirez, 2018). However, this study found that journalists themselves are sometimes their own abusers. This may appear ironic, yet such occurrences have become commonplace over time. This study provides evidence for that, while many anecdotal evidence abound. The abuse, which sometimes come in the form of insults, accusations and denigration, have similar or even worse consequences as those meted out by non-journalists. This is because if journalists openly abuse each other, they indirectly give that right to others to also abuse them. They also give the public the right to question the integrity and legitimacy of journalism and journalists, resulting in suspicion, disregard and mistrust overtime.

Some journalists in Ghana who have been brutalized still have their cases unresolved. Unaegbu (2017) asserts that the absence of legal consequences for criminal behaviour gives offenders greater confidence to flout the law. The Journalists' safety conceptual model predicts that in regimes where the power dynamics favour the ruling class, the occupational safety of key change agents as well as investigative and watchdog journalists will diminish (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023). The courts and security agencies, which have a responsibility to uphold the law, are important to ensure this does not happen. Thus, the relevant authorities must endeavour to guarantee that journalists seeking redress for breaches meted out to them receive the justice to which they are entitled, as Mensah and Ricart Casadevall (2019) contends is one of the foundations of social relations.

Even though the state is responsible for safeguarding the safety of journalists at the systemic level, media outlets and journalists themselves are also responsible for ensuring they are appropriately protected when covering potentially dangerous stories. However, from this study's findings, most journalists lack safety gear that protect them during reportage of volatile events or when they are reporting from points of conflict or covering riot or protest situations. It is in recognition of this shortfall that a not-for-profit independent organization for journalists, Journalists Sanctuary International, founded by Latif Iddrisu, who had himself suffered abuse in the line of duty, presented protective equipment such as helmet and on the stab/bulletproof vest front to a number of media organisations, including Despite media and Media General. This is a critical intervention, as IFEX (2017) submit that protective vests and body armour and tactical vests have become standard gear helping journalists to stay safe. It also responds to some of the practical measures International Media Support (IMS) proposes relevant actors could consider in securing the safety of journalists (IMS, nd.).

Being insured and having medical cover give journalists peace of mind when they are out on their beats reporting protests or exposing corruption and organized crime. However, according to Free Press Unlimited, there is a significant gap in healthcare provisions for local journalists in various jurisdictions (Free Press Unlimited, n.d). During the 2020 elections, the GJA offered journalists insurance package for select group of journalists which was restricted to risks suffered during that period only. However, a more sustaining and comprehensive insurance cover will be beneficial to journalists across the country as they cover a myriad of potentially volatile stories.

Data obtained on the matter of workplace safety revealed that many journalists are uncertain about their safety in the workplace. Media employers must do more to fulfil their duty of care (European Federation of Journalists, 2022) by providing internal and external safety protections to journalists and all media workers. Insurance cover, medical coverage, physical security, appropriate gear, pensions, etc., must be a standard employment benefit for journalists. Nonetheless, it is not surprising that may be

a rare in an environment where journalists are underpaid, and most of the journalistic employment is characterised by precarity, which could result in maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as resistance and avoidance, rather than adaptive ones (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023). According to anecdotal evidence, high-profile or poached media professionals in Ghana are more likely to have stronger bargaining positions and be eligible for some of these provisions. Standardization, therefore, becomes imperative to ensuring equitable working conditions for all media professionals.

8. Conclusions

This study sought to use the self-reporting method of survey as well as key informant interviews to investigate the depth and spread of safety risks that journalists in Ghana faced and to explore the perceptions of important stakeholders regarding the safety of journalists. The most common safety breach, according to the survey, was verbal abuse. Colleagues, police, political zealots, politicians, security operatives, and government officials were among the top perpetrators of journalist safety violations. A sizable proportion (though fewer) were unsatisfied with their workplace safety provisions and had little faith in their employers' concern for their well-being. Approximately half of respondents said their media organizations did not provide safety equipment for reporters on potentially dangerous beats. Many respondents believed that the stance, attitude, and actions of important state actors, law enforcement agencies, and their own association (GJA) regarding their safety were inadequate.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, a number of recommendations that cover provisions at the systemic, organisational and individual levels are made. The first recommendation is for appropriate state institutions, such as the security services and the judiciary, to safeguard the security and safety of journalists and media organizations by investigating documented incidences of journalist abuse. In connection with this, the Ghana Journalists Association must proactively design a program to protect journalists from safety breaches; it is advised that they do so in conjunction with journalists to ensure that it is fit-for-purpose.

It is also recommended that media organizations ensure a safe and toxic-free work environment through codes of practice, policies, and enforcement. The study found that the lack of good conditions of service is equally an abuse of journalists' wellbeing. Media organisations are encouraged to offer good work conditions for their employees. Civil society actors must also continue their advocacy for media workers in the area of their safety as well as their conditions of service.

The media's responsibilities and freedoms oblige them to uphold strict moral and professional standards. The chance for abuse increases when ethical standards are ignored. In order to prevent any provocation that can result in abuse, media organizations must make sure that their journalists follow high professional standards. Journalists become familiar with the various types of safety breaches and corrective measures that can be taken. Journalists could look out for and patronise forums that deal with issues of safety breaches and corrective actions that can ensure their safety. They must also, in a coordinated manner, negotiate with their employees for n=better conditions of service.

10. Limitations and future research

This study evaluated the safety issues Ghanaian journalists faced and looked at how journalists perceived the attitude and engagement of some key actors in preserving journalists' safety as well as how safe journalists felt. The Journalists' Safety Conceptual Model alludes to coping mechanisms that journalists use in the face of safety threats, however this study did not explore that. It is advised that future research explore these coping mechanisms.

The research evidence from other studies, which was uncovered in the literature review, indicated that female journalists are more likely to experience online harassment, and as a coping mechanism, the majority of them avoid social networking sites. Future research could examine this in the context of Ghana and determine the coping mechanisms used by female journalists to prevent online harassment.

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