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EVALUATION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: The freedom of expression and Journalists' safety, as well as other media practitioners have become an issue of debate on press freedom and the working condition of reporters following untoward development on the media space which has become a preoccupation with journalism professional organizations. Thus, the study aimed at evaluating the freedom of expression and safety of journalists in Nigeria. In order to achieve the aim of the study, qualitative research approach was used as the most tenable means of getting valuable data for this study. Both primary and secondary data were employed. Secondary data came through documentary evidence and literature review, while primary data came through in-depth Interview and focus group discussion which were selected as veritable instruments for gathering relevant data. A sample size of 100 respondents in FCT, Abuja was drawn using purposive sampling technique. Descriptive analysis was carried out with the use of pie chart. The findings of the study revealed that as much as journalists are aware that their safety is the freedom the press has to take into cognizance for them to perform their professional task without fear or intimidation, they also perceive that journalists' safety is a phenomenon that is not achievable because of fundamental societal encumbrances. The findings also indicate that a good number of journalists have been assaulted, arrested, killed, and many have had their rights to freedom of expression violated. The study concluded that the issue of safety and protection of journalists in Nigeria must be given adequate concern since the rate at which journalists lose their lives in trying to serve human needs on what is happening in the society and which is an alarming proportion. More so, there is need for media houses in Nigeria to have safety policies that will guarantee the smooth operation and safety of journalists. The study recommended training and retraining of journalists on safety strategies in order to create awareness on safety tips for journalists. The study also recommended that media organizations in Nigeria should gear up efforts in protecting the rights and lives of journalists.

KEYWORDS: *Journalist, freedom of expression, safety, Protection, Professional organizations.*

I. INTRODUCTION

There has been several conceptualizations towards press freedom. Alabi (2003), cited in Okoye (2007), sees press freedom as the unrestrained right that the press has to publish or broadcast what it deems fit for the public. Onoguwora (1985) cited in Okoye (2007) views press freedom as the right of the press to publish without being subjected to intimidation, threat, molestation or blackmail. Also, Okoye (2007) defines press freedom as "the liberty to gather, hold, express and disseminate information and opinions without official or unofficial restrictions via written and unwritten laws and actions". Okoye (2007) further describes press freedom as "the liberty of the mass media to do their duty of informing, educating and entertaining the public without prior official censorship". In the same vein, Oloyode (2005) puts it that freedom of expression is the ability to openly communicate one's views to other people either through the written word or through non-verbal means such as art, music and fashion. This consistently implies that those who work as journalists, whether for print, broadcast or social media, and those who engage in the now very popular citizen journalism, have the right to, as Aviyar (1979) cited in Okoye (2007) asserted, "report facts honestly and faithfully, even if they prove inconvenient or embarrassing to someone".

Glaringly, the right to free expression is a human right as well as a liberty enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 19). Primarily, freedom of expression is a right in itself; the right to receive and impart information and ideas through any media. Nonetheless, through this, all other basic rights are allowed, exercised and protected. This is the more reason many cases in history have proven that when freedom of expression starts to collapse, other basic freedoms can quickly suffer the same fate (Reporters Without

Borders, 2016). Aminu and Rahman (2014) were in consonance with 'Reporters Without Borders' when they opined that public participation in governance is very important especially in a democratic system. This is factual because citizens cannot participate in decision-making (example, voting) if they are denied access to information as well as ideas; and are not able to express themselves freely. Consequently, infringement on the right to freedom of expression often goes hand in hand with other violations, especially freedom of association and assembly. Hence, the right to freedom of expression upholds the rights of all to make their views and opinion known freely.

Reporters Without Borders further upheld that journalists and media organizations are essential partners in the exercise of this basic freedom. This gives credence to why those who seek to restrict the public right to information target journalists. This commonly endangers their safety as they (those that muzzle the press) go to any extent to silence them. The number of journalists killed while on duty shows the scale of the problem and the difficulty in dealing with it. The safety of Journalists and other media workers has become a subject of discussion on press freedom and the working condition of reporters following the alarmingly precarious development on the media space, and this has become a preoccupation with journalism professional bodies (Yusuf, 2013). Journalists play an indispensable role in providing the public with information, as such, journalism is inextricably essential for an open and free society. This is because, to get this information, journalists have to get to where the events take place (Fournier, 2014), and this can jeopardize their safety in many cases.

Agreeing with the Annual Report of UNESCO Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression (2012), the media provides an indispensable service to the society as it keeps the people abreast with information needed to form their opinion and effectively take part in a democratic society. The report sees a journalist as an individual who observes and describes events, documents and analyses events, statements, policies and any propositions that can affect society, with the purpose of systematizing such information and gathering of facts and analyses to inform sections of society or society as a whole (Radisavjevic, 2013). Similarly, a report by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (2011) observed that journalists report about issues of public interest, including government policies and have a crucial role to play in democracies by providing objective information to the public. Consequently, harassment, intimidation, threats and violence against journalists can deny people of their fundamental right to receive and impart information. The report also noted that the rights of journalists to disseminate information under safe conditions devoid of harassment, threat, attack, maiming as well as murder is of utmost importance for the freedom of the press and freedom of expression as impunity against them is on a daily increase. In line with this proposition, Carlsson (2016) opined that allowing people to contribute their quota to the well-being of the society is paramount. However, it must be possible for society's state of affairs to be known to everyone, and it must also be possible for everyone to speak his or her mind freely about it. Where this is lacking, Carlson argued that liberty is not worth its name. This suggests that when those saddled with the responsibility of informing the people are unsafe to do so, then freedom of expression is under siege.

The safety of journalists is very essential and almost indispensable for unhindered practice of journalism as well as the freedom of expression. In spite of this, the study is aware that, unlike the issues of journalism and freedom of expression, journalists' safety is not very popular in academics. More so, the literature on safety of journalism is scanty. Thus, the main thrust of the study is anchored on the need to conduct a research to find out how much of freedom of expression is protected in the practice of journalism and personal safety among journalists in Nigeria, with the spatial scope focusing on the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, so as to contribute to the existing body of literature in that perspective.

II. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The study is anchored on New Institutional Theory. The Theory was propounded by Zucker 1988. Scholars such as Ostrom (2005) also contributed to the development of the New Institutions Theory. The theory is one of the oldest thoughts in the history of social thought. Sociology, economics, political science, and other disciplines have different points of view on the nature and significance of institutions, and their theoretical trajectories have tended to diverge, resulting in literatures that are difficult to synthesize. Fortunately, there has also been a growing trend of drawing upon the foundations of several disciplines to address general questions regarding human behaviour, and this tendency works in advantage of an interdisciplinary perspective on institutions. Consequently, the study considers New Institutional Theory, with the understanding that institutions are foundational elements of the social contexts in which formal organizations are embedded. From this point of view, studying institutions is key to the organizations.

The basic assumption of the New Institutional Theory had evolved to encompass established “law, custom, usage, practice, organization, or other element in the political or social life of a people; a regulative principle or convention subservient to the needs of an organized community or the general ends of civilization”. For instance, a legal doctrine or moral code may emerge over time and gradually become part of the established order through which human affairs are regulated. The latter idea was emphasized in the early sociological theory of Herbert Spencer, who viewed society as an organism evolving through time, adapting to its context via specialized “organs” that functioned as institutional subsystems and could be compared across societies (example, family, government, laws, and customs of property). New institutionalism emerges with this concept by drifting towards a dilemma embedded in the institutional construct: institution implies action, the establishment of something new, and order and regulation the conventions that already have been established. In other words, institution may be conceptualized both as action that enables change and as constraints on action that facilitate stability.

Institutions challenge us to understand the processes of change and stability not as separate or contradictory, but as related aspects of the same phenomenon. How institutions come into being, reproduce, and change is a central question across the social sciences, especially in the organizational and policy arenas. As one illustration, traditional forms of marriage and the family are continuously reproduced through legal rules, social norms, and cognitive constructs in everyday life, while these same social norms are changing through new legal rulings, shifting norms and values, and emergent schemata. This complex process of continuity and change is intertwined with the workings of numerous formal organizations (example, legislatures, courts, churches, human resource departments, media organizations and so on).

The inconsistency entrenched within the idea of institutions is reflected in Scott’s (2008) recent effort to conceptualize them through a survey of literatures drawn from sociology, economics, and political science. He concludes that “institutions are comprised of regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life”. This reveals the complexity of the starting point of this theory for thinking about institutions and their significance for organizations from an interdisciplinary or holistic approach.

According to Scott (2008) the regulatory dimension of institutions involves rule setting, monitoring, and sanctioning activity; the normative domain involves prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory aspects; the culture cognitive component includes shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality. Scott’s work is valuable in helping to dispel a misimpression of institutions only as reputable establishments of the public and civil sectors (e.g., constitutions, courts, schools, marriage, and the family). Through a close examination of scholarship, it becomes evident that institutions encompass far more than those popular notions; they include many more fundamental elements of society that are integral to social continuity and stability. A relevant example would be the construct of risk, that is, the chance of injury, damage, or loss related to a particular set of circumstances, and the ways in which a given society perceives and interprets that chance as a consequence of its particular historical circumstances.

The cultural cognitive element of risk will vary from one society to another. The set of meanings related to risk in a given domain of life (example, safety of journalists) will have been established under specific historical circumstances, and once established, this “institutional element” may come to be viewed by some as a “social fact” (Turner, 2013). There may also be normative rules related to risk that introduce a prescriptive, evaluative, or obligatory dimension; for example, the sense of duty experienced by journalists in the process of discharging their official duties. The regulatory dimension sets rules, while also monitoring and sanctioning activity. For example, with respect to the risks associated with journalism, the state clearly is involved in heightening or reducing regulatory risk when journalists are altered.

Drawing on the new institutionalism theory, this study has validated the impact of Nigeria’s unsafe environment on journalists’ work and right to freedom of expression. Taking into cognizance the diversity of threats faced by Nigerian journalists, there is an urgent need to have a safety mechanism that calls for a ‘mutual effort approach’ from different stakeholders, including government, media organizations, journalists’ unions, academics, individual journalists, security agencies and civil members not just to tame the excesses of those that assault journalists with impunity, rather also dealing with the root causes including issues of terrorism, political conflict, religious violence, extremism, corruption, injustice and organized crime, quackery, poor remuneration among others.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a qualitative research approach as the most tenable means of getting valuable data. In-depth Interview and focus group discussion were also used as the research instruments for gathering relevant data for this study as they were considered the most appropriate that can be used for the target population in view of the research need. The above however constitutes primary source of data collection. The study also made use of secondary sources of data ranging from newspapers, Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) reports, to journals. The population of the study were large number of journalists based in the FCT, Abuja. In order to achieve the objective of the study, a sample size of 100 respondents among the selected journalists working in FCT, Abuja was drawn. The sampling for the study was purposive as the technique entails deliberately selecting what constitutes a sample based on some predetermined purposes or aim which the study expects to achieve.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

According to The data documented by ARTICLE 19 through the period of January to October 2020, there has been an increase in attacks against journalist. Across Nigeria, a total of 60 journalists were affected in 51 incidents. Three journalists have been killed: one by security forces during a protest in Abuja and two by unknown persons in Adamawa and Nasarawa States. Thirty-four journalists have been victims of assaults, including two female journalists. The assaults took place across the country, including in Lagos, Ondo, Osun, Abia, Anambra, Bauchi, Edo and Rivers States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Similarly, eighteen (18) of the 34 journalists were assaulted for covering the nationwide #ENDSARS protests against police brutality in October 2020. In ten cases, the police were the perpetrators (ARTICLE 19, 2020).

Reports from ARTICLE 19 (2020) also revealed that, twelve journalists have been arrested. Half of them were released after a few days, but six were charged to court, mostly under the Terrorism or Cybercrime act. Three journalists were denied access to perform their work, three media outlets have been attacked, and four media outlets were fined for their coverage. In addition, countless other journalists have faced issues like equipment seizure or damages, intimidation and death threats. This trend more than doubled in 2020; compared to the same period in 2019, at least 19 journalists and media professionals suffered attacks, including arrests, detention, assaults, threats, and seizure of equipment.

Some of the 2020 Cases of Attacks on Journalists in Nigeria

- ❖ On 26 October, the National Broadcasting Commission fined three television stations, namely Channels Television, Arise Television and Africa Independent Television, each N3 million (approximately 5,263 USD) for "unprofessional coverage" of the end SARS protests.
- ❖ On Sunday 11 October 2020, a journalist working for Premium Times was assaulted by police officers while covering the #EndSARS protest in Abuja. The journalist was chased and beaten by Police officers.
- ❖ On 1 October in Lagos State, a police officer hit a photojournalist working for PUNCH Newspaper on his head with a baton. A colleague of the journalist who witnessed the attack said that the journalist collapsed and blood gushed out of his injured head. The Commissioner of Police in Lagos apologized for the attack and promised to hold the perpetrators accountable.
- ❖ On 10 September the police in Lagos had arrested four journalists, alongside 14 protesters, during a peaceful protest. They were later released.
- ❖ On 3 August, at least four police officers slapped, kicked, and used their batons to beat a correspondent of the privately-owned Daily Post newspaper. The journalist was reporting on officers' enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions in Old Garage, a suburb of the western Osun State's capital Oshogbo.

Escalation of the Crackdown on Journalists

- ❖ On 21 January, a reporter and editor with the local independent outlet Regent Africa Times died from head injuries sustained at a protest in Abuja, the capital, held by members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria religious organisation. Witnesses claimed that police opened fire at protesters and a bullet hit Ogbu in the head.
- ❖ Archibong Jeremiah Ojanga, Managing Editor of CrossRiverWatch and Secretary Association of Cross River Online Journalists (ACROJ), expressed his disappointment and concerns about the shrinking space for media in the country: *"Public office holders have institutionalized attacks against journalists; that is why it keeps happening. Journalists don't have any space to do their work freely. Politicians orchestrate the reporting, and those who disobey and are ethical in holding them accountable are witch-hunted. I have personally been victim several times. The government must stop this ugly trend. In most of the States, there are cases of journalists who have been threatened, ill-treated, arrested or detained."*
- ❖ Journalists in Nigeria face various difficulties in their work. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown restrictions, it has become increasingly more challenging to collect information. For example, journalists had to go over very restrictive requirements to be allowed to cover the National Assembly (NA), such as evidence of daily circulation of at least 40,000 copies for print media and 5,000 views for online media; income tax returns for the last two years for all media; and for journalists individually, having an experience of

two years covering the National Assembly activities and being a member of the Nigerian Union of Journalists. As a result, a reduced number of journalists received accreditation to cover press conferences, limiting the freedom of press and right to information unduly.

❖ From available reports, Nigeria appears a dangerous country for journalism and considered one of West Africa's most dangerous and difficult countries for media professionals, according to the World Press Freedom Index.¹¹ A journalist interviewed asserts that: *"In present-day Nigeria, journalists are consistently attacked, and arrested on trumped-up charges by those working on the orders of political office holders in a desperate attempt to silence the media. The media must be brave and firm in reporting the undiluted truth against any government in power, without any form of compromise or fear."*

Legal Framework Overview on Freedom of Expression

Nigeria's Constitution recognizes the rights to freedom of expression and access to information as indicated below:

❖ Section 22 guarantees free media: "The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter [i.e. Chapter 2, Fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy, of the Constitution] and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people."

❖ Section 39, subsection (1) provides that "every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including the freedom to hold and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference."

❖ Subsection (2) states that "without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) of this section, every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinion."

❖ Section 45 allows restrictions on the freedom of expression in the interest of defense, public safety, public order, public morality or public health.

Since the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act in 2011, Nigeria has a specific law to enable transparency and access to information. However, the official Secrets Act¹⁴ restricts access of journalists and other persons to official information. Defamation and sedition are criminal offences in Nigeria. But the authorities have charged journalists mostly under the Cybercrime Act (2015) or the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act (2013).

Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc) Act

The Cybercrime (prohibition, prevention, etc) act violates the right to freedom of expression, as guaranteed Nigeria's Constitution. The act makes sending a message which is 'grossly offensive', 'indecent' or 'menacing' a crime. If a person knows a message is false, and it is sent to cause 'inconvenience' they can also be charged with 'cyber stalking'. Anyone who transmits a 'communication' which contains a threat to harm the reputation of another person, commits a crime. If convicted, a journalist could face up to three years imprisonment or a fine of 7 million Naira or both according to the cybercrime law. Many journalists have been charged with cyber stalking, which is overly broad defined as 'a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear'. There are no clear definitions for terms like inconvenience or insult, leaving room for interpretation.

Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act (2013)

The Terrorism Act covers terrorism and related crimes. The authorities have charged several Journalists under this act.

❖ Section 1(2): anyone who "does, attempts or threatens any act of terrorism," "omits to do anything that is reasonably necessary to prevent an act of terrorism," or "assists, facilitates, organizes or directs the acts of persons or organizations engaged in an act of terrorism," "incites, promises or induces any other person by any means whatsoever to commit any act of terrorism" is guilty of a terrorist offence. If found guilty, the punishment can be up to death penalty.

❖ Section 27 Subsection (1) allows a court to "grant an order for the detention of a suspect" for 90 days, which the court can renew for another 90 days, until "the conclusion of investigation and prosecution". This would allow for indefinite detention.

The wide-ranging definitions and extensive powers for the security forces, make it very easy for the authorities to declare someone a terrorist.

Bills before the National Assembly that further threaten Free Speech

There are two bills currently before the National Assembly which could further threaten freedom of expression and the media. The draft 'Protection from Internet Falsehoods and Manipulation bill' also known as the Social media bill- proposed by the Senate in 2019, gives the authorities power to close down the internet and limit access to social media, and prohibits statements on social media deemed "likely to be prejudicial to national security" and those which may "diminish public confidence". In Nigeria's government a punishable offence with up to three years in prison, a fine or both.

The proposed 'Independent National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speeches Bill', reintroduced in November 2019, prohibits behaviour that is "threatening, abusive or insulting", leaving it open to broad interpretation. If passed, it would impose the death penalty for anybody found guilty of an offence of hate speech that incites the death of another person.

Arrests and Prosecutions of Journalists

In 2020 many bloggers and journalists have been arrested under suspicion of 'cyber stalking'. The Government has abused this section of the act to "silence" opposition views in the online media.

For example:

❖ On 28 May, the Manager of the New Media Centre was arrested after sharing a Facebook post allegedly defaming Imo State Governor. He was charged under the Cybercrime and Terrorism act and released on bail of N500, 000 [almost 1300 USD] 22 June 2020.

❖ On 22 May, the Nigeria police filed a complaint in a Federal High Court in Abuja against a freelance journalist for sending a WhatsApp audio message "causing annoyance, insult, hatred and ill will" towards Nigeria's Minister of Information and Culture, in violation of Section 24(1)(b) of the cybercrime 2015.

❖ On 18 August, a local magistrate court charged another journalist with cyber stalking under the cybercrime act for just sending a message that included the title of a news article alleging the spouse of Akwa-Ibom state governor was linked to a blackmail scandal.

❖ On 5 June, the founder of the privately-owned Naija Live TV news website, in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state, was charged under the country's cybercrime act for his reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic. He was previously arrested by the Department of State Security (DSS) and released on bail.

❖ Oluwatosin Alagbe, Director of Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism, reported that: *"It is shameful that Nigeria has been using its Cybercrime Act repeatedly to prosecute journalists. Journalists like Ime Sunday Silas and Fejiri Oliver have been charged under Section 24 of the Act. The Cybercrime Act is oppressive and repressive, and should be dropped because it stifles freedom of expression, association and media freedom"*.

The study examined the perception of journalists on professional safety and freedom of expression in FCT, Abuja. As such, the data obtained from the interviewees were presented and analyzed as follows:

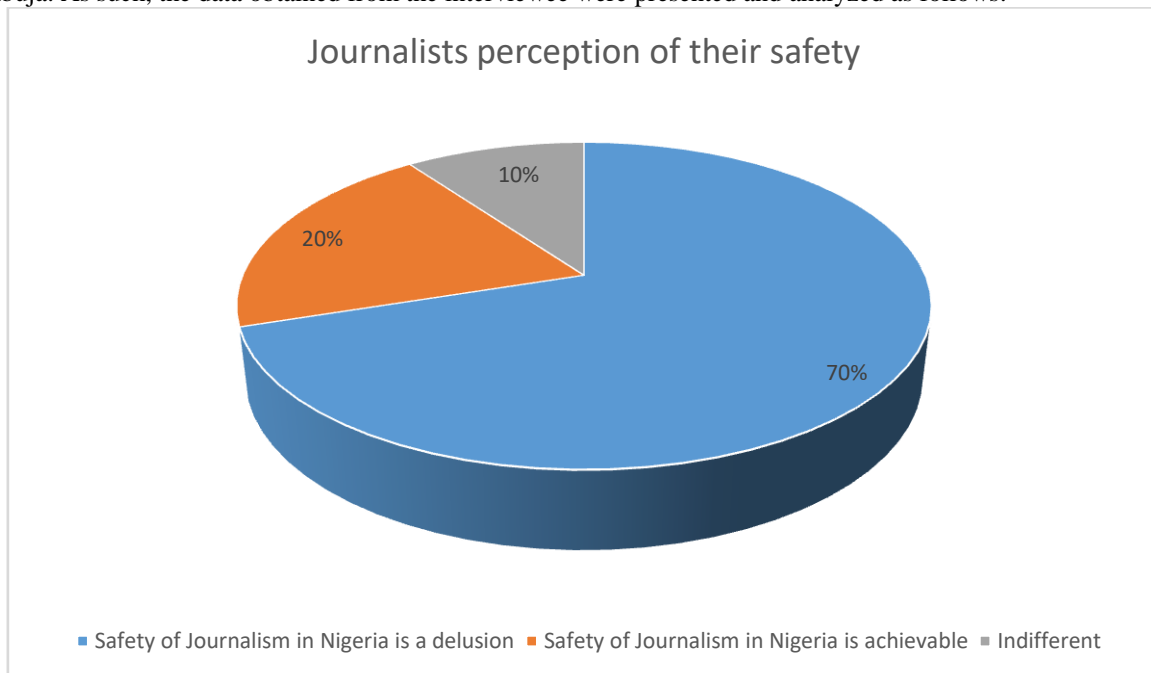


Figure 1.1 Perception of Journalists of their Safety in Nigeria

The study reveals that 70% of the respondents sampled believe that safety of journalists in Nigeria is a delusion, 20% were of the view that their safety is achievable if the necessary mechanism is put in place, while 10% remained indifferent (figure 1.1). On why they think safety of journalist is a delusion, majority of them claimed that, given the nature of the job, it is very difficult to be completely safe.

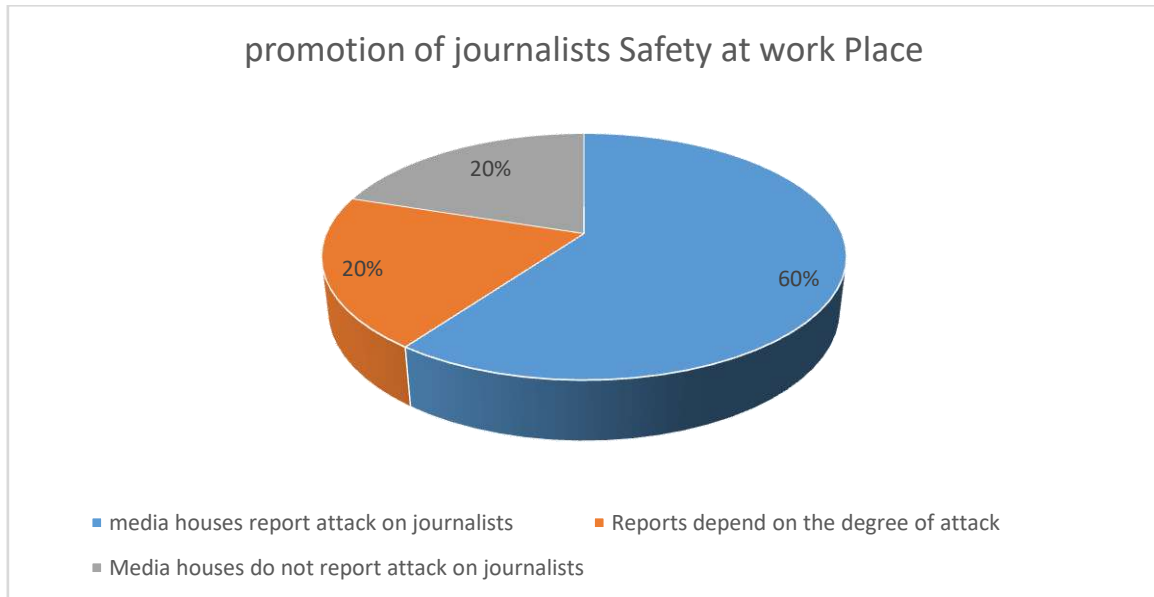


Figure 2.1 Extents to which media houses promote safety of Journalists

The study reveals that, 60% of the respondents admitted that their media houses report threat or attack on safety of journalists, 20% claimed that reporting depends on the degree of assault or threat, while 20% are of the view that, their media houses do not report such. Most of the respondents who are of the view that their media houses report and promote journalism safety are of the view that they give it much prominence.

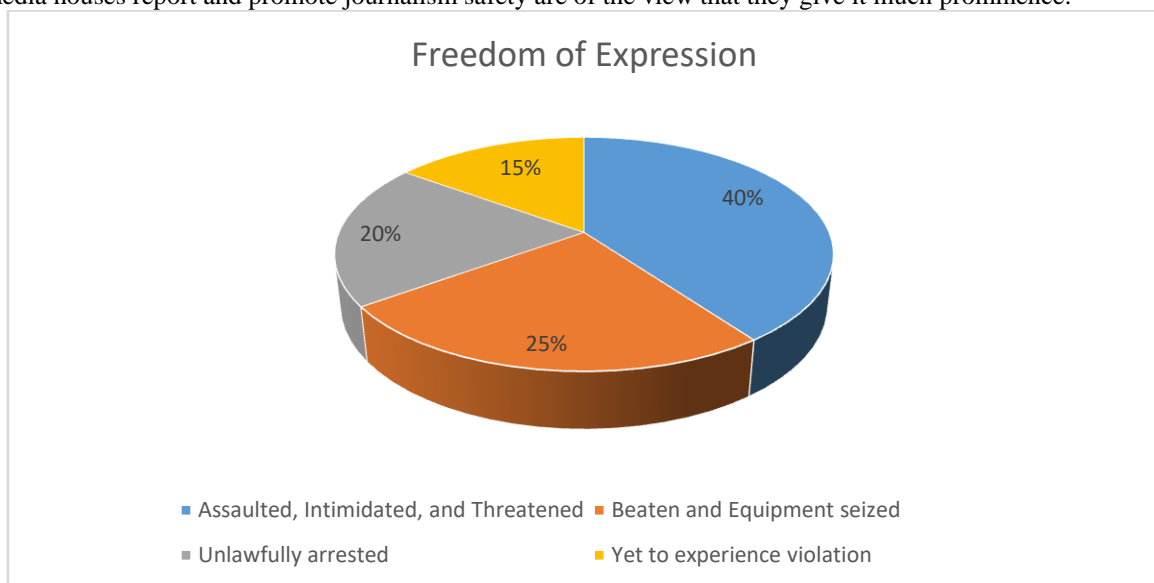


Figure 3.1 Perception of Journalists on their Freedom of Expression in Nigeria

Figure 3.1 shows that, of 100 respondents interviewed, 40% claimed that they have been assaulted verbally, intimidated, and threatened not to report some stories, 25% have been beaten and equipment seized in the course of reporting news that did not go well with some persons, 20% have been unlawfully arrested after news report, while 15% of journalists, as sampled in Abuja are yet to experience violation of their freedom of expression. According to the majority of those interviewed, they now have so much fear in reporting sensitive issues, and stories where highly placed individuals will rather see as scandalous. These findings ultimately reveal that, some media houses directly or indirectly sell out journalists by revealing their identities after coverage. They have not been doing enough to protect and promote safety of journalists in Nigeria.

The findings show that safety of journalists is a fundamental requirement for carrying out their professional task without fear or intimidation. However, even though there are provisions in the constitution, international treaties and humanitarian law that guarantee freedom of expression as well as safety of journalists,

all the respondents claimed that they are aware that they exist but were not efficacious. This finding validates a research by Fournier (2014) on the protection of journalists in armed conflicts. The study suggested that safety of journalists should be a continuation in the present focus of the combination of raising awareness for less impunity and practical assistance. With this, he noted that the level of consciousness on safety will be high which will consequently lead to less attack and threats to journalists.

More so, the study found that most of the respondents see journalism safety as a phenomenon that is not practicable. They noted that it is only in theory, not in practice. This affirms a previous study by (Lohner and Banjac, 2016). In the study, a journalist said that “there is no story that is bigger than your life”.

Therefore, considering the imperativeness of the New Institutionalism Theory, this study has validated the impact of Nigeria’s unsafe environment on journalists’ work and right to freedom of expression, Journalists play a vital role in society as a watchdog, revealing vital information that contributes to holding the government accountable. But they also face immense challenges in the performance of their duty. In Nigeria, they are often victims of assaults, verbal threats, intimidation, and seizure of equipment or even imprisonment. These attacks obviously constitute a real threat to freedom of expression and media freedom.

V. CONCLUSION

It is a sad commentary that, after evaluation, the study revealed that, even, professional bodies like the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), charged with protecting the rights and privileges of Nigerian journalists, have not been able to adequately provide cover and protection for journalists in the country. Clearly, neither organ seems to be effective, nor even sensitive to the plight of journalists within and outside the media space. Journalists often are, and increasingly have become, the target of harassment, intimidation and violence. Such attacks include threats to them and members of their families, expulsion, unlawful or arbitrary arrest and detention, abduction, torture, sexual violence and murder. Harassment is also common, where journalists are tried on false grounds of espionage, subversion, threat to national security or terrorism, or where slander, libel and defamation laws are used inappropriately. The purpose of such attacks is often to silence journalists who investigate, document and report on sensitive issues, such as human rights violations and abuses, environmental degradation, corruption, organized crime, drug trafficking, public crises or protests, which consequently trample on the freedom of expression and fundamental human right.

Thus, the attacks on journalists are not only an attack on the individuals concerned, but also on freedom of expression and democracy. It is because of the important role of journalism that specific protection is needed. Safety of journalists is understood to be an important requirement for unhindered practice of journalism and freedom of expression. In light of this, the study takes a position that, the subject of safety and protection of journalists in Nigeria should be given adequate concern. The rate at which journalists lost their lives in trying to serve human needs on happenings in the society is worrisome. Most importantly, there is need for media organizations in Nigeria, to provide and entrench a robust safety policy that guarantees the smooth operation of journalism and protection of journalists. The policy may also take into cognizance key stakeholders by engaging security agencies such as the police force, military and paramilitary amongst others to understand the principles and ethics of journalism to which this noble profession upholds and to collectively proffer solutions on how best to protect journalists whilst on the job. It is also imperative to train and retrain journalists on safety strategies on how best they can protect themselves.

As this phenomenon is also a global issue, with at least 30 journalists killed in other countries such as the Philippines, Mexico, Afghanistan, Northern Syria and many others in 2020, there is an urgent need for the international community, Amnesty International and organizations alike, such as UNESCO to continually work to reinforce global norms and standards by supporting research, awareness creation, capacity building, monitoring and working in cooperation with the government, academia, Non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations to create campaigns that focus on the increasing dangers posed by threats to non-state actors as well media practitioners. For a sustainable intervention, UNESCO in particular and other relevant agencies should map out key elements and monitor the conditions to which journalists carry out their work and if protective measures such as follow up activities are given to crimes that these journalists have been accused and charged with. It is paramount that these evaluations are periodically done in order to examine to what extent the UN Plan of Action on the safety of Journalists and the issue of impunity has substantially improved the trends and contemporary challenges to the safety of journalists such as retaliatory killings for carrying out their jobs in specific countries that are part of the UN roll out action plan.

In conclusion, the Nigeria Union of Journalists and Nigeria Press Council could learn and adopt the Council of Europe’s- Platform for the protection of journalism and safety of journalists which allows for the collation, processing and dissemination of information on threat to the safety of journalists and media freedom posted via the platform by partner organizations who publish a situation analysis and report on the situation of

these issues as it arises. This provides an opportunity for the states concerned to reply accordingly. This approach is worthy of emulation as it also serves as a means to hold accountable the perpetrators and to proffer possible lasting solutions.

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