

Covid 19 And The Safety Of Media Personnel In Nigeria

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Abstract: *This paper investigated media personnel employers' compliance with safety and protection of professionals in charge of dissemination of information whenever their assignments take them to places where their lives could be at risk. The occupational safety and health convention spells out the requirements that employers of labour are expected to fulfill in order to protect workers at the front line of disease of epidemic or pandemic proportions as contained in the International Labour Organisations Convention. The paper has four sections that include, introduction, literature review and analysis. Interview was used as data collection instrument. The primary data was relied upon. The qualitative data was analysed in themes. This paper argued that Health correspondent have a duty to protect themselves when at the frontline in order save their lives and that of their colleagues and their family. All safety precautions have to be adhered to. Their employers too are expected to give them all necessary kits to adhere to the safety precautions.*

Keywords: *Covid 19, Global Pandemic, Disease, Safety precaution, Media Personnel, Journalism, health reporting*

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Introduction

The Covid 19 global pandemic is a threat to lives of all human beings and as such precautionary measures are being put in place as a form of protocol drawn out by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to prevent the ravaging transmission of the disease. Countries locked down cities and villages in order to prevent the ravaging transmission of the disease. Frontline doctors, nurses and other personnel in the health sector as well as medical personnel have to be on duty in order to prevent the spread of the disease. Media practitioners do not belong to the health sector directly but their profession and duty in the period of global pandemic is very essential for the creation of awareness in order to make all citizens to protect themselves against being infected by disease. There were accusations and counter accusation between media practitioners and the government of Nigeria that media practitioners are not usually provided with the personal protective gears or other equipment provided for the frontline health medical professionals.

The overall objective of this paper is to assess the safety of media personnel at the frontline covering Covid 19 related events. The specific objective includes:

Research objectives

- a. To assess the roles of journalists and media personnel in health reporting.
- b. To evaluate the job-related wellbeing and health convention of the International Labour Organisation.
- c. To assess the level of compliance of employers of media personnel on the work-related safety and health convention

Research question

- a. What are the roles of journalists and media personnel in health reporting?
- b. What are the job-related wellbeing and health convention of the International Labour Organisation?
- c. What is the level of compliance of employers of journalists and media personnel regarding the work-related safety and health convention in the period of Covid 19?

To answer the questions raised above, the study reviewed researches done on the roles of journalists and media personnel in health reporting and the provisions of job-related wellbeing and health convention of the International Labour Organisation.

Journalists: Protected professionals?

Journalists have to be protected as professionals in charge of dissemination of information should their assignments take them to places where their lives could be at risk. Balguy-Gallios (2004), explains the privileges given to journalist in the conflict situation and the safety priority accorded them:

Beyond the war front journalists or media personnel's lives are being threatened by infectious diseases in the wake of coverage of Covid 19 pandemic. This brings to the mind the affirmation of the idea of healthcare journalism as a sub-discipline that has to do with coverage and investigation of the following for public consumption:

- Condition of government hospital
- State-of-the-art equipment in hospital
- Interview of expert
- Rare surgery
- Critical report of health policy
- Critical report of non-medical stories and
- Critical report data for review and public studies (P. Narayan, n.d.)

Healthcare journalism: roles and responsibilities

There are reasons for the coverage of health issues in the society. These reasons mandate the journalist to perform his or her duty. In the course of professional duty some risks are involved. Even with these risks accurate and clear reporting of events and explanation of issues, reflecting on the society are important. There is need to look at issue critically, proportionately and comprehensively in order to set agenda and investigate medical research claims on the efficacy of drugs or the origin of new or existing diseases that threaten the lives of people in an area or in the whole world (G. Schwitzer, G. & al., 2005, p. 0576).

In Thomas and Senkpeni (2020), affirms that it is obvious that outburst of infectious diseases are not only public health crisis, but equally crisis that

affect the type of information journalist are exposed to. The implication to this is that it affects that level of trust people that about the information journalists. This therefore calls to question the credibility of both the constructive source of scientific facts and as a destructive source of rumor that tend to amplify panic.

In consonance with the position expressed above, Thomas and Senkpeni (2020), consider the age of social media and at add that as far as health issues are concern, it is on a high note as diseases now spread not only physically but also digitally in print, posts and videos that “go viral”.

The safety of journalists is the preoccupation of Cecaro (2012). This writer discusses the risk of communication in the line of duty and other health issues regarding the life of journalists:

Risk communication is the final part of a process which leads to the decision maker to determine whether a particular risk is acceptable or not and to adopt preventive behavior. Along this process mass-media play a crucial role in shaping citizens' opinions and attitudes. When reporting public health rises to the general reader, mass media try to translate expert knowledge in a clear and understandable way. (M. Cecaro, 2012, p. 1000)

By implication, this means news on health related issues like the COVID 19 need to be verified before being published in order to avoid misinformation i. e where there is the right information the rate of believability is high. There are instances where the daily figures or update released by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), are either over blotted or reduced by overzealous journalists who want to be the first to release the news for economic gain at the expense of the people.

Importance and challenges of health reporting

Keshvari, Yamani, Adibi and Shanazi (2018) explain the importance and challenges of health journalism, asserting that

Health journalism is considered a means of sharing of the results through the dissemination of health news medical research and health policies. Mass media play a leading role in the sermon eating health news affecting the knowledge and health beliefs of the public and eventually promoting public health. (M. Keshvari & al., 2018, p. 14)

The position above is explained further looking at the influence of health journalism “The influence of Media on public believes is so huge that sometimes people adopt a new treatment due to the latest health news they learn about through the media full-stop moreover Media highly effective decisions of doctors, policymakers and health professionals”. In other words,

the challenges of journalists covering health related issues also includes but not limited to; time to source and release the news, pressure from health authorities, unwillingness or health personals to cooperate and the vacuum created by insufficient training and retraining. Other obstacles are lack of awareness of latest findings and reachability as well as inept approach in writing stories or articles.

Obstacles to professional health journalism the world over are enumerated by Vincent (2007, p. 6):

- a. Lack of basic journalist skills and understanding of science and health issues
- b. Low sector and Meagre reward of health journalism
- c. Restriction of access to health information statistics
- d. Lack of equipment time access to communication and travel exposed
- e. Lack of cordial relaxation with health practitioners.

Journalists and Occupational Safety and Health Convention (OSH)

The Occupational Safety and Health Convention spells out the requirements that employers of labour are expected to fulfill in order to protect workers at the front sign of disease of epidemic all pandemic proportions as contained in C. 155, article 6:

Employers should be required to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable that's the workplaces machineries equipment and processes under their control are safe and without risk to health and that the chemical physical and biological substances and agents under their control and without risk to health when the appropriate measures of protection are taking. Employers should be required to provide where necessary adequate protective clothing and protective equipment to prevent so far as is reasonably practicable risk of accidents or of adverse effects on health. (ILO, 2020, p.11)

In a related issue, C.155, article 18 state that “employers should be required to provide where necessary for measures to deal with emergencies and accidents including adequate first aid arrangements”. Article 19 on this same C. 155 also states, that “Employers should also ensure that workers and their representatives are consulted, informed and trained on OSH associated with their work”.

Another provision in C. 155 article 13 spells out the following

Workers and their representatives have the right to receive adequate information and training on OSH. They should also be enabled to enquire into and to be consulted by the employer on all aspect of OHS associated with their work. Workers have also d right to remove themselves from a work situation

which they have reasonable justification to believe presents an imminent and serious danger to their life or health without undue consequences.

According to International Labour Organisation document which specified the guidelines on the protection and safety of health workers (published in 2020) it outlines few measures to be put in place for the protection and safety of health workers. These measures are

- a. Social distancing – Physical distancing or social distancing involve creating sign for the distance of about 2 or 3 meters between persons who interact in work environment. Population of people meeting in a place has to be reduced in for example news room or any other workspace.
- b. Observance of personal hygiene – Hygiene also involves disinfecting and washing of hands use of face mask use of bent elbow when coughing and other way of promoting respiratory hygiene. The use of personal protective equipment while at the frontline and proper disposal of such material.
- c. Cleaning of the environment – Cleaning involves the culture of disinfecting areas and equipment which people use regularly and at all intervals. Door knobs restroom and keyboards are also cleaned at intervals.
- d. Training of workers on safety and protection against risk of Covid 19 infection and
- e. Regular communication with workers on safety and protection against risk of Covid 19 infection with reference to World Health Organisation's guidelines.

The International Labour Organisation document also suggested ways of assessing and controlling risk that workers may go through:

- a. Employer and employee are expected to assess the probability of being exposed to contagious disease and the likely severity associated with contacting a disease.
- b. They should take measures that will help control the impact of Covid 19 on their colleagues or families.

Methodology

Media personnel using print, electronic and multi-media platforms were interviewed. Data from interviews and discussion were gathered and analysed. 10 media personnel using print media, radio and television platforms were sampled using purposive sampling. Both primary and secondary qualitative data were analysed in themes. The journalists interviewed were specialist in

health reporting. They were the ones at the frontline during the lock down that was observed all over Nigeria.

Occupational Safety and Health of Journalists: Analysis of level of compliance in Nigeria

S/ No	Safety and health convention provision	Responses on compliance
1	The provision, where necessary, adequate protective clothing and protective equipment to prevent so far as is reasonably practicable risk of accidents or of adverse effects on health.	There are no risks related to the use of personal protective equipment because journalists or media personnel were not allowed into intensive care units, except on rare occasion when they are to cover events at isolation centres.
2	The provision, where necessary, adequate for measures to deal with emergencies and accidents including adequate first aid arrangements.	There were adequate provisions for first aid arrangements for journalists and media personnel in their workplace and the vehicles conveying them during field work.
3	Availability of protective clothing and equipment should be provided without any cost to the worker as contained.	Arrangement for protective clothing and equipment were made without any cost to the worker because it is the government that want the journalist or media personnel to cover events showing casing where patients are being kept.
4	To ensure that workers and their representatives are consulted, informed and trained on OSH associated with their work be enabled to enquire into and to be consulted by the employer on all aspect of OHS associated with their work.	Few journalists and media personnel were trained on OSH associated with their work.
5	Workers have also the right to remove themselves from a work	There are no incidents where journalists or media personnel had

	<p>situation which they have reasonable justification to believe presents an imminent and serious danger to their life or health without undue consequences.</p>	<p>to remove themselves from a work situation which they thought presented an imminent and serious danger to their life or health.</p>
6	<p>Workers should report their situations to their immediate supervisor; until the employer has taken remedial action if necessary the employer cannot require workers to return to a work situation where there is continuing imminent and serious danger to life or health.</p>	<p>There are no incidents where journalists or media personnel had to report their situations to their immediate supervisor and where the employer had taken remedial action where there was continuing imminent and serious danger to life or health of the journalist or media professional.</p>
7	<p>Taking reasonable care for their own safety and that of other persons who may be affected by their acts of commissions at work complying with instructions given for their own safety and health and those of others; using safety devices and protective equipment collectively and not rendering them inoperable; reporting forthwith to their immediate supervisor and situation which they have reason to believe could present be hazard and which they cannot themselves correct; reporting any accidents or injury to health which arise in the course of or in connection with the work.</p>	<p>These items were given attention but there were no incidences that warranted their implementation among journalists or media personnel during field work or in the workplace.</p>

Safety precaution in the work place for journalists

S/ No	Safety precaution	Responses on compliance
1	Social distancing	Social distance of two metres were observed in the newsroom and other offices within the media houses. Most presentations or news report submissions were done via e-platforms
2	Hygiene	Journalists and media personnel were given face masks, hand sanitizers and hand washing equipment were provided at the points of entrance of each building and the toilets were regularly disinfected
3	Cleaning	The offices, door handles, rails and toilets were cleaned and regularly disinfected in order to kill germ likely to reside on the platforms mentions.
4	Training	Journalists and media personnel were given training on how Covid 19 could spread protect themselves from the risk of infection at work place or during field work.
5	Communication	Employers of Journalists and media personnel were communicating regularly with their workers on the situation and latest pronouncements made by the Covid 19 committee at the national and state levels.

Summary of finding

This study confirmed that precautionary measures were taken by journalists and media personnel in the workplace and during field work. News report submissions were done via e-platforms to avoid the risk of contracting Covid 19 disease. They were given face masks, hand sanitizers and hand washing equipment were provided at the work place. Places of interaction were cleaned and disinfected regularly. Training were carried out and latest issues on the protection of personnel were carried out regularly with journalists and media personnel.

Recommendation

It is recommended that health correspondents have a duty to protect themselves when at the frontline in order to save their lives and that of their colleagues and their family. All safety precautions have to be adhered to. Their employers too must not be tired with providing them with all necessary kits to observe the safety precautions. The e-platform should be used more by media houses during the Covid 19 in order to promote the safety and protection of journalist and media personnel in their professional undertakings.

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