

## Challenges to Journalists' Safety in Covering Boko Haram Insurgency in the North-East, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*This study examined the challenges to journalists' safety in covering the Boko Haram insurgency in North East, Nigeria. The research sought to assess the nature of safety challenges journalists face, the level of safety they have, to identify the safety routine measures journalists adopted before fieldwork, and find out whether media organisations provide safety measures to their reporters. The Protection Motivation was reviewed and used as framework for the study. To achieve these objectives, a qualitative research approach was used as a means of getting valuable data. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was selected as the methods for gathering relevant information. A sample size of 41 participants was selected for the FGD using purposive sampling technique. Thematic analysis method was used in analysing the data generated, which was used in answering the research questions. The study found out that journalists who cover the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East adopt various local and international best safety practices laid down for journalists covering dangerous assignments. The data also revealed that the safety routine measures adopted by journalists before fieldwork reduced risk and improved safety. The findings further revealed that media organizations do not provide safety measures for journalists and that the safety of journalists covering the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East is solely their responsibility. The research concludes that the issue of safety and protection of journalists in Nigeria must be given due consideration by the government and media stakeholders. The way and manner journalists lose their lives in the process of discharging their duty is alarming. The study recommends that the safety and protection of journalists should be made part of journalists' employment contracts, and there should be a national protection and safety protocol curriculum and training for journalists.*

### Keywords

Boko Haram, Challenges, Insurgency, Journalists and Safety



## I. Introduction

Over two decades, the insurgency has become one of the serious issues faced by most societies around the world. The mass media are instrumental in mobilizing for war and conflict, they are involved both at the planning stage of insurgency and at the execution stage. Some scholars have confirmed that the mass media are always the source of information and that the outcomes of wars and conflicts have always been catastrophic for journalists' safety (Pate & Oso, 2017). The study conducted by Navi Pillay in Msughter (2017) suggests that 'the safety of journalists is quite simply essential to the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all of us, as well as the right to development.'

Research on media and terrorism in recent years has attracted scholarly attention. For instance, Schmidt and Jongman in Garba and Msaughter (2023) argued that about 90% of all terrorism-related literature was written in the late 1990s. Similarly, Oreoluwa et al., (2024) observe that research on terrorism and terrorism-related issues have increased

dramatically in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. This is another way of saying that the terrorist attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre (WTC) and the Pentagon signalled a rebirth and increased research interest in terrorism. The attack is often rated as the deadliest in the history of terrorist attacks (Onyejelem et al., 2024).

The challenges to journalists' safety and the increasing level of impunity worldwide in recent years is a thing of concern among key media players. Most journalists who report in risky environments consider many uncertainties and dangers to be inherent in their work. Journalists face many security threats that can be mitigated. Worldwide, within the past two decades, about 1149 journalists have been killed with confirmed motives. Over sixty percent of these cases were classified as the killing of journalists concerning their work (UNESCO 2016; Maiwada et al., 2025). The Committee to Protect Journalists documented 1387 killings of journalists since 1992, with about 713 cases left unresolved (Aondover et al., 2024).

This increase in the killing of journalists, according to Carlson in Sulemana (2014) was a result of the drastic decline in freedom of information and safety of journalists during the period. Also, the Press Freedom Index for 2015 declares that press freedom is declining worldwide and points out the targeting and manipulation of media workers as the main cause of this deterioration. Two-thirds of the 180 countries surveyed for the 2015 World Press freedom index performed less well than in the previous year. The annual global indicator, which measures the overall level of violations of freedom of information and that of journalists' safety in 180 countries year by year has risen to 3,719. This is an eight percent increase over 2014 and almost ten percent compared with 2013.

Between 2014 and March 2021, about 251 journalists have been killed. These killings were confirmed murder in the course of their duty. A year- by-year distribution of these deaths showed that 2014 was the worst for the safety of journalists worldwide; with 87 deaths in 2014 and three journalists killed in the first quarter of 2021 accounting for the least death since 2014 (UNESCO 2015). The 2020 World Press Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) showed that the coming decade will be decisive for the future of journalism, with the Covid-19 pandemic highlighting and amplifying the many crises that threaten the right to a free report, independent, diverse and reliable information (Garba & Msughter, 2023).

Reporters Without Borders (2020) further maintains that journalists and news organisations are indispensable partners in the exercise of this basic freedom. This informs why those who seek to restrict the public right to information target journalists. This usually jeopardizes their safety as they (those that muzzle the press) go to any extent to silence them. The number of journalists killed while on duty (over 1000 from 2006 to 2022) shows the scale of the problem and the difficulty in dealing with it.

Marcesse (2017) examines global efforts to promote journalist safety carried out by the UN system from its inception in 1945 until 2016. The study revealed that the 1970s was the beginning of the first serious efforts toward the protection of journalists within the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). However, the study found that the safety of journalists' issue became a 'battle between different views on the role of the press and journalists, worsened by Cold War rivalries' (Yar'Adua et al., 2023). The altercation that shrouds the debates and the departures of the United States and Great Britain from UNESCO in the 1980s put an end to the issue of journalists' safety till the 1990s (Yar'Adua et al., 2023).

On the African continent, countries like; Ghana, Tunisia, Uganda, South Africa, and Libya have witnessed several years of media repression, particularly under various

military regimes. In many other countries across Africa, there have been disquieting evidence of the scale and number of attacks against the safety of journalists and media workers as well as of incidents affecting their ability to exercise freedom of expression by threats of prosecution, arrest, imprisonment, denial of journalistic access and failure to investigate and prosecute crimes against them (Yar'Adua & Msughter, 2023). According to AON Terrorism and Political Violence Risk Map for 2015, Sub-Saharan Africa had the greatest number of high-to-severe-risk countries (Imo, 2017). Nearly 80 per cent of all terrorist attacks in 2015 occurred in just two countries, Nigeria and Somalia (Mustapha, 2014). Importantly, Nkanga (2014) noted that Nigeria was the only country in this cluster that featured among the 10 most terrorism-afflicted countries in the world. The Nigerian military became better suited in its response to Boko Haram attacks between 2016 and mid-2018 and thereby forced a significant reduction in Boko Haram atrocities. However, in late 2018 renewed attacks by Boko Haram terrorists reversed the situation with the terrorists gaining the upper hand.

The causes of insurgency in African nations vary a great deal. The tremendous cultural and language differences play a great role. The only truly shared experience is a history of European colonialism. However, in the Sahel region, some countries such as Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso have suffered from successive weak governments, impunity, and disorganization. Mali offers a clear example of how structural failings, poor governance, and weak state security have been the main cause of the growing insurgency and long predates the 'war on terror' narrative. The Al- Shabab, Maitatsine, and a host of other terrorist groups have unleashed terror attacks on civilians and journalists in the past. Perhaps, the most notorious terrorist activity in Africa during the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been in Nigeria due to the activities of the terrorist group Boko Haram.

In Nigeria, the practice of journalism is not significantly different from the global experience. Nigeria is committed to protecting and promoting the rights and safety of media professionals. Notwithstanding, journalists are still vulnerable to psychological harm, physical abuse, and death (including murder). Other acts include the closure of offices by the police or Department of State Security, abductions and kidnappings by militant groups, violence, battering and killing (Pate et al., 2017). In the same vein, Wilson in Msughter et al., (2023) states that journalists working in conflict zones like the North East and politically volatile areas remain highly vulnerable to attacks without investigations or arrest of perpetrators, except for condemnations that usually follow from the Nigeria Union of Journalists.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to examine the challenges of journalists' safety in covering the Boko Haram insurgency in North-East, Nigeria. This study seeks:

1. To investigate the nature of safety challenges journalists, face in covering the Boko Haram Insurgency.
2. To examine the level of safety journalists covering the Boko Haram Insurgency have.
3. To examine journalists' safety routine measures before fieldwork.
4. To find out safety measures media organisations provide for journalists covering Boko Haram Insurgency in the North-East.

## II. Review of Literatures

### Theoretical Framework

The study employed The Protection Motivation Theory, which was originally founded by R.W Rogers in 1975 to better understand fear appeals and how people cope with them. However, Rogers later expanded the theory in 1983 where he extended the theory to a more general theory of persuasive communication. The theory was originally based on the work of Richard Lazarus who researched how people behave and cope during stressful situations. He stated that people differ in their sensitivity and vulnerability to certain types of events, as well as in their interpretations and reactions (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022). While Richard Lazarus came up with many of the fundamental ideas used in the protection motivation theory, Rogers was the first to apply the terminology when discussing fear appeals.

He developed the most recent iteration of the PMT model in 1983 as a means to better understand how and why individuals respond to potential threats to their health and safety. PMT proposes that both individual and environmental factors can provide either encouragement or discouragement for engaging in protective behaviours and that the effects of such factors are mediated by individual cognitive processes. These cognitive processes are intended to distinguish from the assumed direct relationship of emotional fear on protective responses. To date, this theory has been largely applied to explain protective behaviours related to health (Idris & Msughter, 2022).

The Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) as detailed by Rogers (1983) has two components. The first component of the model, sources of information, includes environmental and intrapersonal factors that provide an individual with suggestions regarding potential victimization threats, potential protective options, and reasons why the individual should or should not engage in a given protective response (Hile et al., 2023). Environmental sources of information include conversations with or directions from others such as family members, neighbours, media, or the police regarding victimization threats and potential protective responses (verbal persuasion). Environmental sources of information can also include directly witnessing acts of victimization or the use of protective responses (observational learning).

Intrapersonal sources of information related to an individual's characteristics or experiences that may influence his or her perceptions of crime or willingness to use protective measures. Rogers identifies two intrapersonal sources of information: personality variables and prior experiences. These intrapersonal sources of information suggest that an individual's prior experiences with victimization or the use of protective measures as well as his or her personality characteristics may contribute to knowledge of potential threats and perceptions of threats and potential protective responses (Aondover et al., 2022). Together, environmental and intrapersonal sources of information provide the individual with a general knowledge of potential threats and potential protective responses. Based on information an individual obtains over time about potential threats and protective responses, the individual then must assess this information to determine whether or not to engage in a given protective measure in response to a given threat. Rogers identifies two cognitive mediating processes by which the individual performs this assessment.

In the maladaptive response process, more commonly referred to as the threat appraisal process, the individual assesses the potential benefits of continuing with their current lifestyle even though it may expose him or her to a potential threat. The individual may consider intrinsic rewards such as retaining a slim figure with the use of potentially



dangerous diet pills or extrinsic rewards such as social approval for drinking large volumes of alcohol when around others who are binge drinking (Aliyu et al., 2023).

While these intrinsic and extrinsic rewards may encourage an individual to engage in behaviours that may expose them to potential threats, the individual may also consider factors that would increase his or her concern to evaluate the risks of the potential threat, the adaptive response process, or coping appraisal process, allows the individual to evaluate potential responses that could protect the individual from a given threat. According to Rogers, the individual first considers their perceptions of whether or not a given protective response will be able to prevent a given threat (response efficacy) and whether they will be able to employ the protective response in a way in which it will be effective in preventing the potential threat (self-efficacy). The individual then considers the relative expense of employing a given protective response (response costs). This may include both monetary and social costs associated with purchasing or employing the protective response. Based on the evaluation of these factors, the individual will determine whether a proposed protective response will be both physically and cost-effective in protecting them from a given threat (Vitalis et al., 2025).

The summation of considerations associated with the threat and coping appraisal processes produce the individual's 'protection motivation.' An individual may perceive that exposure to a potential threat is not a serious concern or is not serious enough to warrant further protective action, that a potential protective response will not be effective in protecting the individual from a potential threat, or that the costs of a potential protective response exceed the potential benefits of the protective measure. In this case, individuals will choose not to engage in a given protective response. On the other hand, when the individual perceives a serious threat, believes in the efficacy of a potential protective response, and/or has the means to afford a protective response, then the individual is likely to engage in the given protective response. It is important to remember that the components of this assessment response are informed by the environmental and intrapersonal sources of information and that the final protection motivation is based on the summation of all components of the assessment process.

The theory is applicable and relevant to this study because the theory stems from both threat and coping appraisals, Threat appraisal assesses the severity of the threat of Boko Haram activities and how serious it is. While the coping appraisal focuses on how journalists respond to the insurgency situation (Onyejelem et al., 2025). Coping appraisal consists of both efficacy and self-efficacy; efficacy is the journalist's expectancy that if safety measures are in place it can prevent or remove possible harm in the field. Self-efficacy is the journalist's ability to execute safety measures successfully. The assumptions of this theory are bedrock for this study as it revolves around the basic concept of the study: 'Safety of Journalists in covering Boko Haram insurgency.'

### **III. Research Methods**

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine the challenges of journalists' safety in covering the Boko Haram insurgency in North-East Nigeria. A descriptive qualitative research approach was chosen because it is useful in discovering the meaning that people give to event that they experience. The study adopted Focus Group Discussion method. Therefore, the population of This study consists of the 1345 journalists in the North-East Nigeria, who work as reporters. It also includes all General managers/Editors of print and broadcast media stations in Northeast Nigeria. This study adopted the purposive sampling technique in selecting the sample for the study. Based on

the purposive sampling approach, the study selected 41 journalists for the in-depth interview.

## **IV. Results and Discussion**

As such, the data obtained from the interviews and FGDs that were considered important in answering the research questions were presented with supporting evidence, including both quotations and feedback. The analysis was segmented and done according to the themes. Below is a detailed discussion of each of the identified themes concerning the interview questions:

### **4.1 The Nature of safety challenges: Physical, Psychological and Economic**

One of the questions this study answered, is the research question 1 which sought to find out the nature of the safety challenges journalists covering the Boko Haram insurgency face. Based on the data generated from the FGD, all the participants expressed the fact that in covering the activities of the Boko Haram insurgents they face physical, psychological, economic, environmental, digital, and other forms of challenges. They expressed their individual experiences and how they were able to cope. However, some journalists simply gave up on covering insurgency because of lack of safety protection support from their media organisations. In addition, throughout the FGDs and IDIs in the selected states, journalists also reported a decrease and a significant lack of physical, psychological, and digital safety training protocols. In Maiduguri for instance, according to the data generated during the FGDs, the intimidation, threats, and assassination of colleagues have led many local reporters to cease reporting the insurgents and fled to Yobe and then to Adamawa.

#### **a. Physical Safety Challenges**

The Physical safety challenges journalists covering the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast face, according to their responses include; threats, intimidations, physical attacks, material attacks, abduction, and even death. One of the Participants in Maiduguri during one of the FGD sessions summarizes their physical safety challenges, thus:

It has not been easy coping with the situation here, threats and intimidation have become something we hear and witness daily. I could recall a sinister one that almost made me give up, one of the terrorists called my phone on one Sunday evening, being a strange number, I did not pick because it is part of the security training that we should not pick calls from strange numbers at the first call but when the call persists. Later, I received an SMS from the same number saying; ‘yabakadagawayaba? Dan Iska, sai mu keshe ka’ (why didn’t you pick your call? Bastard, we will kill you). After fifteen minutes of the SMS, the terrorist called again and I picked up, he shouted ‘Shege’ he continued, ‘since you are against our mission of rescuing our people from the system of disbelief, you have become our enemy, we are watching you closely and we will kill you. He said this in middle-class English mixed with pigeon English and Hausa (Participant 3, FGD, 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2020).

#### **b. Psychological Safety Challenges**

Psychological safety is another nature of safety challenge that journalists covering the Boko Haram insurgency say they face. Some of the participants across the selected states mentioned during the FGDs that they also face Psycho-social safety challenges. Threats to journalists’ physical safety can thus be a major source of stress. An increasingly threatening environment and exposure to violence can lead to journalists suffering from

fear, trauma, and paranoia. Psychological trauma may take various forms and is experienced differently by individuals depending on the context. In sharing their experiences participant 41 a newspaper reporter in Yola summarily says; ‘I have been subjected to severe fear by frequent sounds of bomb blast and gunshots, I have suddenly become hypertensive since we started covering the insurgents and that is a great challenge to my wellbeing’ (Participant 41, FGD, 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2020).

Common symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder are increased alertness, numbing and disassociation, intrusive memories etc. These according to the majority of the participants are symptoms every one of them covering Boko Haram insurgency suffers, A participant in one of the FGDs in Damaturu summarises their experiences, thus: ‘None of us is left out in being a victim of one or more of the symptoms of trauma or post-traumatic stress. I am on a psycho-therapy to correct my intrusive memory disorder’ (Participant 25, FGD, 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2020). To one of the participants in one of the sessions of the FGDs in Yola, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a very serious safety challenge whose symptoms live with journalists for life if a proper and effective remedy is not sought on time.

### **c. Economic Safety Challenges**

Economic safety is equally another major safety challenges journalists covering the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East face. Some of the reporters who put their lives at risk to cover the activities of the insurgents are either poorly paid or not paid regularly. There are no hazard allowances, insurance/life assurance schemes to cover them. During the FGDs, participants complained about poor welfare for those who report from the conflict zone. Participant 23 who covers the insurgents in Potiskum captures how bad the situation is, thus:

My monthly salary of less than One Hundred Thousand Naira (N100,000) had even been halved due to Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this, I had to buy a camera from my savings to do this work. Nobody cares about hazard allowance for journalists like me covering a conflict zone. Salaries are not paid timely let alone hazard allowance. The salary I was being paid seven years ago is what I am still earning, which is the same salary a reporter of my grade level in normal zones earns (Participant 23, FGD, 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2020).

### **d. Other Safety Challenges**

Besides the physical, psychological, and economic safety challenges which are dominant in the list of safety challenges journalists covering the Boko Haram insurgency face. Few participants during the FGD sessions across the three states also said they were faced with environmental, digital and legal safety challenges in the course of their duty. One of the participants of the FGDs held on the 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2020 in Maiduguriaffirms the challenges mentioned by other participants but mentioned others thus: ‘My friends have mentioned many of the safety challenges we faced, but I will say environmental safety challenge, digital safety challenge and legal challenges are also part of the challenges that we face too’ (Participant 7, FGD, December, 2020).

Some journalists were threatened with legal actions to make them fear and drop some important stories that may likely be of negative effect. Most legal threats come from government officials and security personnel. Participant 22 reiterates this during one of the FGDs in Damaturu thus:

...It may surprise you to know that our fear graduated as the event got worse day in day out. Even the military became unfriendly with us at a point. They harass and threaten

our safety, especially when they do extra judicial killings and we report. They threaten us with legal action if we do not drop such stories that have negative implications on them. Nothing successful comes without a challenge. We succeeded in covering every bit of the activities of the insurgents but we had to pay the price. Many journalists lost their lives, others were kidnapped beaten, threatened, and harassed (Participant 22, FGD, 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2020).

#### **4.2 Level of Threats and Assaults on Journalists**

Journalists covering Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East face threats and are being assaulted in the course of their duty. This theme answered research question 2 which sought to find out the level of safety journalist covering Boko Haram insurgency have. The insurgency itself is a threatening situation to lives and property. Participants in the FGDs in the three states expressed how they were threatened and assaulted by terrorists. When it comes to threats and assaults on journalists by the terrorists, no journalist covering the activities of the terrorists has not been threatened and assaulted. Journalists like Timothy Olanrewaju, Bello Gaidam, Olatunji Omirin and a host of others who have been covering Boko Haram from Maiduguri since they began have been threatened and assaulted like so many other journalists who have covered the violence, they have seen corpses loitered around them and come close to been killed themselves. Participant 7, who covers the insurgents in Maiduguri in one of the FGDs in Maiduguri recounts how he and his colleagues have always been threatened and how they have escaped death attempts by the terrorists:

We were returning from Ngariri a village which is some kilometres from Maiduguri when terrorists in their hundreds invaded Ngariri and killed 9 persons burnt down houses and kidnapped others. We narrowly escaped but took some shots with which we developed a story (Participant 7, FGD, 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2020).

#### **4.3 How Safe Journalists Report**

From the data generated from the Focus Group Discussions held with participants in the selected states where this research covered, the data disclosed that journalists covering Boko Haram insurgency in the North East are more at risk and very unsafe than any other journalist covering other beats. This is because of lack of experience and training in conflict and war reporting on the part of journalists and mostly the nature of insurgency and how the insurgents operate indiscriminately. One participant during one of the FGD sessions held on December 12, 2020 at the Press Centre Government House, Maiduguri Road Damaturu, Yobe states peaks extensively on his experiences and that of his colleagues on how unsafe and difficult it is for journalists covering Boko Haram insurgency thus:

The insurgents consider us as their enemies and draw a battle line with us. In the past, they would send text messages to us that they knew us very well. Sometimes they would ask why we were not reporting them well. They organised teleconferences for us, and there they would threaten to kill us if we do not do their bidding. Some of my colleagues have had to flee from Damaturu because of continuous threats. I remember a particular time we had to help some of our colleagues escape to Abuja because the insurgents were after their lives (Participant 20, FGD, 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2020).

#### **4.4 Routine Training and Safety Measures Adopted by Journalists**

Journalists covering Boko the Haram insurgency in the North-East adopted some routine trainings and safety measures before, during, and after every dangerous



assignment. This theme answered research question 3 which sought to examine the safety routine measures journalists adopt before field assignments. Significant in this discourse is how these safety measures interlink with one another to produce results. In the whole, how effective they were in reducing risk and ensuring safety. From the FGDs held with participants in the selected states that this study covered, the participants mentioned that journalists adopted various local and international safety protocols prior to covering Boko Haram insurgency. Among the participants of the FGDs, 35 out of the 41 said that at one point in time or the other participated in security routine trainings organised by NGOs, NUJ and other stakeholders. Participant 11, who reports for Al-Jazeera noted that, 'I have gone to Ghana and Ivory Coast on my own financial expense to attend trainings on safety and war reporting, and during the training we were taught some security tips on how to cover insurgency and war. The training has helped me most in covering the Boko Haram activities' (Participant 11, FGD, 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2020).

**Hostile Environment and First Aid Training:** During the FGDs participants mentioned Hostile environment and first aid training conducted by ex-military officers as one of the safety trainings and measures they undergo. These they said include modules on civil unrest and wars. This training further prepares journalists on how to use a first aid box in treating themselves and colleagues who sustain minor injuries in the field before seeking medical attention. Participants were asked during their FGDs if they were more secure in the field after they must have undergone this training. The discussion sessions and the field notes taken during each session of the FGD indicate that participants tend to pause before answering this question. The delay in responses to this question seemed to be more about the wording of the question than the responses from the participants. The researcher often provided wait time for the participants to think about this question and sometimes rephrased the question to delve into their experiences.

During one of the FGDs in Damaturu, Participant 20 said: 'I felt more prepared for assignments after every safety training than when I had to go to the field without the training. This was because I felt I could overcome any danger and risk' (Participant 20, FGD, 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2020). Participant 39 who reports for a national daily newspaper in Yola who has undergone Hostile environment and first aid training also affirmed that the training makes him feel he could report during crossfire between the Army and the insurgents without being hurt: 'I feel this training has given me an advantage over some reporters who have not undergone any security training or who do not have safety and security routine training before assignments and have fallen as victims of the attack and eventually died' (Participant 39, FGD, 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2020).

**Risk Assessment:** From the data generated, conducting thorough and regular risk assessment was one of the safety routine measures adopted by journalists covering the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East. The majority of the participants of the FGD (32 out of 41) said the risk assessment includes emergency communication protocol with colleagues, family members and their organisations which on several occasions has reduced risk factors even if risk could not be completely eliminated. Participants were asked during the FGDs if the emergency communication protocol was effective and if it reduced potential risk in covering Boko Haram insurgency. Participant 4, a correspondent in Maiduguri who escaped danger in Abadam during one of the attacks of the insurgents in the area, explains how he managed to use his knowledge of risk assessment:

It was effective, I think, yeah, I would say it reduced potential risk for me on several occasions. Most times when I am about been trapped especially in an unfamiliar place. I recall my experience in Abadam local government when the insurgents attacked the area, such emergency communication with colleagues who

are familiar with the environment give me direction on areas to avoid and areas to go with such risky environment,’ (Participant 4, FGD, 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2020).

**Risk Analysis and Contingency Planning:** This, according to the data generated from the FGDs is a detailed strategy for protecting journalists against risks and emergencies. Creating contingencies and risk assessment plan involves identifying the potential risk areas to create an effective response, should those risks develop. Participants were asked during the FGDs on how they performed risk analysis and contingency planning and how effective the implementation was. In response, some of the participants of the FGDs (38 of 41) highlighted how they performed risk analysis and contingency planning and the level of success it yielded. Participant 5, a reporter for a newspaper in Maiduguri summarises how he performed risk analysis and the effectiveness of the implementation thus: ‘I began by identifying the risk then define the level of uncertainty, estimated the impact of uncertainty, after that, I completed the risk. I analysed the result and began implementation of the result’ (Participant 5, FGD, 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2020). He further explained how effective the implementation was, thus: ‘I thank this is the most effective safety measure ever developed. (Participant 5, FGD, 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2020). Participant 15 added that ‘It is systematic, it is easy to follow, easy to implement and in all result yielding’ (Participant 15, FGD, 14<sup>th</sup> December, 2020).

**Use of Bulletproof Vest and Helmet:** According to the data generated from the FGDs participants revealed that the only time journalists covering the Boko Haram insurgency dress like military personnel as safety measure is when going on assignment when there is a bomb blast or attack on villages or communities. There is knowledge that after every bomb blast, the insurgents follow it up with a second blast when people run out to see what happened. This common knowledge makes journalists who come out to cover the blast dress with bulletproof vest and Helmet as safety and protective measures. Although, few journalists get them from security agencies and return them after completing assignments in the field. When asked during the FGD sessions, all the participants admitted that: ‘Bulletproof and Helmet are safety and protective measures against stray and targeted bullets’ Participants 1, 17 and 33 who report from Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa respectively submit that Bulletproof and Helmet have on several occasions protected them against stray bullets (Participants 1, 17, 33 FGDs, December, 2020).

#### **4.5 Spiritual Safety Measures**

The outstanding information the data of this study revealed is the spiritual safety measure journalists adopt in covering the Boko Haram insurgency. The data generated from some of the FGD sessions revealed that journalists adopted spiritual safety measures across religious divide; Islamic, Christianity and traditional sources were sought by journalists in protecting themselves. Participant 2 said despite all the trainings and security kit, he still fell back on God for protection: ‘I have my regular safety routine, I put them to action whenever there was any sudden attack on communities by the insurgents. But in all, I was very close to God and HE was sufficient for me as a protector’ (Participant 2, FGD, 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2020).

Some Muslim Journalists who cover the Boko Haram activities in the North-East after security trainings and other safety measures resort to supplicating with Quranic verses designated for protection, like Ayatul Kursiyyu (Verse of the Throne). A participant who reports for a state owned broadcast station in Borno state, during one of the FGDs in Maiduguri narrates the place of spiritual safety measures to journalists, thus: ‘As part of my preparations and safety measures before going to the field, I would supplicate to Allah using all the verses of protection. As a Muslim, I don’t wear charms like some reporters

do. Some of our colleagues believe more in the spiritual safety measure than in the conventional measures' (Participant 9, FGD, 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2020).

#### **4.6 Safety/Protective Measures Provided by Media Organisations**

One of the objectives this study sets out to achieve is to investigate whether media organizations provide safety and protective measures to ensure that their reporters in the field covering the Boko Haram insurgency in the North- East are safe from all forms of dangers. Some large media organisations in advanced countries do have safety measures and protocols in place to protect their journalists and media professionals such as implementing detailed communication plans in the case of danger, providing protective gear, paying for hostile environment and first aid training, and providing robust digital tool. However, the vast majority of media organisations in Nigeria and the North-East, in particular, have failed in providing adequate security and economic safety to their reporters who cover the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East. According to the data generated from the FGDs and IDIs conducted in the selected states, most of the participants said Media organisations do not have such safety measures in place. They buttressed that on the part of media organisations there were absolute lack of safety and security training by media organisations, lack of insurance job cover, poor remuneration and irregular payment of salaries, etc

#### **4.7 Lack of Safety and Security Training**

Almost all the participants in the FGDs commented with disappointment when asked whether their employers and media organizations provide measures for their safety. In their similar and unanimous response, participant 1, who is a reporter for The SUN in Maiduguri said he has been covering Boko Haram for more than 20 years. He speaks on the lack of training and the danger it poses on journalists like him:

The first challenging issue I faced covering the insurgency in Borno is lack of training. My organisation does not have in-house training for us and they did not send me on any safety training. Most of us were not trained on how to report terrorism. And as such, we were seriously endangered. Some of us sustained injuries in the field. I was once an internally displaced person. But after series of trainings organised by agencies, which we used our money and connections to attend, I learnt about reporting from a conflict and war zones' (Participant 1, FGD, 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2020).

### **V. Conclusion**

Considering the findings of the study, which formed answers to the research questions raised for the research, this section concludes the study by stating that the key research findings in line with the research aim and questions are that journalists covering Boko Haram insurgency in the North- East face physical, psycho-social, economic and other forms of safety challenges and that media organisation do not provide safety measures to their reporters. The study also concludes that journalists adopt spiritual safety measures for their safety as their safety is solely their responsibility. It also reviewed the limitations of the study and proposed opportunities for future research. This study aimed at examining the safety challenges journalists face in covering the Boko Haram insurgency in North-East, Nigeria. The findings indicate that journalists covering insurgency in the North-East are very unsafe.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion reached, the following recommendations are considered:

1. The study recommends that government and media organisations should provide specific and regular training on safety and security protocol for journalists covering Boko Haram insurgency, by sending journalists on safety training and should be motivated with proper welfare.
2. The media organisations in Nigeria should have safety policy incorporated into their policy manual and should provide safety measures for their reporters, these measures can come in the form of protective gear, kits and incentives to improve their welfare. This will improve the safety and protection of journalists.
3. The study recommends that journalists in the field covering Boko Haram insurgency should have insurance schemes, this the government and media organisations can do by jointly paying annual or monthly premium for journalists to ensure compensation or indemnity at times of loss or death.
4. The training of journalists should be made a priority, by organising inhouse trainings, making training a policy and sending journalists on special courses especially on conflict and war reporting.

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