

Unmask The
Truth

August
2020



**JOURNALISM IN
BANGLADESH
DURING CORONA
PANDEMIC**



**MEDIA
HEROES**

10

Journalists told their stories

200

Journalists participated
in on-line Survey

Published by

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SACMID

Compilation and Editing
Syed Kamrul Hasan,
SACMID

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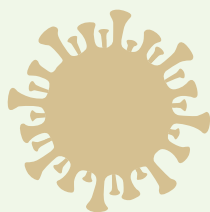


Compilation and Editing
Syed Kamrul Hasan
SACMID

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PREFACE

Reporting in Pandemic or “Pandemic Reporting” is new as a term by itself and a quite new experience to our hard-working journalists. In Bangladesh, disaster, either natural or manmade, is not a new phenomenon for our journalists to make on-the spot, investigative and in-depth reports and stories. But Covid-19 is a completely new, unprecedented, and invisible enemy for the whole of mankind, against which the citizens of the world have been fighting for the last six months. Along with the doctors and health workers, journalists have come up as frontline warriors in this struggle for human existence. By providing the people reliable information on test and treatment on 24/7 basis, the journalists are playing a great role in saving the lives of the citizens. They are not only providing accurate information but also they are combating against the spread of rumor and fake news around the virus (which is now called as infodemic). That heals millions of souls from trauma and panic in this catastrophic situation. This is not a mere professionalism, but beyond that! They are doing this driven by their inner inspiration and commitment to the people. In doing their job, the journalists are risking their lives, family and neighborhood. Several of them have already died and a big number of them have been infected. Until August 8, a total of 17 media workers have lost their lives while fighting with Covid-19 in Bangladesh. Besides, 697 journalists and 162 other employees of national and local media houses have been infected with the deadly virus across the country during the period. In Bangladesh, while media outlets are now passing the threats of even extinction, the working journalists are doing their best with minimum facilities and scanty of resources. Many of them procured their protective equipment by themselves. They do not have any insurance or incentive for such a hard job. But still they are battling in the war field, extending their hands for humanity. SACMID would like to glorify their role calling them as “Media Heroes.”

In this small book, we have identified 10 heroes from different media channels of the country and documented their stories. Our colleagues took their time and went for in-depth discussion with those media soldiers

PREFACE

and transcribed those into pieces of stories. These stories embodied their first-hand experiences, fear, concerns, hope and aspiration. We believe, these stories will be inspirational and a reference for any pandemic journalist in future.

At the same time, we have also conducted an on-line survey on 200 journalists of the country using a comprehensive questionnaire. We have analyzed the findings and produced those as a complete report. This report has made the second part of this book. Combining the 1st part on 10 journalists' stories with the 2nd part on overall scenario, the book has been named as - "Journalism in Bangladesh during Corona Pandemic".

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to those journalists who have given us their valuable time in telling their stories and responding to all the questions. Our colleagues did not care about the office time; aligning with the lockdown situation they have dedicated their time and efforts to make this work happened.

We are grateful to Free Press Unlimited Team for their continued inspiration and support in this task. This is already mandated in the organization's "Together for Reliable Information" and "Unmask The Truth" as global media campaigns which they have started during this Covid-19 pandemic.

We hope these stories and the media scenario will draw attention of the national and the global community.

Syed Kamrul Hasan

Deputy Director, SACMID

Editor, Journalism in Bangladesh during Corona Pandemic.



10 Journalists told their stories

In this part of the book, we have identified 10 heroes from different media channels of the country and documented their stories. Our colleagues took their time and went for in-depth discussion with these media soldiers and transcribed those into pieces of stories. These stories embodied their first-hand experiences, fear, concerns, hope and aspiration. We believe these stories will be inspirational and a reference for any pandemic journalist in future.



Falguni Rashid

Staff Reporter
Ekattar TV



*I think we've
been in a bit
of an
information
crisis for a
while now*

[Falguni Rashid has been working as a Staff Reporter for Ekattar TV for the last 9 years. She has also worked in a Bengali and English magazine before. She talked about her personal experience while working in Corona.]

At first there was no opportunity to go inside the hospital, then I covered the news from outside, I went to Khilgaon cemetery to report on the funeral of Corona patient. Later, when I went inside the hospital and covered the news, almost all the hospitals started providing corona patient services. Often I visited Dhaka Children's Hospital and Mugda Hospital and reported.

In fact, in the newsrooms, the work is distributed in consultation with us before assigning any journalist a responsibility. I told my office on my own initiative that I wanted to go there to take pictures of the children's hospital and the cemetery. No one forced me here. I have

planned the work myself. I wasn't too scared. There is a competition to broadcast a kind of live program on the key 24 hour news channels. In many cases the office may have asked me to do 2/1 live, what's more, I avoided the issue of live broadcasting because of the risks involved. Because to broadcast a live report I have to stay in the hospital for hours, this seemed more risky to me. I'll go and work inside the hospital - that's right; but I have avoided standing in the hospital for a long time. Working in a disaster like Corona didn't seem too scary to me, because journalists would work there in any disaster. Before the virus spread in Bangladesh, it had spread too many countries in the world; I was sure that even if the corona virus spread in Bangladesh, I would have to work. I already knew mentally that I would have to work through this disaster. I work using all kinds of safety equipment.

I have previously had experience reporting on various disasters or crises, such as the US Bengal plane crash, the Churihatta fire and the Rana Plaza tragedy. I was

there during various rescue operations the day after the Rana Plaza demolition. When I went to work there, the one I did interview was crying and I was crying, even my cameraman was crying. We usually work on controlling our emotions, but when we can't control our emotions, it can be very frightening or serious. Torn corpses cut around. Someone's mother or sister may have gone to work and may never returned, never to see him again. At that moment I felt very mentally crippled. I was very upset mentally for a few days. Even then I overcame that horror.

Yes. Whenever we went to cover the news, my office has provided with PPE and other safety equipment. It so happened that my PPE did not arrive, so may be I skipped my day job. All safety equipment is still provided from the office when going to the hospital.

I was a little scared at first when a journalist from Independent TV was attacked among the TV channels. Then, when the doctors, nurses and the police

started getting infected, I became quite aware that some journalists would be infected with the corona virus. I didn't break down too much then. What's more, when someone is attacked in my own channel - we try to understand why, in what areas we have weaknesses. After all, I have always supported my colleagues emotionally. I didn't stop for a long time. Because there is no treatment, no medicine, no vaccine.

Going physically everywhere for work now is not something that is a limitation. We have to adapt to the "new normal" system, such as conducting online interviews. In the past, journalists could ask questions during the self-proclaimed bulletin run by the Department of Health, but that is no longer possible. And I can't do that if I want to keep myself a little different or away from family life. For example, a few days ago, I left my kid at my mother's house out of fear that he could be infected, since I went to the hospital. I couldn't accept the fact that I didn't see him from around four. Even after returning home from work, I cleaned everything and then brought the child to my house.

My family members have become accustomed, since I have been in the journalism profession for a long time. So whatever the disaster I have to run out - that's what they normally accept. My mother is always there to help me, like keeping me on my toes, making me lunch when I go to the office. Even at night, my mother keeps me on the couch.

I think Bangladesh has never gone through such a new phase before. Everyone is thinking in many ways. There is an opportunity to do multidimensional news during this time. I can show through the news that I am trying to deal with Corona in different ways. In short, this is not the time to sit back. This is a very good time for journalism. This is my biggest inspiration. And I'm getting used to it a lot. At first I was a little scared. The fact that the number of patients infected with the corona virus is slowly increasing day by day is no longer alarming. Because you have to be careful, you have to follow the rules. Even then, if you are infected with

corona, you must be mentally strong, which helps to increase the body's resistance to disease. If someone thinks s/he is at risk, s/he can object. No one here can force anyone. Because no matter how much protection is taken, no one can be sure that a certain person will not be infected with the corona virus. The offices that have focused on the reporter's own views on the matter. I think that's a positive aspect. And I was in no way discouraged by these events. One of my co-workers was a little apprehensive when I went to report on the corona patient burial. I was not at all discouraged. I think at this juncture; a reporter should have freedom of opinion. There is no force from our office to work. Of course journalists should get special incentives. In fact, the issue of risk allowance for journalists is nothing new today. In reality, the risk allowance for journalists is not far from over, nor is there a provident fund, which could have been the last resort of their retirement. But in some media houses, the employees do not even get regular salary. Newspapers are now in financial crisis for various

reasons. There is nothing for journalists in the sense that doctors, police and government officials have special insurance. Even the journalist organizations do not have much initiative in these cases. They are busy working on the issue of regular salaries of journalists, in which case how will they work on the issue of risk allowance! They are still working on the basics of journalism.

There is a center called Broadcast Journalist Center (BJS), an organization that has contracted with a private hospital to ensure medical care for all television workers, from journalists to producers, cameramen, where 35 seats will be allocated for television channel staffs. There we can take treatment as needed on a priority basis. BJS has entered into an agreement with a private company to test the corona of journalists, through which journalists can go to a specific booth to test the corona. The Northern City Corporation has provided a designated place for the construction of the booth. Where journalists can test the corona. The Dhaka Reporters

Unity (DRU) has many newspaper and TV journalists. The organization has set up corona test booths for journalists in their own space. At these two testing booths, journalists and their family members (parents, children) will be able to test the corona. Corona test kits have been provided by the government.

I think we've been in a bit of an information crisis for a while now. We (journalists) have a lot of questions during the broadcast of the self-published bulletin run by the Department of Health, which we can no longer ask. The Department of Health has provided data on one issue today, but may have forgotten to provide data on another. There is no way to remind them of that fact and to know that data. The Health Department of has drafted a map of red zone: The Ministry of Public Administration has also announced a general holiday in the Red Zone area. We have not yet received any clear information on what areas will actually be identified as red zones, how general holidays will be implemented in those areas. I don't even know the information

by going to someone physically. Even then, the people's representatives are cooperating with us. They have given their time through online. I can't communicate with the administration officials in that way. In the past, I would have physically gone to the office and talked to them, but in the current scenario, that is not possible. Considering those aspects, I think there is a lack of information.

Date of Interview: June 18, 2020



Vaskar Bhadury

Reporter, Jamuna TV



"I want to do something for people' is what inspires me the most. I think now is the best time to do something for people."

[Vaskar Bhadury is currently working as a senior reporter at Jamuna TV. Before that he has worked for Ekattar TV. While working as a journalist, he had the opportunity to witness various disasters and accidents. In an interview with SACMID he has described some of his professional experiences during the time of Corona pandemic.]

At the beginning of the Corona epidemic, I started reporting at home using various digital media. But after a few days, I realized that the real picture of human suffering cannot be presented by reporting at home. Just then my supervisor Mohsin-ul Hakim gave me the task of collecting some stories related to Corona. From the beginning, I started reporting on the experiences of corona ambulance drivers and assistants, and the general public's attitude towards them. I have had to face many challenges in making such reports. Because the people of

the area already knew that these ambulances carry corona patients. As a result, if anyone saw the ambulance stop in front of his house, he would object.

I even had to choose an open space and interview the driver and assistants of that ambulance there. Although later the people of the area accepted the matter. Since then I have been reporting on various Corona cases. In particular, I had to go to Khilgaon Cemetery, Azimpur Cemetery and Postagola Cemetery to report on the burial of Corona patient. Honestly, I was not scared to do such news but I considered it as my professional responsibility. Even almost all journalists want to show their best performance in a disaster or crisis. From that point of view, I also want to do my best during Corona. Although it is a disaster for the whole world. But I see this epidemic as a possibility or an opportunity to prove my professional skills.

Since I've been in journalism for a long time; so when I hear that a colleague of mine or a journalist from another newsroom has been infected with the corona virus, it doesn't seem very unusu-

al to me. For example, a few days ago, a colleague of mine was infected by corona and I and my other colleagues together confirmed his proper treatment. But the thing that worries me is that if I get infected with corona virus through any of my colleagues, then I have to go to isolation and I can't do my duty. So far I have not faced any such challenge directly. However, while working at the field level, I have to face many unnecessary questions from the common man. Such as- why you are in such a profession, where you have to deal with health risks. Also, when I get in the office car on my way to work, the people around me look a little different or panicked and this is not a normal look.

But, my family is cooperating with me during such disasters. I have not faced any obstacles from the family side so far. But I'm a little bit worried; since my elderly mother is with me. At the same time, during this lockdown, I have to talk on the phone much more than before - this is often complained about by the family.

'I want to do something for

people' is what inspires me the most. I think this is the best time to do something for people. There may not be a better time to help people through your work. Getting information to people is now the most important thing. During this lockdown, I keep in touch with colleagues through WhatsApp, Messenger and plan for work. We don't stay out of communication for more than two and a half hours and try to stay connected in one way or another.

Yes, it is also partly true that many in the newsrooms of different channels do not want to take corona related assignments. Honestly, I'm looking at things a little differently. I think, I am relatively safe in a hospital or cemetery than anywhere else. Because of the high risk of corona virus infection in these areas, everyone is much more aware and adheres to cleanliness.

I also believe that while my job is to inform people, I can't expect any incentives or bonuses for fulfilling my professional responsibilities. Even if someone claims these things, the matter is insulting. What a soldier expects a special bonus in return for fight-

ing! So why would journalists expect incentives to perform their duties?

The government has not yet taken any initiative to ensure the safety of journalists. I think the government may take some steps in future from the learning of Corona epidemic. If the government could appoint one focal person in each hospital, the flow of information would be more efficient. I do not want to talk about the transparency of the government in providing information. Because when it comes to transparency, we need to know what is considered opaque.

Date of Interview: 27 May, 2020



Chowdhury Akbor Hossain

Staff Correspondent,
Bangla Tribune



“The biggest challenge is that none of us know who is affected by corona and who is not. As a result, no one is above suspicion and I think it is a big challenge to continue working with this suspicion.”

[Chowdhury Akbor Hossain has been involved in the profession of journalism since 2010. He has been working for Bangla Tribune since 2015. He has previously worked for an online portal and Mohana TV.]

It's hard to say how I felt about getting an assignment from the news desk. Sometimes I was terrified, sometimes I felt like I had a chance to do something good. However, such a disaster may not come very easily. All the time I am interested in getting involved in a little exceptional work. Knowing the risks, I was interested in working on Corona issues. Although there was always the risks of being attacked by Covid19. The first person to be infected with corona in Bangladesh was identified on March 8, 2020. However, the global panic over the virus began in December (2019). During that time I worked at the airport regularly. Talked to passengers returning from abroad very

closely. Then after the person infected with the corona virus was identified in the country, I went to various risky places including hospitals, airports, and cemeteries and locked down areas.

Yes, I have also had experiences on covering news of national disasters in the past. I will never forget the Rana Plaza tragedy. I sat on the spot for 48 long hours. I forgot the time when people were crying, I didn't have time to remember my own hunger in the cries of others. Such a day should not come back in our life.

Yes! My office provided me protective equipment at the beginning of the corona virus outbreak.

Two colleagues in our office were attacked by Corona. However, they have been recovered. One had to be hospitalized. Whenever I got the news of a journalist being attacked by Corona, I got upset. I think maybe one day I will be added to this list. There is some stress.

The biggest challenge is that none of us know who is affected by corona and who is not. As a result, no one is above suspicion and I think it is a big challenge to

continue working with this suspicion.

Naturally family members are very nervous. However, even though I was terrified, I got the courage to work because they were by my side. My family members are concerned about my safety.

Basically, journalism is my profession, so I have no chance to go back. Honestly, as a journalist I work out of a sense of responsibility. I have to do my job. At the same time, what will happen in the future, in my family, if we become unemployed at this time is also a big concern for me. Yes, some of my colleagues have expressed reluctance to work in hospitals where Corona patients are being treated. These incidents did not make me very upset or scared.

Any professional doing risky work should have risk allowance as well as risk insurance coverage. Special allowances have been allocated by the government for government employees in case of coronary heart attack or death of the victim and his family. Similarly, it is not only logical for journal-

ists to have such an allocation, I would say it is urgent.

I'm not sure how the government is helping with our security. Because I did not see any security instructions. The government's sovereignty in providing information varies at different levels. Receiving information about the success of the government is easy and normal. However, in some cases, some government officials believe that all government information is confidential. Due to which it is not easy to get information from them. Although the government has no such policy in public. On the other hand, the access of journalists to some government institutions is also reserved. These restrictions in many cases depend on the attitude of the head of the organization. There is no clear policy on these matters. For example, most government departments are reluctant to provide income and expenditure information. Government officials are reluctant to provide information, fearing that some irregularities may come out.

Date of Interview: 2 July, 2020



Zenia Kabir Shuchona
Staff Correspondent,
Channel 24



“How would you know if Covid's new drug came out, what happened in the world, if a journalist was not out?”

[Zenia Kabir Suchona - Staff Correspondent, Channel 24 told her experience to SACMID representative.]

When the first corona was infected on March 8, I was given the assignment on the first day, and we are grouped as a corona cell in the office. The two of us formed a team together. When I was initially given the assignment, I was not scared, because I am a reporter, a journalist. There is nothing to be afraid of here, I went, worked, went to the hospital.

From the beginning when I was assigned to follow Corona situation, the office has ensured me the best security. Personal protective equipment was in our office. Also, for those who went to the assignment, the office provided PPE for everyone. Since I went to the hospital, interacted with people, the security was guaranteed from the beginning.

When it was identified for the first time that one of my colleagues was

Corona - infected, I didn't have panic, but I felt bad. When an entire team is infected we have another team to work through a lot of stress. I had to go through stress. When a team is infected, the effect is felt throughout the office.

The challenges in one's personal life are many. The reason is that in the area where I live, maybe everyone is inside the lockdown. I am constantly going out! Here I have to do a kind of fight to convince them, I have to go out to inform them. There is always a fear in me that if someone is infected because of me or by me, the blaming will come to me. With this challenge, I am constantly coming out and working. I have received 100% support from my family. Even then, if someone is infected by the same fear, it deals with the challenge that you have.

Since I've been a journalist for 10 years, my family has taken it easy. However, my family is always aware of me, always looking for me when I go out to work. Let me say one thing, my family has given me 100% support this time. It would not have been possible for me to work at this

time without the support of my family.

The office has confirmed my safety. I went to Kurmitola Hospital, where I saw many of my colleagues who had not been assured of any security from their office. Many of our journalists do not have health insurance coverage, if something happens in his life, what will happen? We are constantly working as a front line fighter with the doctor and police. We have not been provided with any kind of health insurance or anything. In that case, if a journalist does not get such support from his organization, then he will not go to work.

We journalists do not have a specific schedule. We know the beginning of the day; we don't know when the end will come. Even then we don't get tired, because we love this profession. Being able to work in this situation or deal with challenges, where do you get this courage from? To answer this, I would say, in fact, I like to take challenges from a young age. I try my best to be 100% aware and I want to take the challenge. Even if let something more terri-

ble happen, we face it with courage.

There is no health insurance coverage for journalists. One thing you will notice is that as soon as an incident happens you sit in front of the TV set with the remote in hand, you wait in the morning to see what will come in the paper or how deep the news is. Now the corona pandemic is going on, when we are talking about patients, when we are talking about doctors, when we are talking about the suffering of ordinary people, when we are talking about labs, we show you, we tell you, we inform you in writing. We need to go in-depth when we know these things, we have to go to those places.

Some of you may notice, some of you may not notice, how much sacrifice some people have behind it; with so many feelings of abandonment they actually do this work. When everyone is at home with their husband, children, mother and family, what do we do outside? They all have families, everyone has children, and there are parents. They are out to let you know. There is no chance of ignoring them. What is the risk of a journalist's life? Even

then I stay in that place just to let you know. Of course I think journalists need to be given incentives like any front liner.

For the country, for you, the journalists are always out to update the corona. If these journalists were not in the field, you would not know how many people died, how many were injured, how many were affected. How would you know if Covid's new drug came out, what happened in the world, if a journalist was not out? But still nothing much has been done for journalists.

I think the government has some limitations in the context of our country. As a journalist, I would like to say that the government has already taken some steps to ensure the safety of journalists, I will not say those are enough, I think some more initiatives should be taken. Some of our colleagues have already been infected and died. In fact, journalists are a pillar of the state. I think it would be better if a little more protection could be ensured for them.

Date of interview: 10 May, 2020



Md. Sazzad Hossain

Senior Reporter,
Bangladesh Sangbad
Sangstha (BSS)



“Already unemployed, miserable, and many of the journalists who have lost their jobs or have not received their salaries have been paid Rs 10,000 in cash by the government”

[Md. Sazzad Hossain has been working for Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) since 2014. He has previously worked for the daily Muktakantha and the weekly Sugandha. During discussion with him he told his experience and opinion to SACMID representative. Some of his key expressions are in his words put as below:]

Recently, I went to Azimpur Cemetery to pay my last tribute to the late National Professor Anisuzzaman Sir. Besides, I have reported on his physical condition and medical issues when he was infected by Corona virus and hospitalized. I have personally visited Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University and reported on the process of testing samples of potential Covid patients and how the test report is being provided. At the same time, I used to report on the performance of IEDCR in person at the beginning

of the Covid infection, and covering the regular self-bulletin online run by the Ministry of Health.

We have been instructed by the office to work online as much as possible. Whenever we have to go out / field to report, the office is always aware of our safety. Covid 19 is a new virus and this global epidemic has created a whole new world. All the organizations working in the field of health, starting from the World Health Organization, are struggling to cope with this virus. The nature and symptoms of the corona virus are constantly changing. So the office authorities have advised us to work while maintaining physical distance. Even someone who is by my side can be a potential corona positive patient - this is something I have to keep in mind now.

I have covered the horrific fire of Churihatta that took place in Old Dhaka City in 2019. I didn't have the fear that I might be harmed while doing that news. When it comes to working as a journalist, we always have to be careful. The intensity of the fire in Churihatta was somewhat reduced and I

went to the spot. People have been burnt to coal there; I have observed the rows of corpses with my own eyes. I have observed and reported how the rescue team and security forces were working.

Hand sanitizers, masks and hand gloves were provided by the office at the beginning of the Corona epidemic. I bought the Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) by myself.

Humayun Kabir Khokon, the first journalist of 'Samoyer Alo' newspaper in Bangladesh, has died after being infected with the corona virus. He was personally very close to me. We used to have an organization together called Comilla Journalist Forum. At first I was informed that he had been admitted to the hospital. Within half an hour I got the news that he was dead. Then a kind of panic worked in me. I thought maybe I could be affected by Corona too. Honestly, his death caused panic in me thinking that a person very close to me had died. Later, Mr. Aslam of Bhorer Kagoj died. At present, more than three hundred journalists have been affected by Corona,

although many of them have become recovered. I didn't feel discouraged at work. There is no chance of being discouraged in the profession of journalism. We came here knowing that there are challenges in this profession.

My family feels worry for my work outside the home. I also think my family members can be attacked by me. Still, I must agree that my family is supporting me one hundred percent. They have given me courage even after all the fears and anxieties in the family. Journalism is no longer sitting at home, I have to go to the field, in all these cases I have received the best support from my family. When I go to work outside the house, they make me aware of my safety all the time.

Before the Corona infection, I could have had a face-to-face conversation with an officer, but now I can't. The interviewer cannot express his or her feelings over the telephone. There are some differences between the corona period reports and other normal period reports.

While the Corona epidemic is a disaster for the world, as a journalist I see it as an opportunity. Even being able to witness a

disaster that I consider myself lucky. I'm able to work in this transition - I see this as a great opportunity. Besides, my wife has always been an inspiration to me. My children give me courage. My supervisors at work have inspired me. They always follow up me.

The mentality of each person is different. A journalist may find his job unsafe so he refuses. I think I have to do my job, how do I report if I don't go to the field, so I have to go to the field for the sake of my reporting. These incidents do not discourage me in any way but I think I have to fulfill my responsibility. As a front-runner, I salute the doctors for the battles they are fighting in Covid. Journalists are also fighting in the front row. The Ministry of Information has announced that Rs 3 lakh will be paid to the families of journalists who die of corona virus. As far as I know it has already been implemented. Even then, I think, if a journalist is infected with Covid, his treatment should be guaranteed by the state. The government should provide incentives for journalists

during these emergencies. Already unemployed, miserable, and many of the journalists who have lost their jobs or have not received their salaries have been paid Rs 10,000 in cash by the government. The money has already been paid in two installments and it would have been better if the government could have done this on a larger scale. I think the amount of money earmarked for the families of the deceased journalists should be further increased. A journalist may be a number to the state, but to his family he is the whole world. We, the journalists, can go to the press club and get the corona tested, from the booth set by 'the reporters' unity'. The IG of the police has given 4 high flu nasal cannulas to the 'Reporters Unity', giving financial assistance to the families of the journalists who died in Corona.

Many hospitals do not want to allow journalists to enter or give them any information. Maybe the hospital authorities do not want any journalist to be affected by corona so they are creating obstacles. It is not possible to do full journalism at this time. We

can no longer ask questions for online briefings by the Ministry of Health. What journalism means is not possible through online briefings. There is always a gap in information. There is a difference between what I see with my own eyes and what I hear and report from someone.

Date of Interview: 14 July, 2020



Rashed Lemon

Reporter, Somoy TV



“My parents are very tense and inquire about me a lot more than before. My family members are cooperating as much as possible at this time.”

[Rashed Lemon is currently working as a reporter for Somoy TV. During the interview with SACMID, he talked about different aspects in the light of his personal experience while working in Corona.]

During the corona pandemic period I visited Covid and Non Covid Hospitals and reported. Especially on May 25, 2020, the day of Eid, I visited Kurmitola Covid Hospital and covered the news. Potential Corona patients have also had the experience of visiting laboratories to test samples, such as IEDCR, National Institute Laboratory Medicine and Referral Center and various booths. In fact, the corona virus did not happen overnight or all in a sudden. When the first covid positive patient was found in Bangladesh, I went inside the lab of IEDCR and made a report. Since then, we reporters have had the mental preparation to adapt to such a situation. As a

result, when I reported standing in that long line in front of the hospital, lab, booth, there was no fear. In short, since I have to work, I already have a kind of mental preparation. Although there was some fear, I was more alert because of that fear.

Last year (in 2019) I witnessed the horrific fire at the FR Tower in Banani from the very front. In the beginning, I was the first television reporter to do a live FR Tower fire. As I was walking towards FR Tower from Gulshan Nagar Bhaban, just at that moment someone jumped from the 12th / 14th floor and died instantly. After a while another jumped like this and died on the spot. That scene shocked me immensely. Even though I went live and started reporting at that moment, I couldn't take that scene mentally. I could not accept the fact that two people fell in front of my eyes and died. It even took me a long time to get over it. Even after that I saw this cruelty of fire for hours on end. What happened to Rana Plaza or Churhatta? This is why I already knew a little bit about that horror. With the immediate aftermath of the FR Tower fire, I

still can't forget that atrocity.

My office has provided adequate protective equipment several times since the beginning of the epidemic, such as PPEs, glasses, masks, gloves.

In fact, when I find out that a journalist close to me is corona positive, I feel very bad, even a little scared. We have another print media office in our office building. When a journalist died in there Corona, the fear was even greater. Then gradually I adapted myself to the environment. In my own media house, a few colleagues have recently been infected with the corona virus, in which cases they have been sent to quarantine or isolation. At the same time, those who were very close to those colleagues were also sent to isolation. Honestly, I had a panic attack one day in the beginning. I had severe shortness of breath. I immediately consulted 2/3 of the doctors by telephone and a doctor came to my house and treated me. After taking the medicine as per the advice of the doctor, I got better later.

I can't go everywhere because of this lockdown in field work.

Instead of going in person and interviewing someone, I am now doing that work by telephone, video call or Skype, which does not seem to be a very effective way for me. Keeping yourself safe on the field has also become a challenge. I would also say that it is difficult to ensure the safety of all the cameramen and drivers I have with me. Again when I enter the office it is quite challenging to manage these things so that any of my co-workers (who do not go out) is not attacked by me. Another thing I noticed is that 2/1 co-workers in the office avoid me a bit, as I regularly go to the hospital and cover the news. Yet I have received all kinds of support from the office.

I could not work without family support. Now my home environment has changed a lot, for example, when I return from work, my wife stands at the door with a spray. Family members are making hot water for me before I get home from work. On the way home from work, everyone checks in again and again to see if I'm wearing the right gloves, goggles, and mask. My parents are very tense and inquire about me a lot more than before. My

family members are cooperating as much as possible at this time. It would be much more painful for me if my mother, wife or any member of my family got infected with corona through me.

Being at work also helps me stay mentally healthy. I am trying to keep myself busy with spending my spare time with family, watching TV, movies and dramas to keep myself mentally healthy. Even when someone in the family discusses Corona-related issues or wants to know about it from me, I stop immediately. I try my best not to worry too much about Corona, because thinking too much makes me feel bad mentally. With that we pray regularly and remember the Creator.

Some reporters may not want to work. Since I was mentally prepared from the beginning that I had to do this kind of work, I was not too upset to hear this. Even before the corona virus spread in Bangladesh, I reported about covid. For those who do not want to take responsibility for the disaster, the office usually does

not even give them responsibility. But if someone objected to doing such things for their own safety, I have nothing to say about it. In general, I do not want to make any positive or negative comments about it, even if someone objects.

Yes, in the current context, journalists deserve incentives. But I think a little less about these things. I see my profession as a job. And since I'm in the journalism profession, I have to think from the beginning that I'm not going to give up in a disaster like this, I'm going to have to survive. Many have received special incentives, and journalists should also receive that consideration. I don't feel bad about not getting a bonus or I give status on Facebook, But don't have that kind of attitude.

As for government initiative to ensure the safety of journalists, I can say as a journalist / reporter for a private television station that until now, the government has done nothing for me. And regarding the freedom of information supply, I would say that the government is not hiding any information at present, but there is a gap of information. Because, the government is not able to reach all the corona patients, I

personally think that the government has given the correct information about those to whom it can reach.

Date of Interview: May 31, 2020



Hasan Mesbah

Staff Reporter,
Independent Television



“There is no such thing as health insurance or health coverage for us at the moment”

[Hasan Mesbah, Staff Reporter, Independent Television expressed his feeling and opinion during his duty within corona situation]

For journalists and media workers in Bangladesh, those of us who are working at risk, covering the corona, have not been given any kind of incentive by the state so far. But what we expect more from the government than this incentive is that if the free flow of information can be ensured, if it is normal, it could be a great reward for our media workers.

We have seen at various times that we have not had same difficulties in obtaining information, but we have felt that we have received a little less information, especially in a big disaster like the way the outside world is doing research. In Bangladesh, such activities are rare in government institutions and we have received very few such issues in the media. As a result, the kind of information we needed, such as

news material or news, was not enough. From this point of view, I think the government has a lot more to offer to journalists or the media. Hopefully that will grow a lot more in the future and this free flow of information will continue unabated.

The media workers are working equally with the front line fighters like doctors, health workers or law enforcing agencies to deal with the disaster in Bangladesh. More than 80 of our journalists have been infected with the corona virus. Like others, our dedication and devotion is much greater. But sadly, so far we have not received any incentive or special benefit. We don't work for incentive, but when one of my co-workers was hit by a corona, his family fell into a kind of crisis. As a result, stay away from the issue of incentives, many media workers are losing their jobs during this time, they are not getting their salaries properly, even if incentives can be provided for them, or if compensation can be provided for them after being attacked, two of our media workers have already died. It would be a good initiative to provide incentives for their families. Media workers also demanded that this be done, but

it is a big question how much attention it will actually draw.

The motivation for my work is that it is my duty. No matter how bad my condition is, or what kind of crisis I am going through, or what I am getting or not getting, this is not the time to do this calculation. Rather, I try to work as much as I can. And now in this disaster we are trying to do our utmost. If we are attacked while performing our duties, we will take it normally.

Journalism is not an official job, it is not a duty to put it into working hours, but we have to be in the news 24 hours a day. When we go to the office in the morning, we can say when we are leaving the home, but the time when we will return is not fixed for us, because I will finish my work and return home only after explaining to the office. Many times I go in the morning, I have to return at 1 or 2 o'clock at night. There are many times like this, I have worked for 36 hours continuously. That has to be done for the sake of real duty, for the sake of responsibility. In this case, if the office knows, there has never been any issue of paying separately. I don't know of any media doing

that.

There is no such thing as health insurance or health coverage for us at the moment. Neither the state nor the journalists' organizations that we have any kind of insurance or anything centrally prescribed for us. Although there have been statewide incentives for health workers, there has been no such announcement for our news workers.

When I went to work on the corona virus, I always heard a word from my family, that is - quit your job. But it is not possible to do that from the place of one's responsibility. But I try, since I live with my family, in a place where I have a 2 year old child, every day after returning home from the office I have to clean all the clothes, freshen myself up and do it every day and stay in quarantine after office each day. In my case, my family is cooperating with me. There is a kind of anxiety in the family, there is a kind of anxiety in myself, I go to the hospital every day and when I come back to the family, I feel a kind of bad feeling that if my family is infected again through me! So the support that I am getting from the family at the moment is actually a lot!

A colleague, he's a videographer,

he was infected, he was the first to be infected in the media circle. I've worked with him, I've worked with him at IEDCR, I've worked at the Department of Health. Then suddenly one day his fever came, the next test came his covid positive. He was hospitalized. When a colleague first became infected, we became so anxious that we were in contact with at least 100 people. I worked myself, colleagues worked. And the 47 of us who were in close contact together, we went to the quarantine. And the good thing is that none of us who were in quarantine came back positive. But when a media worker is infected, he has the same kind of contact with everyone in the other house. Due to which, when one person is infected, other media workers are worried.

I have had the opportunity to work with every kind of crisis that has arisen in Bangladesh in the last 10 years, from diseases like dengue, chikungunya to every kind of crisis that has arisen every year; our media workers have worked relentlessly on dengue last year as well. I had to work continuously for 3 months

without any day off. Chikungunya has had to do the same in previous years. Work on the corona virus began in December last year. When the virus was first caught in China, I first broke the news on a television station. I have been working with Independent Television since the arrival of Corona in Bangladesh. The crisis we face when working with the corona virus is this: the safety and security equipment we needed from the beginning was not enough. These have since been given to each office, as has been given to me and we are now getting adequate support from the office. We are given PPE, sanitizer, safety materials when we want to report to the hospital. Now we are on duty for 7 day. We are working as two teams. 3 of our colleagues were also infected yesterday. However, we have to work through various risks.

Better yet, the way our doctors are working, more than 600 doctors have been infected so far; Nurses and other health workers have been affected. Bangladesh is needed to be more vigilant in dealing with such catastrophic disasters, and coordination needed to be done more smoothly. The lack of coor-

dination is still there as it was at the beginning. People are suffering when they go to give samples. I got a call from a colleague of mine, a father and daughter were admitted to a corona related hospital, 7 days later the father was informed that he was not corona positive, and the girl has not been informed yet. They did not receive any report from IEDCR. There is suffering of incoherence; there is suffering at the entry of patients. Overall, Bangladesh is trying to deal with this situation.

Since we work with hygiene, we always have to keep in mind that when a disease strikes, not only Bangladesh, but the whole world has to be investigated. When the first virus was infected in Wuhan, China last December, we went to the IEDCR to talk to them, the virus was not named, they named it the Wuhan virus. That's when the work on the corona virus began. Shortly afterwards, the disease caused by the virus was named Covid-19. However, at first it was thought that the virus may not come to Bangladesh. And the virus then infected only a few people. China has not yet made a state announcement. It was

just news in the media. The IEDCR then said they were taking overall notice of the matter. The virus was first caught in Bangladesh on March 8. After coming to Bangladesh, I had to work continuously. What I felt as a news worker was: we have to go to different places to cover the news, often to the patients or to the doctors, to the hospital. I have worked with dengue before, I have worked with chikungunya. This is the first time I've been working on a corona virus, and I'm worried about what will happen next. The way in which countries like the United States, Spain, and Italy are being harassed by this virus, the medical capacity in our country, not only to a media worker, but also to a common man, creates a kind of concern in itself. But now I don't think so, I don't panic like before, I think the responsibility is real, whatever happens when it comes to fulfilling the responsibility, there is no way to stop it. I go to fulfill my responsibilities with as much protection as I need from my place. 3 of my colleagues were infected with Corona yesterday, but we are still working. A kind of torment has been created in my mind to cover this disaster. Bangladesh got

time like 3.5 months; I asked the officials at the beginning, how ready are they? Or how ready is Bangladesh? From the beginning they have said that Bangladesh is fully prepared. Bangladesh is ready to deal with all kinds of disasters. You can still see that my colleague had to visit the hospital for 3 days to give sample for one time. He was able to give samples by talking to a senior official. If that was the case for a media worker, what could happen to the general public? The hospitals are not fully ready yet. When people like a government Secretary don't get services even after visiting 3 hospitals, then it actually makes us think a bit. A kind of pain is created in oneself. We also actually suffer. Despite getting a lot of time, Bangladesh is going through various crises. Now these crises have to be tackled, people have to give their lives. In the Corona unit of Dhaka Medical College, we saw that hundreds of people had died. Overall, Bangladesh is still going through preparations.

Date of Interview: 12 May, 2020



S.M. Ahammad Ullah Bachu

Reporter Daily Kaler Kantho,
Kaliganj Upazila, Satkhira



“I always think about what I can do for the country - this thought drives me away. One of my writings / reports may be of great use to people”

[S.M. Ahammad Ullah Bach has been involved in journalism for over 30 years. At present he is working as an upazila Correspondent in the daily Kaler Kantho. He has previously worked in magazines such as 'Brishtipat' and 'Samajer Kotha'. At the same time he is acting as the information and cultural editor of Kaliganj Press Club.]

From Dhaka, Narayanganj, Tangail, brick kiln workers started coming to Satkhira district. Since then, in collaboration with the people of the administration, the chairman of the upazila, the chairman of the union, UNO, the workers have been given instructions to go for institutional quarantine in their respective areas. We had to go to those institutional quarantine centers and make multiple reports. Just then a kind of panic was created inside our area. Since the whole world, especially Italy and China, were heading for

such a terrible change, it seemed that we were moving towards the same kind of change. This is how the corona virus infection started in our area - since then the administration has continued to monitor, as well as we use the home or institutional quarantine in the proper management of corona patients with information.

On the one hand, there was panic in me, because everyone has the illusion of life. On the other hand my moral responsibilities or professional responsibilities have haunted me. I was always asked for information from the office, where, how many people have been infected, what kind of action has been taken for them. When more than one person in our upazila became infected with corona, the upazila health department treated them. Under the guidance of Kaliganj Upazila Administration and in collaboration with Community Radio Nalta, plans were made to deal with Corona. The Upazila Administration and Radio Nalta have jointly formed a few Corona Expert Team with 260 members, who have been given hands-on training on

raising public awareness. The district administration has divided Kaliganj upazila into 12 unions; One team at a union is working to spread awareness during the Corona. Kaligonj Upazilla can be considered as a Model Upazilla for Corona Prevention . Giving information to the upazila administration as a journalist, the people who are affected by corona - locking down their houses, managing their home quarantine, ensuring their cleanliness, advising them to use masks - responding everywhere has left our activities. The work of the Corona Expert Team has been praised in the markets and on the ground. I have not witnessed such an initiative in any other upazila.

We have dealt with a number of disasters over the past year. The recent cyclone (Amphan) was a tragic natural disaster. I visited cyclone centers and shelters (schools, colleges, madrasas) whole night and witnessed the heartbreaking plight of people. There I saw the suffering of children and pregnant women. It was not possible to maintain social distance in the shelter in

any way. There was no sanitation system for them, no food security.

Sad but true is that we have not yet received any safety equipment from our office. I personally purchased masks and hand gloves. No PPE was provided. I can't say exactly why the office couldn't provide this safety equipment. Maybe there is a financial crisis or there are some other limitations.

Ever since I got my hands on journalism, I have been aware of many challenges, including today's epidemic. Many times we have to report even in the midst of gunfire. Journalists sometimes forget that there is life. Even then, when I heard that one of my co-workers had passed away due to corona, I felt a kind of suffocation in my chest. Instantly, again it seems, the people of the country have a lot to gain from me. One of my information / messages may come in handy in another person's life. Whenever someone is infected with the corona virus, I go to their side and offer my condolences. I have always reported their feelings, what they are missing, their advantages and disadvantages. I have worked to strengthen their morale.

About 4 lakh people live in our

upazila. Government has made beds of 5 people for the treatment of patients in this upazila health complex. Since I am a senior journalist, I do not face any obstacles while working in the field. In family life, one has to face many problems while moving out of the house in such a situation. My family members are very concerned about my safety. Even then they are cooperating with me.

Ever since I entered the world of writing, I like to be involved in a little exceptional work. The thing that discourages everyone draws me the most. I have a thought that this horrible situation is the turning point of life and death, no matter how difficult it may be, I have to reach out to people. This kind of thought is helping me move forward.

I always think about what I can do for the country - this thought drives me away. One of my writings / reports may be of great use to people. I don't have to be busy with anything else as my thoughts are mostly country-centric. The people in the administration have always welcomed me. The Upazila Nirbahi Officer always gives encouragement and coopera-

tion from them, which inspires me. Being able to work for people, to stand by people, makes me feel very proud. I may have an economic crisis but I still feel great if I can do something for the people of the country and the region.

On the one hand I am responsible to the office; on the other hand I am responsible to the country. If the office gives me responsibility, I must do it. Mentally, it may feel a little bad when someone does not want to report during this disaster. I have a civic responsibility to the country. I have to go to the people to fulfill my civic responsibilities.

Of course I think journalists should be encouraged. When any incident takes place anywhere, the information first reaches to the journalists, even when the administration does not know. In that case, we arrive first, we hold the camera, we unravel the mystery of the incident. There must have been incentives from the government for the print, electronic and all kinds of media workers working in this country in times of crisis. The press club was asked for a list of vulnerable journalists who would be given rice and pulses. I think the media personnel have

been disrespected through this initiative. Those who work in this way at their own risk, who have such a big place in the society - their incentive cannot be 10 kg of rice and pulses!

I did not notice that the government did anything for the safety of the journalists. Elsewhere, I have seen MPs, Upazila chairmen, UNOs assisting journalists financially on their own initiative. Some have collaborated with PPE, some have collaborated with masks. I have seen multiple such news in newspapers, but no such initiative has been taken in my area. I can't talk about the whole of Bangladesh. I am a media worker in my area. And in our upazila there are 260 people grouped in Corona Expert Team. If someone has a cold, cough or fever, we must get his information. There are even union based web page, where you can find out 260 members of our expert team by giving any information. From that side there is no gap in the information in our upazila. There may be some information gap across the country.

Date of Interview: 15 July, 2020



Rakibul Hasan

Reporter, Somoy TV,
Rajshahi



“Rajshahi Medical says that there are 3 allocated hospitals for corona patients but in reality it is not. I noticed a discrepancy in the information”

[Rakibul Hasan has been working as a reporter in the Rajshahi bureau office of Somoy TV for the last 5 years. He has been involved in journalism since 2011. He has got experiences of working with Radio Padma, Banik Barta and Channel 9.]

I had to visit hospitals, cemeteries and corona laboratories to report on covid. The first corona positive in Rajshahi was a construction worker. That worker came to Chapainawabganj from Dhaka. When he was admitted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital with possible symptoms of corona virus and his sample was sent to Dhaka, corona virus was found in his body. Since then I have been visiting Rajshahi Medical College Hospital regularly. I used to report the corona situation in Rajshahi Medical College like what kind of progress has been made in dealing with corona virus, how many isolation centers there are or which ones are being select-

ed for quarantine, how many wards have been allocated for corona patients. There is a team at the medical college that is working for Corona patients and the coordinator of the team gives a press briefing every day and I cover that press briefing regularly. I have even visited the homes from where samples of potential corona patients have been collected.

As a journalist, corona reporting has been quite adventurous / exciting for me. We have observed the situation in Wuhan, China and other countries before the outbreak in Bangladesh. I have been covering the border areas ever since the Corona infection started in our neighboring country India and people from our country stopped traveling to India. I also covered the news when a camp was set up in the border area, where truck drivers began their testing and health check up. I also visited Sona Mosque area in Chapainawabganj and reported. Above all, the subject was not scary to me, but it seemed a lot more adventurous.

I have the experience reporting on natural disasters like Cyclone "Fani" in the past and "Amphan" in recent times.

At the end of April, I have been

provided PPE first from Rajshahi Television Journalists Association. I bought my own safety equipment other than PPE. Originally due to the crisis in the beginning we could not get PPE from the office. There is a shortage of PPE compared to the demand of the staff. Since I had to cover Rajshahi Medical's regular press briefings, I collected the safety equipment myself.

In fact, the feeling was twofold. Fear didn't work when I went out to work, but it is quite apprehensive when I got home from the office. Looks like my colleague got infected; it would be nice if I could do my test too. I wish I could be more secure. Then a little fear and apprehension worked in me. I used to think about these things, Once again, I was hesitant about whether I was actually infected with the corona virus, I should be sure that I was not infected with the corona virus at all.

Wearing protective equipment for a longer period of time can be quite uncomfortable. It is very hot in Rajshahi region so it is very difficult to work wearing PPE. Another issue is that doctors do not treat us as expected when talking to and interviewing them. Their behav-

ior is quite deceptive. Just as doctors and police are working on the front lines of the Covid period, so are journalists working on the front lines. So here we have to cooperate with each other. However, as a journalist, I have not received that cooperation from doctors and the others on frontlines. Instead, doctors and police consider journalists “dangerous” as they have to visit several places.

Also as a journalist I am noticing a little panic among my neighbors and relatives about me. Since they see that I have gone to the place where the samples of Corona patients have been tested and are doing live news in the hospital, they have avoided me a bit. Some of the neighbors may have avoided my mother a little. Also at home I live and eat with my elderly parents, which can be a risk to their self-esteem. Sometimes I wonder if I should stay at home or move somewhere else so that my family members can be safe, sometimes I get into such dilemmas.

My parents are very supportive of me. So far they have not stopped at anything by suggesting like don't go there or do a little less work. Rather they are quite enthusiastic to know something about my profession. However,

my mother has got a little of panic since a journalist in Rajshahi died of the corona virus.

People have not received any information during such a disaster, it is my job to tell them the real news. I am able to convey information to people in such times of danger. For example, I know where and how the suspected covid patients have been tested. People have not left the house since the pandemic started. In the lockdown a few days ago, people relied on the media alone for information. So I think it's very important to give people the right information at this time.

A few days ago when I was physically ill, my other co-workers who were there all the time inquired on the telephone -which helped me to strengthen myself mentally. A lot of times I might sit somewhere together with journalists of the same age and share a little experience which is helping me to stay mentally healthy.

I think it is better for journalists who lack confidence not to go to work at this time. And if anyone thinks that he can do his job according to the plan while maintaining his safety

and social distance, then he should work at this time. Again, I have seen many colleagues who may or may not have gone to the hospital with excuses, but may have gone to the market again. They are very scared of the hospital. And these things have not affected my task. Nowadays there is a kind of competition in journalism, whether as a journalist I was able to bring up the right thing as quick as possible. As a journalist, I have to go inside the hospital to highlight the situation of the hospital. For example, volunteers at Corona Patients have not provided adequate care, their relatives are doing all the work - I have to take the challenge to present such a real picture. At the same time, the general public should be informed about this news.

I don't think journalists should get any incentives. If we have to work with incentives / bonuses, then why did we come to the profession of journalism! When I came to the journalism profession on my own and I came knowingly. When I read about the 'ethics of journalism', it didn't say that when the world is hit by an epidemic, I will stop working if I don't get a bonus or money! Currently, there are many journalists who are working from

home or working on a web portal, who do not have to work at personal risk. They are definitely not supposed to get bonuses. However, if the journalists who are working in the front row / field are encouraged, they may be able to do their job even in this disaster.

So far as I know the government has asked journalists to make area-wise lists for incentives. The Prime Minister also gave some gifts to the journalists affected by the corona. So I don't think the government has done anything for journalists on a large scale.

There is a lack of government coordination in providing information. The District Commissioner said that there are 150 isolation centers in 9 upazilas. He visited the upazila and saw that there are 5 isolation centers. Rajshahi Medical says that there are 3 allocated hospitals for corona patients but in reality it is not. I noticed a discrepancy in the information. I think this discrepancy is only due to lack of coordination.

Date of Interview: 7 July, 2020



Razib Hassan

Correspondent of
Ekattor TV, Jhenaidah



"In Jhenaidah district, when only 2/1 people were affected by corona, I have started reporting to make 2 million people in the area aware. As a small news worker, I still have that effort"

[Razib Hassan is working as the Jhenaidah district representative of Ekattor TV. Being a busy journalist he is associated with the Jessore regional daily 'Gramer Kagaz', the district representative of the online newspaper Rising BD in Dhaka and also working on the daily Patrika KholoKagaz. He has been involved in journalism for long 16 years. Previously worked on Somoy TV for 1 year, there was a TV channel called CSB, in which he worked for 6 months, although the channel is currently closed.]

Journalism is a challenging profession. Despite the high risk of life in this profession, we have to go to work in the field. Do those who are staying at home during the corona pandemic want to get updated news of each district? We also have to go to the isolation ward, where samples of potential corona

patients have been collected. If someone dies of possible symptoms of the corona virus, we have to go to their funeral and report what happened to their family.

Yesterday, I also broadcast live reports in the morning and afternoon on the limited status of the lockdown in Jhenaidah. Jhenaidah Covid Hospital still has about 25 patients admitted, in addition to those who are in isolation or in the home quarantine; we have to follow up and report all the time on that. We have to keep them informed more or less.

When the corona virus became widespread in China, isolation wards were set up in almost every hospital in Bangladesh. At that time, no one in Jhenaidah district or the surrounding district was infected with the corona virus. I had to report from the beginning. When an assignment is given from the office, we have to go there even if the fear subsides. In Jhenaidah district, when only 2/1 people were affected by corona, I have started reporting to make 2 million people aware in the area. As a small news worker, I still have

that effort.

In fact, journalism is a very risky profession, no matter how big the disaster is. In the present case, we have to work through fear. Because this disease is contagious, this is also spread through the air! Many people have not treated the information by hiding it and then after collecting the sample, the person may have come back positive. We have had to report on television to let people who are unaware, who do not know how to prevent the corona virus.

A few days ago, the effects of the natural disaster Amphan swept over Jhenaidah district. The disaster has caused extensive damage. Crores of takas worth of vegetables, mango trees and banana trees have been damaged. When that disaster flowed over Jhenaidah district, in the morning of that day I went to different spots and saw the screams and wails of the people with my own eyes. We have talked to those who have lost crores of takas due to this disaster. I have visited various shelters in the dark of night and reported. Even before

the Corona epidemic, I have covered other natural disasters, including dengue fever.

Protective equipment including PPE, goggles and gloves have been provided from our office after the Corona epidemic spread in Bangladesh on a large scale. This protection was provided in May.

I have come here knowing that journalism is a challenging profession. It seems that journalists are also reporting on the field, so they have become infected. So I also could be infected with this virus at any time this feeling worked. A journalist from my upazila who did not have any symptoms of corona was found to be infected with corona. When I went out with that journalist, fear also worked in my mind. When the Corona epidemic is on the rise in Dhaka, many journalists are living at home, not interviewing online.

We have never seen such an epidemic before. The biggest challenge for me at this time is to work with the risk of life. There is no guarantee that anyone will survive as no vaccine has yet been discovered. Family members continue to be careful. No

matter how hard I go through journalism, I have never had such a terrible time. Even then I try to report according to all sorts of rules. I work with strong morale.

A year ago, while reporting on a human trafficking syndicate, the ring tried to blackmail me into a conspiracy. Realizing their purpose, I tactfully got rid of it. After subsequently conducting an investigative report on those Adam traders, they were apprehended by law enforcement. We often have to go through such difficult situations.

In 2004, when I was a young journalist, the extremists (the underground extreme left political workers) picked me up in front of Jhenaidah Sadar Hospital and cut the vein of my wrist. With that cruel torture on me, later in collaboration with my office I found new life back. My family, parents, relatives, well-wishers always say the same thing - be careful. The family is supporting me in all kinds of ways at this time.

I walk every afternoon and do some regular physical exercise. I drink tea with different herbal

ingredients and I take steam of hot water every day. I follow the positive news in the media around the world, use social media, pray regularly and enjoy good entertainment. I think for all these reasons my morale is still strong.

My followers and friends make very positive comments when I share my reports through social media, they inspire me. A few days ago I was suffering from sore throat, and then about 500-700 well-wishers inquired about me and greeted me. I am blessed with the love of so many people.

Journalists who have the morale and courage are probably covering the corona reports. On the other hand, those who are a little weak and old may not have gone to the field. Journalists who have shortness of breath, asthma and are mentally depressed will not be able to work in the field in any way during this crisis. I think everyone should fulfill their responsibilities properly. Those who step back from responsibility should not be in this profession.

Of course! Journalists should be encouraged. The government of

Bangladesh has provided special incentives to those who are in government service, who have risked their lives to provide services to the patients, and the administration officials on the ground. It would be unfortunate if journalists were deprived of this incentive. The government should launch a package for journalists during this time.

According to the law of Social Science, journalists are called the fourth pillar of the state, journalists will remain independent. It is the job of journalists to spread neutral news in the media. Journalists have policy values and ethics. Any problem will be brought before the nation, crime, corruption - these issues will be raised. I think some sections of the Digital Security Act must be changed. Many journalists have been arrested and harassed in various ways due to the digital law. The government must consider this issue and repeal this law.

A form has been sent to journalists across Bangladesh two days ago for financial assistance from the Prime Minister's Special Fund. It is not specified what

amount will be given as grant. I think, in this time of disaster, journalists certainly deserve a grant because journalists are also working as front line fighters.

When corona test was free, many people showed interest in testing. Now corona has to be tested on a fixed fee, as a result of which many people have not been tested despite having corona symptoms. They may have taken paracetamol on their own. Many panicked and did not go for the test, as the test booths are crowded and many of them may be positive. The more corona tests are done, the more the number of victims will increase. The government does its best to prevent deaths in Corona. There is considerable negligence on the part of the concerned workers in the Government Health Sector. As a result, there is a gap in information.

**Date of Interview: 17 July,
2020**

Questions for Interview of the Journalists

1. How was your feeling when you first got the assignment to cover COVID 19? Was it scary? Did you have any prior experience to cover any national disaster as a journalist - [like Rana Plaza, Old City Fire tragedy etc.]-say something about your experience, if you have any.
2. Did you get proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) from your office before going to the field?
3. When you heard a journalist is infected and the full team had to quarantine, how was your feeling?
4. What are the challenges you are facing in your work & in your personal life due to COVID-19?
5. How's your family dealing with your profession in this new circumstances? How did they react? Did they cooperate?
6. Have you heard any of your colleagues or journalists from other house oppose to take assignment on COVID -19 because it has health risk and there is no health insurance coverage?
7. What drives you to continue the work? How are you keeping yourself mentally strong?
8. Do you think journalists also deserve grant/incentive because they are also taking life and death decision every day and putting themselves into risk for better wellbeing of country and democracy in this corona outbreak?
9. How about the government support regarding your safety-security and also transparency on providing information? Are they enough?

Thank you.



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Online Survey

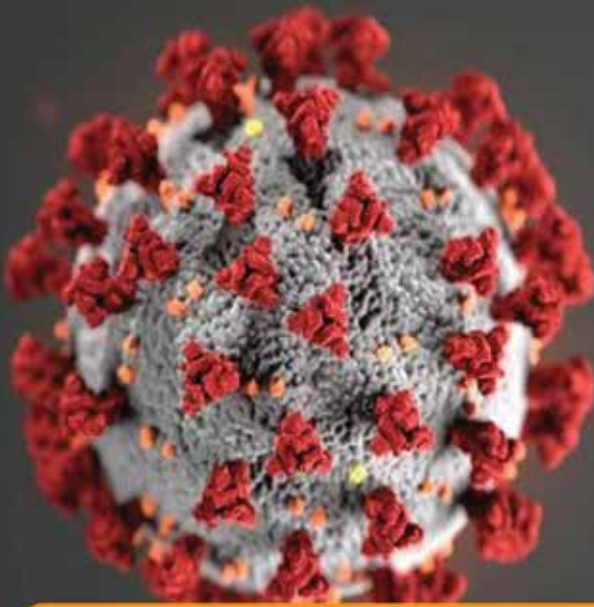
Journalism in Corona Pandemic in Bangladesh

May 2020

Conducted by
SOUTH ASIA CENTER FOR MEDIA IN DEVELOPMENT
SACMD

Supported by
FREE PRESS UNLIMITED
FPU

Together for reliable information



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Journalism in Corona Pandemic in Bangladesh: Survey

Background: During the time of COVID -19, people are widely depending on media to be informed about latest update of death, cure, vaccines, medicine, healthcare facilities and information provided by government. For anything & everything citizens rely on media as this pandemic is new and media is the only source which can help with information on how to deal with the situation.

Despite all the expectation towards media from consumer, it's also true that Newsrooms are facing challenges every moment. There are several issues making the journalists dealing the pandemic with hardship. The most challenging one is health issue, journalists are covering news from public places and crowd, secondly, there is no prior knowledge or research on COVID-19, so if they are suggested for a new behavior, safety precautions or medicine they have to depend on one source, there are limited resource to cross check the information and the mental trauma is always there.

In Bangladesh, journalists are facing more challenges than other developed country. One journalist Humayun Kabir Khokon (47) died on 28th of April, 2020 and another two journalists died before him with COVID-19 symptoms. Until today, 88 journalists have been identified Corona-infected. One national newspaper closed their printed version of newspaper and continued only on online, all crew of all unit in a television channel had to go quarantine for 14 days; but they continued their program by taking footage and other technical help from other media houses. Generally, houses are prioritizing to 'Work from Home' but it's very difficult for profession like journalism where frequent visit and observational findings are crucial for reliable journalism.

Objective of Survey: To find out how professional journalists are experiencing with COVID-19 situation in terms of safety (health & financial) and accessing information.

Survey Method: Quantitative (online survey)

Survey tool: Close ended questionnaire with 20 questions including demographic inquiry.

Sampling: Journalists working in different media outlets in Bangladesh.

Sample Size: 200 (of mixed group)

Research Team: Survey initiated and conducted by South Asia Center for Media In Development (SACMID) team members under 'Promoting Media Literacy in Bangladesh' project supported by Free Press Unlimited. Team SBCC cooperated to collect data from the responding journalists.

Respondents' Demographic Segregation: Age, gender and job specification was not pre-determined in this survey. Journalists from different age group, gender and different work area were appreciated to take part in this online survey.

82% respondents were from 25-35 age group where 36-40 and 41-50 age group made 12.5% and 5.5% of the total respondents, hence no above 50 aged journalist participated in the survey. 91.5% male journalists and only 8.5% female journalists responded in the survey. Most of the journalists are urban based (90%) and only 10% are from rural area. Most of the journalists are from Newspaper (37%) where 31% journalist are from Television channels and 28% are from Online news portal. 61% percent journalists who responded were reporters and 23.5% worked in desk. Professionals from the area of Photography/Cinematography, news production and the journalist working in 'Others' are made 2.5%, 7.5% and 5.5% respectively.



Figure 1: Age

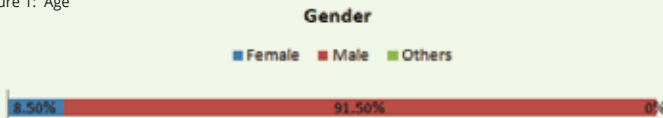


Figure 2: Gender



Figure 3: Work Location

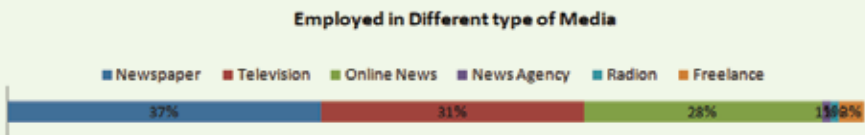


Figure 4: Type of Media where journalists are employed

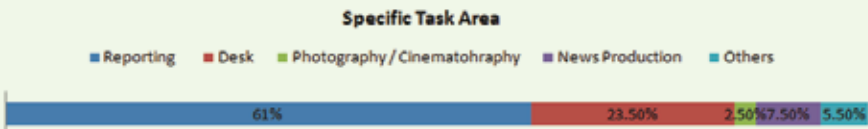


Figure 5: Specific Task Area.

Physically Working in Field to cover News in COVID-19 period:

According to 'Figure no 6' and 'Figure No 7', 57% journalists among 200 have directly covered COVID-19 related news and 67.5% journalists worked in field to cover either in COVID-19 related news or other news during Corona pandemic time. In the question "time" was specifically mentioned as 'from 8 March, 2020 as first patient of Corona has been identified on this day.

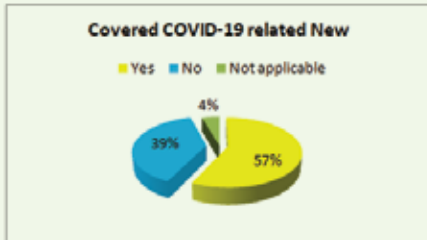


Figure 6: Covered COVID-19 directly

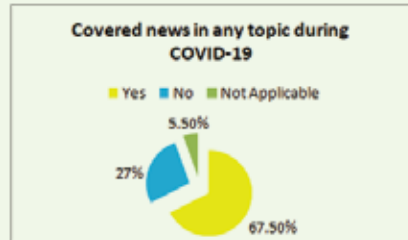


Figure 7: Covered any news during COVID-19

Getting Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during COVID-19 working Period: Journalist were asked if they have any Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during COVID-19 days. 62% journalists have PPE, collected from different sources where 32% don't have PPE yet. In the questionnaire, specification of PPE was explained as a package of Hand gloves, mask, hand sanitizer and goggles.

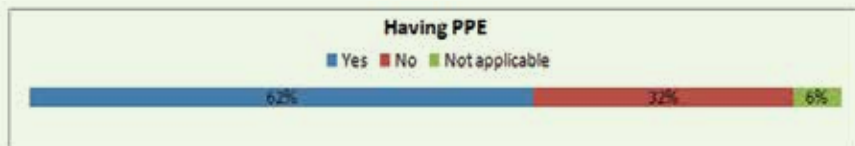


Figure 8: Having PPE

Respondents were also asked about the process of procuring their PPE. 29.5% said that, their employer has provided them PPE. 27% journalists have bought their own PPE with own cost. 2% journalist said that they have collected the PPE by their own but employer has reimbursed the money later. Only one journalist, (which made .5% of total respondents) received PPE from government, Other Non -government organization and 'Other' sources provided each 1% of PPE. 38% respondents said 'Not Applicable' for them, it can be assumed that they don't have any PPE yet.

Only 3.5% of journalists had PPE before March 2020, 19.5% had PPE on first half of March and 21.5% had it by second half of March, 2020 according to the finding shown in 'Figure 10'. 34% journalists said that they don't have any PPE yet.

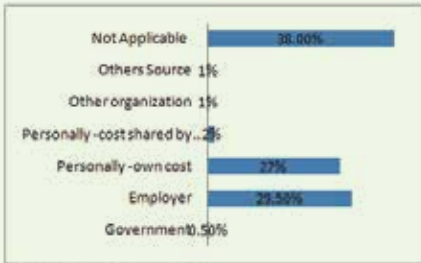


Figure 9: Sources of procuring PPE

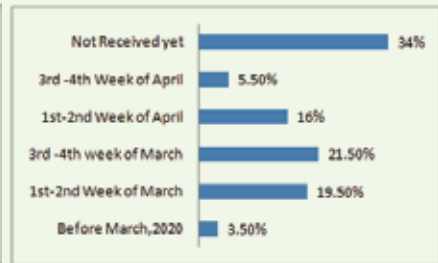


Figure 10: Time of Procuring PPE

Health care Facilities (health insurance):

76% journalists don't have any health insurance coverage or medical allowance from their employer when they recruited them. Only 7% journalists gave positive response towards this, that they have either health insurance or medical allowance or have both of these from their employer. 7% said, this is not applicable for them, though according to their job specification only 3% are freelancer.

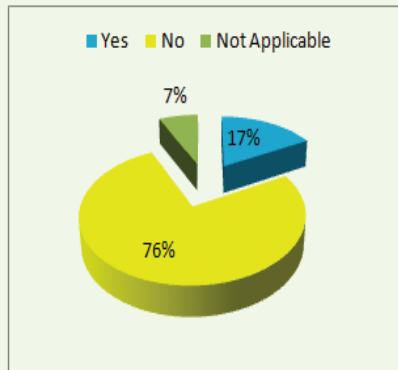


Figure 11: Health Care facilities from Employer

Facilities from the employer/work Place: Journalists were asked what are the facilities they have been provided by their employers during facing Corona virus situation. 73% of the Journalists said that they were allowed to “work from home” for a certain amount of time. As the respondent could tick more than one options, so 29% journalist said that they were provided PPE which we have seen in ‘Figure no 9’ also. 39% stated that, office had provided safe transportation for their field work and 39.5% said they were allowed to take medical leave if required and only 4% said employer supported their treatment costs.

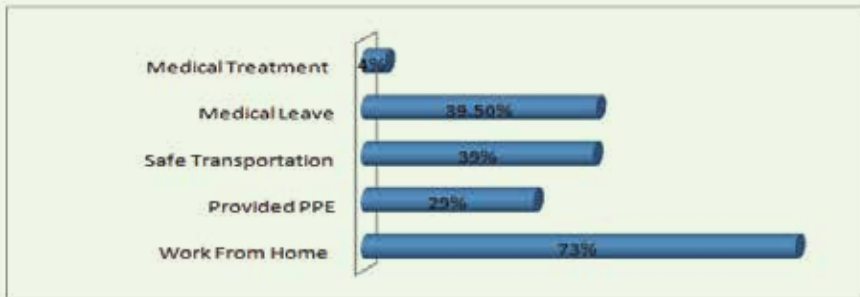


Figure12: Facilities from Employer during COVID-19

Challenges During COVID-19 pandemic:

Respondents were given eight different probable challenges to mention/mark they faced while working. They could choose more than one option. only .5% (means 1 person) from the respondents got infected of Corona virus. Facing difficulty to do investigative reporting as most of the government and non-governmental offices are closed for long time, journalists found this challenge the most with 45% responses. 38% journalists had to be detached with their family because of safety concern. 35% journalists explored that they are going through mental trauma as they have to suffer always from the fear of getting infected. Same number of journalists also found difficulties to identify the news sources because of numerous number of Fake news and rumors spreading related to COVID-19. 30.5% journalists said that they didn't get salary in time. 27.5% are in fear of losing job in near future and 20% journalist have been harassed/ threatened from either government, non-government/corporate organizations or persons for publishing certain news.

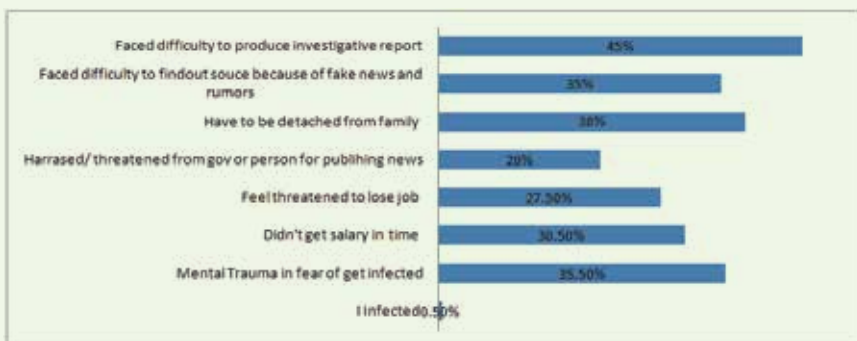


Figure 13: Challenges faced during COVID-19

Accountability of Media regarding Fake News and Rumors:

Journalist were asked if media is responsible towards spreading fake news and rumors; because media failed to disseminate authentic and reliable information. According to 'Figure 14' 46% journalists didn't agree that media is responsible, 36% agree with the statement and 19% didn't comment.

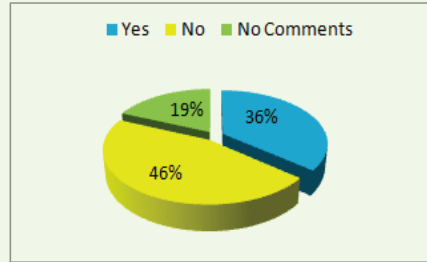


Figure 14: Media is responsible on spreading fake news & rumors

Adequacy of Information from Government Agency:

'Figure No 15' is representing the question number 15 where it was asked to journalist that, the information is being provided by the government on COVID -19 are enough at all. 84% journalists said information provided by government agency are not enough, only 9% said those are enough and another 9% didn't comment.

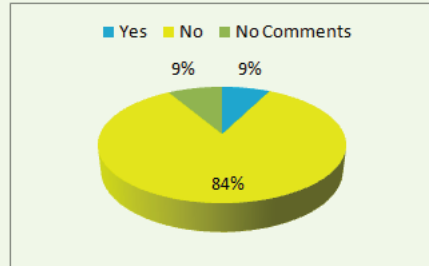


Figure 15: Adequacy of Information from government agency

Government's sincerity towards ensuring free Flow of information:

Only 19% journalists believe that Government is sincere towards ensuring free flow of information during COVID-19 period where 63% think that government is not sincere enough and 18% didn't comment.

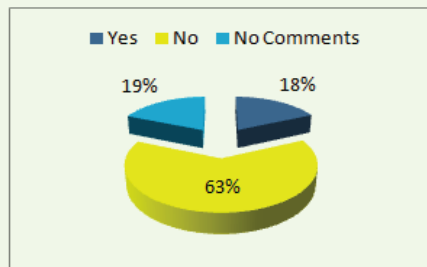


Figure 16: Government's sincerity toward ensuring free flow of Information

Accessibility of information of COVID -19 by Community people:

In response of question 'Do you think- people from all class and occupation of the society irrespective of rural or urban, rich or poor are getting all information around Corona Virus correctly and accurately?' 84% journalist said 'NO' means people are not getting COVID-19 information accurately and correctly, only 10% responded as positive.

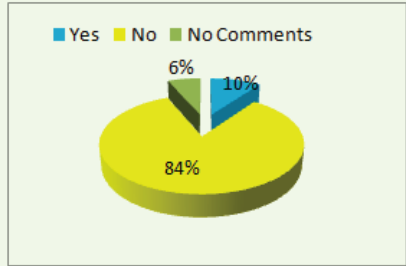


Figure 15: Accessing COVID-19 information correctly and accurately by all people of Bangladesh

Question number 18, tried to explore the cause behind the gap between all news consumers and accurate information with seven options of prospective causes, while the respondents were able to choose more than one options. 68% sated that 'due to people's reliability on social media where fake news spread very quickly', 51% think government is not sincere enough to provide accurate information. According to 48.5% journalists the cause is 'Public media channels are not performing their responsibility'. 41% respondents believe, people's disability (could be economical, technological & educational cause behind this) to accessing all media is the reason behind this, Figure 18 shows all the responses of prospective causes.

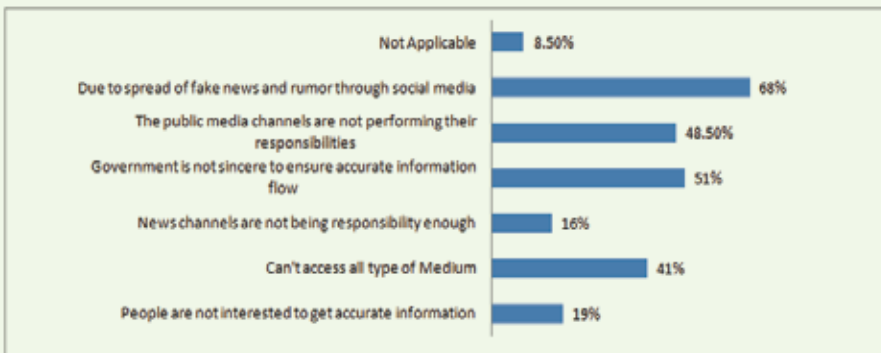


Figure 18: Cause behind of not getting information equally, correctly and accurately

Initiative Taken for Journalist welfare in COVID-19 Pandemic situation: Journalists were asked if journalist union or association have taken any initiative for journalist welfare during COVID -19 period. Only 29% journalists responded positively that initiative have been taken, 59% said 'No' and 12% 'Not exactly know' whether initiatives have taken or not. Figure 20 followed nearly the same trend. 63% said there are no initiative from government body for journalist welfare and only 6% said 'Yes' they did, and a significant number of journalist (33%) said they don't exactly know.

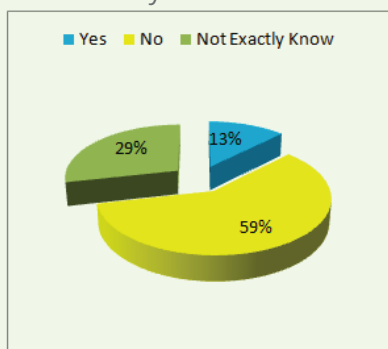


Figure 19: Initiative taken by Journalist association and Journalist Union

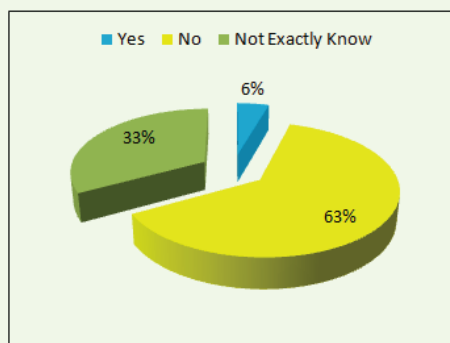


Figure 20: Initiative taken by Information Ministry or any other government agency

Discussion and Conclusion: This survey revealed some significant findings from different perspective. 32% journalist don't have any PPE by the mid-May, 2020 where COVID-19 cases have been increasing every day and 88 journalists from 42 national and regional media houses tested positive till date (12th May, 2020). This is also unfortunate that people who have (62%) PPE, 27% of them bought by their own cost and there is only .5% contribution from government. 76% journalists don't have any health insurance or medical allowance though they are also exposing themselves in crowd, public area and hospital to cover news. Fake news and rumor is a new challenge journalists are facing these days. 35% journalist already faced challenges because of fake news and rumors and 68% of them think that people are not getting accurate news because news consumers are widely depending on social media which are the sources of fake news and rumor. In terms of government response, it is quite evident

that journalists are not satisfied with the information that government is providing. 20% journalist faced threat and they have been harassed for publishing news, 63% journalist believe that government are not sincere enough to ensure free flow of information regarding corona virus and 84% believe that the information government is providing is not adequate. Nether Journalist Union nor Government body is thinking about journalist welfare according to findings.

Questionnaire for on-line Survey

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Work Location : City/Village
4. Designation/Professional Responsibility :
 - Reporting
 - Desk Work
 - Photography/Cinematography
 - News production
 - Others
5. The types of media channels you are involved in as a professional
 - Printed Newspaper
 - Television
 - On-line News Portal
 - News Agency
 - Radio
 - Free lance
6. Are you working directly to collect news on Corona situation in the field ?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Not Applicable (N/A)
7. Have you been assigned to collect news on Corona Virus situation at field level after its outbreak and identification of pateint on 8 March(2020) in Bangladesh ?
 - Yes
 - No

- Not Applicable (N/A)
8. Did you have any Personal Protection Equipment (PPE - Hand Gloves,Mask,Hand Sanitizer) during your office work or during on-duty for news gathering at field level?
- Yes
 - No
 - Not Applicable
9. If you already received PPE,where did you get it from?
- Government
 - Employer
 - Procure personally- own cost
 - Procure personally- cost borne by the Employer
 - Contribution of any non-government organization/agency
 - Any other source
 - Not Applicable
- 10.If you already received PPE (not on own cost) ,when did you get it ?
- Within 1st -2nd week of March 2020
 - Within 3rd-4th week of March 2020
 - Within 1st-2nd week of April 2020
 - Within 3rd-4th week of April 2020
 - Not yet received any
11. Do you have any Health Insurance Coverage or medical allowance in the Terms & Conditions of your job by your employer ?
- Yes
 - No
 - Not Applicable
12. What types of facilities did you get from your employer media house during your news collection and report preparation (you can give tick more than once)
- Facilities to work from home
 - You have been given PPE
 - Transport facilities for shuttle from workplace to home safely
 - Leave while you are sick
 - Treatment facilities by the employer while you are ill

13. What types of challenges have you faced due to the corona virus transmission ? (you can give tick more than once)

- I have been infected personally
- I got nervous breakdown(mentally sick)
- I did not get my salary & allowance regularly or get lately
- Feel threatened to lose my job
- Harassed/threatened from the government/non-government person/agency due to reporting on corona situation
- Have to be detached from the family worrying over their security and safety

• Faced difficulty to find out the news source due to excessive spread of rumours

14. Do you think that rumors are spreading around Corona Virus widely due to the failure of media in providing accurate information?

- Yes
- No
- No comments

15. Do you think - whether the information on Corona situation released/supplied by the government agencies are enough ?

- Yes
- No
- No comments

16. Do you think -whether government is sincere to ensure uninterrupted information flow regarding Corona Virus ?

- Yes
- No
- No comments

17. Do you think- people from all class and occupation of the society irrespective of rural or urban,rich or poor are getting all information around Corona Virus correctly and accurately ?

- Yes
- No
- No Comments

18. If not they get -what are the probable causes you think ? (you can give tick more than once for answering)

- People are not interested to get accurate information
- Number of insufficient media channels to reach to the community
- News channels are not doing responsibility properly
- Government is not sincere to ensure accurate information flow
- The public media channels are not performing their actual responsibilities
- Rely on fake news and information due to spread of fake news and rumour through social media

- Not Applicable

19. Did the Union of Journalists/Association of Media Owners take any initiative so far, for the welfare of journalists addressing their special professional situation during this time of Corona Crisis ?

- Yes
- No
- Not exactly know

20. Did the government(Ministry of Information) take any initiative so far, for the welfare of journalists addressing their special professional situation during this time of Corona Crisis ?

- Yes
- No
- Not exactly know

Thank you.



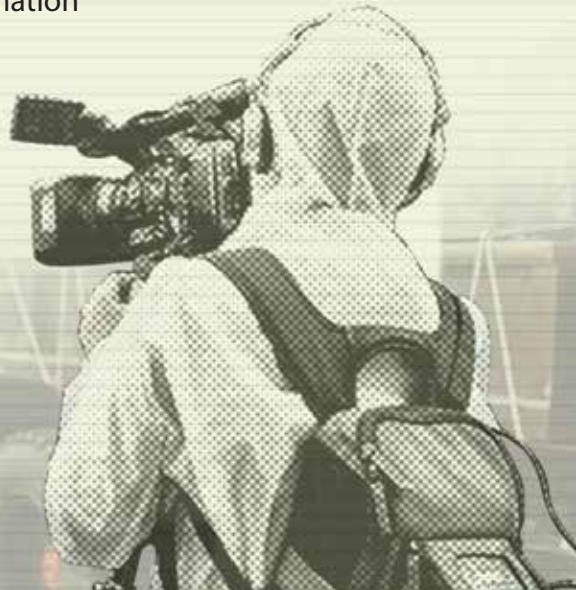
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