

Safety of Journalists in Ghana

**A Study on the State of Safety of
Journalists' Policies and Practices
in Media Houses in Ghana**

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Executive Summary

This study presents an overview of the state of journalists' safety in Ghana, focusing on the perceptions of journalists about the role of regulatory bodies, media houses, and colleagues, in safeguarding journalists in the discharge of their duties. The study specifically assessed the priority given to journalists' safety in different newsrooms in Ghana. It surveyed the measures to improve journalists' safety and the impact of COVID-19 on safety practices at media houses in Ghana. Forty (40) media houses comprising broadcast, print and online were sampled for this study. In addition to the results of the online survey, interviews were conducted with ten participating media houses to provide illumination on female-specific issues in the various safety policies. A content analysis of three available policies was done to determine the quality of the policies currently in use. The state of journalist's safety in Ghana was compared with the UNESCO journalist's indicators.

Priority given to Journalists Safety

- The study revealed that media practitioners have divided opinions on the priority given to journalists' safety in various newsrooms. Even though the majority of media practitioners agree that media organizations prioritize journalists' safety issues, almost half of the respondents also disagree.
- The journalists suggest they give higher priority to their safety issues themselves than their newsroom. They, therefore, argue strongly that their safety issues are mostly in their own hand.
- The policy documents currently in use by some media houses are not labelled as *safety policy* and have very little or no safety issues as the main subject of their content.
- Several of the UNESCO journalist's safety indicators at the national level have not been met and there is no meaningful attempt among media houses and journalism associations in Ghana towards the achievement of these indicators.

Trends of Violations against Journalists.

- A significant number of journalists are aware of violations against them in the country and they believe to a large extent that such violations are rampant.
- Journalists, even though aware of violations against them, suggest that they do not get justice through the judicial system, which they think is unsupportive.
- In line with several previous studies on safety and security of journalists, law enforcement agencies, politicians and political fanatics continue to be perceived as the major perpetrators of violence against journalists amidst all the interventions that have been adopted by stakeholders to ensure that police –journalist relations improve.
- The lack of comprehensive safety policy documents among media houses and the industry in general means the availability of relevant and quality female journalists' safety issues could not even be assessed.

State of Journalists' Safety Policies in the Country

- The overall assessment shows that the state of journalists' safety policies in the country is weak as many media organizations do not have safety policies and those which have, do not include conditions of service, insurance package and female-specific issues.
- There is, therefore, a common agreement among the journalists that media regulatory bodies should ensure newsrooms implement and enforce safety policies within their media organizations.
- The journalists affirmed, as well, that media organizations that fail to develop and implement safety policies must be sanctioned by regulatory bodies.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Journalists' Safety

- The study also revealed that most media houses have increased their meetings on safety precautions during the COVID-19 pandemic; thereby intensifying journalist's awareness on the need to improve and codify safety policies and practices within their media organisations.

Introduction

Ghana ranks 30th in the world with one of the freest media landscapes. However, press freedom in Ghana has not always been the norm when related to key concepts like diversity, the safety of journalists including their emoluments and ownership structures (RSF, 2020). Today, there are over 575 authorized radio stations in Ghana with 437 of them granted a commercial licence (NCA, 2nd Quarter, 2020) and presenting politically opposing views that mirrors the interest of their owners.

A third of the media in Ghana are owned by businessmen and political power brokers linked to present and past governments. This has led to threats on the lives of investigative reporters. The vast majority of cases of police aggression against journalists go unpunished and yet little attempts have been made to combat the problem (Reporter Without Borders, 2019). Braimah (2014) argued that security agencies such as the police and military have been the worse culprits of violations against journalists, accounting for over 38% of all violations against journalists; followed by political party supporters and individuals. Most of these perpetrators usually go unpunished; or at best, they render an apology to their victims. The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) subsequently has engaged the police and media personnel across the sub-region to foster mutual respect and healthy working relations.

Bisilki and Opoku (2019) have reasoned that investigative journalism remained a risky venture in Ghana with legal suits and death threats being the norm. They therefore recommended strong institutional support and capacity building for this category of journalists as well as collaborations among practitioners in their projects. Over the past few years, there have been a series of attacks on journalists, with the most general forms of violations being harassments and attacks. In 2014, MFWA in a report issued a tall list of incidents of attacks and violations against journalists in the country and indicated the likelihood that the country's press freedom ratings might drop if safety issues of journalists were not prioritized.

Despite Ghana's fine press freedom index outlook, there are very worrying reports of attacks on media practitioners in line with their editorial responsibility. There is even a scarier picture of the larger Ghanaian population calling for stiffer punishments for journalists and limitations on the country's press freedom (Isbell & Nyamekye, 2018). Nyarko and Akpojivi (2017) have argued that while the media practitioners' work is very important to society, their success is largely tied to the cooperation they get from the general public for whom they work. According to their study, security agencies, supporters of political parties and accused persons whose stories are reported by journalists constitute predominant perpetrators of violence against journalists.

The UNESCO Media Development Indicators (MDI), a framework for assessing media development, provides a diagnostic tool for assessing national media landscapes and identifying media development gaps. The broad indicators include:

- i. Journalists and associated media personnel are not subject to threats, harassment or surveillance
- ii. Journalists and associated media personnel are not physically attacked, unlawfully detained or killed as a result of pursuing their legitimate activities
- iii. Media organisations are not forced to close down as a result of pursuing their legitimate activities or threatened with closure
- iv. Crimes against journalists are prosecuted and there is no climate of impunity
- v. Media organisations have policies for protecting the health and safety of their staff and freelancers
- vi. Measures of social protection are available to all staff, including temporary and freelance employees
- vii. Journalists do not routinely self-censor because of fear of punishment, harassment or attack
- viii. Confidentiality of sources is protected in law and respected in practice

This study presents an overview of journalists' safety issues in Ghana focusing on how journalists perceive the role of regulatory bodies, media houses, and their colleagues in safeguarding journalists in the discharge of their duties. It looked at the trends in issues of safety of journalists, including violations, and a survey of journalists' safety policies and practices among media houses in Ghana. It considered the impact of COVID-19 on the attitude of media houses towards safety of journalists and situated the state of journalist's safety in Ghana within the UNESCO safety indicators.

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What, according to the journalists, is the level of priority given to journalists' safety issues in Ghana among actors such as media houses, regulatory bodies and journalists associations and journalists themselves?
2. What is the trend of journalists' safety issues in Ghana, including violations?
3. Who are the dominant perpetrators of violence against journalists in Ghana?
4. What is the state of journalists' safety policies among Ghanaian media houses?
5. What is the impact of COVID-19 on safety practices at media houses?

Methods

This study employed a descriptive survey to investigate journalists' safety policies and practices among media houses in Ghana. Using the simple random sampling method, a total of 40 media houses in the various regions of the country were sampled for the study. The selection of media houses from all regions of the country was to ensure that the sample was representative of the total population of media houses in Ghana. The study targeted two

categories of journalists: (1) journalists in editorial and managerial roles – editors, senior journalists, editorial staff; (2) journalists with non-editorial and non-managerial responsibilities – reporters, presenters, announcers. A database with the contacts and emails of journalists and editors from the selected media houses was developed after which invitations were sent to journalists and editors from the selected media houses to participate in an online survey. Journalists and editors were made aware that participation in the research was purely voluntary; they were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity. In addition to the online questionnaire, interviews with ten participating media houses and a content analysis of available policy documents were conducted to provide illumination on female-specific policy dimensions.

Findings

This section discusses the demographic characteristics of the participants of the survey. The online survey recorded a total of 80 respondents from 40 different media houses across the country. Tables 1 and 3 below present a summary of the demographic data of these participants.

Table 1: *Gender of Participants*

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	70	87.5
Female	10	12.5
Total	80	100

Source: Field Data, 2020

Although the media houses were encouraged to get at least one individual each from among reporters and editors – male and female – to fill the survey questions, they nominated more males than females.

Each participant had about a year or more working experience in their media houses. Table 2 shows the distribution of the participants’ years of work experience within four categories.

Table 2: *Participants’ Years of Work Experience*

Duration (years)	Frequency	Percent
1-4	19	24.0
5-10	39	49.0
11-20	18	23.0
20+	4	5.0
Total	80	100

Source: Field Data, 2020

Table 2 reveals that the respondents of the survey had averagely 11 years of work experience as journalists.

Twenty-seven of the participating media houses are radio stations, six (6) are Television stations, five (5) are newspapers and two (2) online media.

Table 3: *Participating Media Houses*

Item	Media House	Types	Region
1	Ghanaweb	Online	Netherlands
2	Modernghana	Online	Netherlands
3	TV3	TV	Greater Accra
4	TV Africa	TV	“
5	GTV	TV	“
6	Metro TV	TV	“
7	Angel TV	TV	“
8	Atinka TV	TV	“
9	Daily Graphic	Newspaper	“
10	Ghanaian Times	Newspaper	“
11	The New Crusading Guide	Newspaper	“
12	Daily Guide	Newspaper	“
13	The Finder	Newspaper	“
14	3FM	Radio	Greater Accra
15	Joy FM	Radio	“
16	Top FM	Radio	“
17	Peace FM	Radio	“
18	Citi FM	Radio	“
19	GBC Radio	Radio	“
20	ATL FM	Radio	Central Region
21	Spark FM	Radio	“
22	Skyy Power FM	Radio	Western Region
23	Pure FM	Radio	“
24	Hello	Radio	Ashanti Region
25	Kesben FM	Radio	“
26	Oyerepa FM	Radio	“
27	Ashh FM	Radio	“
28	Atinka FM	Radio	“
29	Classic FM	Radio	Brong Ahafo Region
30	Royal FM	Radio	“
31	Ho FM	Radio	Volta Region
32	Radio Builsa	Radio	Upper East Region
33	A1 Radio	Radio	“
34	Radford Radio	Radio	Upper West Region
35	Radio Progress	Radio	“

36	Joy Dadi	Radio	Eastern Region
37	Rite FM	Radio	“
38	Obuoba FM	Radio	“
39	Eagle FM	Radio	Northern East Region
40	Zaa Radio	Radio	Northern Region

Level of priority given to journalist’s safety issues in Ghana

The journalists assessed the priority given to safety issues by four groups of actors independently: (1) newsroom/media houses; (2) media regulatory institutions; (3) journalists associations; and (4) journalists themselves. Using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, the respondents indicated that safety issues are an individual affair in their media house (newsroom) with little or no direction on how to handle them.

Level of Priority of Journalists’ Safety Issues

While 15% (N=80) were not ready to assess the priority given to journalists’ safety issues by their media house, there was a split in opinion among the remaining journalists. About 37% of them felt safety issues were given a priority by their media house while 47.6 % of them said their media houses did not give their safety issues much attention. The case summary indicates that editors, senior journalists (with editorial responsibilities) and management members of the media houses were quite emphatic that the media houses are not doing much to prioritise the safety of their journalists. Reporters (the subordinates of the editors) tended to be either unsure of the priority their safety issues are receiving or agreed, without intensity, that their media institutions gave priority attention to issues of safety.

The journalists had a divided opinion about how media regulatory bodies and associations like the National Media Commission (NMC), Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana (PRINPAG) and Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (GIBA) prioritised their safety issues. A total of 35 respondents dismissed the idea that regulatory bodies take their safety issues seriously, with various degrees of disagreements, while the other 35 felt that the regulatory institutions and associations prioritised their safety issues as a serious matter. About 10 of the respondents were not too sure about their position. Regarding the assessment of journalists themselves about the importance accorded to safety issues among colleagues, they agreed unanimously, with various degrees of attention, that safety issues were very important to them.

In general, the respondents agreed largely that journalists’ safety issues remained a priority for them and their media houses but they were sharply divided when it came to the general media regulatory bodies and associations like GJA, NMC, PRINPAG and GIBA.

Trend of journalists' safety issues

To determine the trends of safety issues and violations entailed finding out the prevalence of violence against journalists in Ghana, the awareness of the journalists that these violations exist and the remedies available to them.

The media practitioners felt violence against journalists was rampant in Ghana. This observation is consistent with recent studies and developments on the media scene. In February 2016, for example, the media regulator, National Media Commission, the Ghana Journalists Association, Private Newspaper Publishers' Association and Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association issued a joint statement decrying the spate of attacks on journalists. The statement delivered at a press conference in Accra, noted that there had been many incidents of physical attacks on journalists in the line of duty. (Joint Statement NMC et al., 2016)¹

Manso (2016) also says that Journalism is fast becoming an endangered profession and underlined the need for the rights and safety of media practitioners to be secured as they go about their duties².

Prevalence and Awareness of Violations against Journalists

The higher the rate of violations, the more aware journalists are about the nature of their safety predicament. Interestingly, despite Ghana's international reputation as a model democracy with a vibrant pluralistic media, the survey showed that there is a high perception among journalists that violations against them are frequent. This perception is in line with violation figures published in reports by the MFWA and concerns raised by experts and other stakeholders. The MFWA has often cited security agents in various reports being one of the leading perpetrators, and has, consequently, been engaged in efforts to improve the relationship between the law enforcement agencies, especially the Police, and journalists. These efforts have culminated in the adoption of a [Police-Media Framework](#), a manual intended to guide relations between the two institutions.

¹ Retrieved from: <http://www.ibagh.org/index.php/component/content/article/1-latest-news/98-%2509joint-%2509statement-by-the-national-media-commission-ghana-journalists->

² Rights and safety of journalists need to be secured – Experts. Retrieved from <http://gbcghana.com/1.8418323>

Table 4: Prevalence of *Violence against Journalists*.

Response Keys	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly agree	11	13.8	13.8
Agree	46	57.5	71.3
Not too sure	9	11.3	82.6
Disagree	11	13.8	96.4
Strongly disagree	3	3.6	100.0
Total	80	100	

Source: Field Data, 2020

When we discount those who were not too sure about the prevalence level of violence against journalists and compare the agreements and disagreements, it turns out that over 80% of the media practitioners thought that violence against journalists was rampant. The basis of that assessment can be found in the level of awareness about violence against journalists over a period (Table 5).

Table 5: Awareness of *Violence against Journalists over time*

Response Keys	Within 6 months Frequency (%)	Within this year Frequency (%)	Within the past 4 years Frequency (%)	Within the past 8 years Frequency (%)
Strongly agree	12 (15)	12 (15)	26 (32.5)	27 (33.8)
Agree	29 (36.3)	40 (50)	46 (57.5)	40 (50)
Not too sure	12 (15)	9 (11.3)	1 (1.2)	5 (6.2)
Disagree	20 (25)	13 (16)	3 (3.8)	4 (5)
Strongly disagree	7 (8.8)	6 (7.5)	4 (5)	4 (5)
Total	80 (100)	80 (100)	80 (100)	80 (100)

Source: Field Data, 2020

It is obvious that the majority of the respondents are aware of violence against journalists within the last six months but a good number are either not too sure or disagreed with the statement; meaning they had not experienced or heard about violence against journalists within the last six months. About 80% of the respondents were aware of violence against journalists in the previous four to eight years.

The Media Foundation for West Africa's Freedom of Expression (FOE) [Monitor January-December 2019](#) recorded 19 freedom of expression violations in Ghana, behind Nigeria (63) and Guinea (24). Two of the violations were not related to the media but to freedom of assembly. The 17 media-related violations included the killing of journalists Ahmed Hussein

Suicide by unknown gunmen on January 16, threats, arrests, shutdown of media organisations and physical attacks on journalists.

In a [Policy Brief](#) on Media and Participatory Governance also published by the MFWA in 2019, it is indicated that “between the period of 2014- 2018 Ghana has recorded 71 violations, out of which only one has been redressed.”

Citing the Freedom of Expression Monitor, the policy brief further revealed that from February 2018 to March 2019, a total of 22 violations against journalists and media organisations were recorded in Ghana. “Indeed, these attacks among several others culminated in the drop of Ghana 4 places down—23 to 27—in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index,” the MFWA noted.

Obtaining Justice for Violence

Having agreed that they were aware of violence against journalists and the fact that it was rampant leads to whether they felt that they got justice from the Police and the Court regarding the abuses. In their assessment, journalists somewhat disagreed; but also many withheld any assessments by saying they were “not too sure”. While 21 of them stayed neutral in assessing this issue, 21 others affirmed that justice was available whenever they were abused. A majority of the journalists (32) perceive the judicial system as unsupportive and not delivering the justice required to deter attacks on journalists.

Many of respondents had over ten years of journalistic experience indicating their capacity to know whether or not journalists were getting justice through the judicial system. The case summary interestingly revealed that 15 editors /management members remained neutral in their assessment of whether journalists were getting justice or not from the judicial system. The neutrality of the editors in this case clearly shows they were unhappy. Apart from these 15 respondents (editors), the remaining editors disagreed, and some five of them even disagreed strongly.

The media practitioners perceived violence against journalists as rampant, many of which they were aware of and they also felt that they were not getting justice through the judicial system. Many of them were even reluctant to indicate whether they were getting justice or not.

The lack of justice for abused journalists is partly due to the failure of the Police to investigate and prosecute reported cases, as the police themselves were often guilty of such violations. A policy brief by the MFWA queried “if you are assaulted by a police and you report it to another police or a police station, how far can one expect that case to travel? It is not clear

how fair and objective the police will be in investigating itself as rightly noted by the Editorial of the March 20, 2019 edition of the Ghanaian Times newspaper” (page 4).³

Dominant perpetrators of violent attacks on journalists in Ghana

Law enforcement agencies and their officers, politicians and political fanatics, have been cited severally as the groups that commit the most violence against journalists.

Table 6: *Dominant Perpetrators of Violence against Journalists*

Response Keys	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly agree	16	20	20
Agree	50	62.5	82.5
Not too sure	4	5.1	87.6
Disagree	5	6.2	93.8
Strongly disagree	5	6.2	100.0
Total	80	100	

Source: Field Data, 2020

The journalists agreed largely that the politicians, law enforcement agencies and political fanatics are the most dominant perpetrators of violence against journalists; with various degrees of agreement summing up to about 82% (66 respondents).

It is crucial to note that the journalists perceived the judicial system as unsupportive when they are abused and they were consistent in their response by indicating that law enforcement agencies themselves plus their political bosses remained the biggest perpetrators of violence. They went ahead to state that lack of protection from these dominant abusers had influences on their content. While 6% were not too sure of their assessment of the statement, 67.5% of them felt that abuses from law enforcement agencies and politicians, in a way, influenced their content as shown in Figure 1. Considering Ghana’s world ranking of press freedom, this assessment is quite alarming because it is pointing to some form of self-censorship to stay safe.

³ Assault of the 3 Ghanaian Times Journalists: Policy Paths to Improving Safety of Journalists’ Situation in Ghana
<https://www.mfwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Assault-of-the-3-Ghanaian-Times-Journalists-and-Matters-Arising-New.pdf>

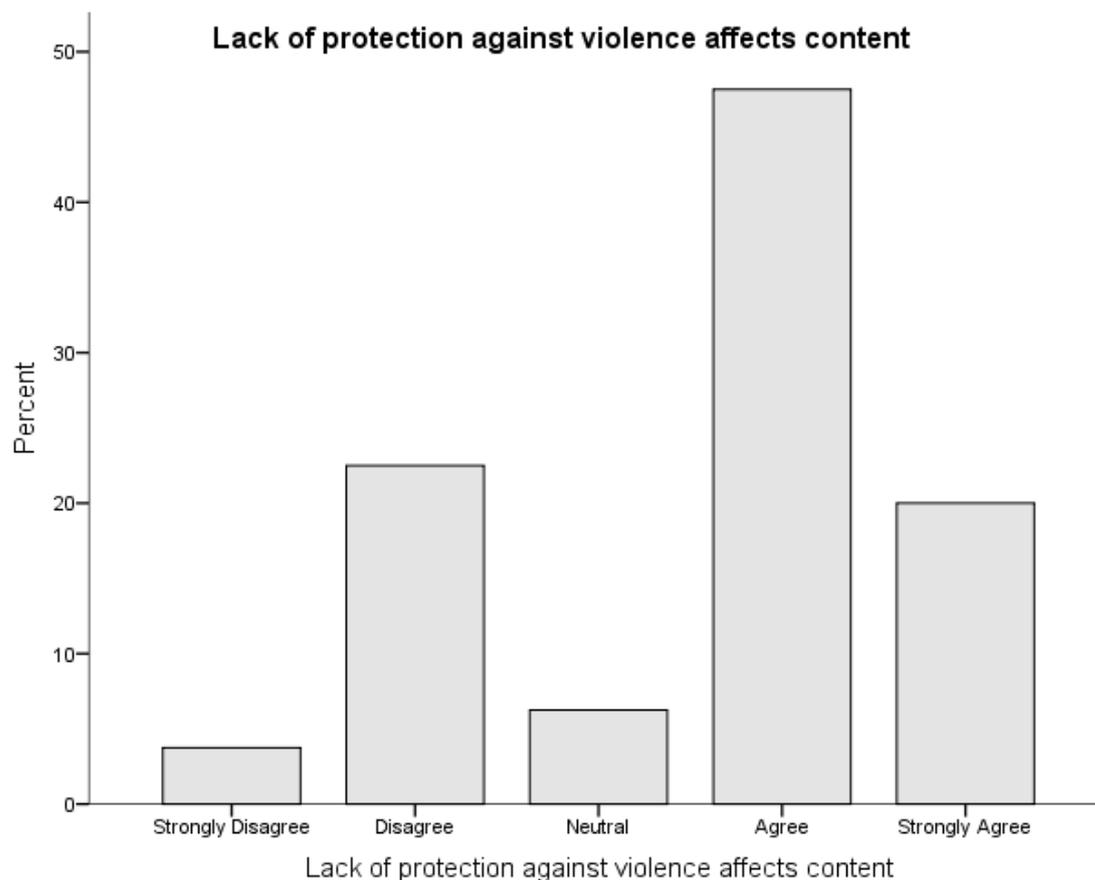


Figure 1. *Lack of protection against violence affect journalistic content.*

State of journalists’ safety policies within the Ghanaian media landscape

A majority of the journalists revealed they had no safety policies in their media organisation and as a result they relied on their own personal judgement and intuition. About four in five (81%, 65) said they used their understanding of the job, relied on friends, and used their “head” (intuition) when confronted with safety issues because their organisations had no safety policies. The remaining one in five (19%, 15) of the journalists spread across 11 media houses said they followed the safety protocols of their organisational policy. A reading of these organisational policy documents revealed that the media houses did not possess separately codified safety of journalists policy and the three that were received, on request, had in fact very little or no meaningful safety and health protocols for journalists.

Meanwhile, the UNESCO Safety Policy and Protocols⁴ (February, 2016) urges media organisations to, among other measures:

⁴ https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ideas_for_news_organisations_en_0.pdf

- Establish clear habits, routines, protocols and systems (including insurance and regular training) to enhance safety, with clear responsibilities from the media organization and the reporter
- Institutionalize daily check-ins and provide back-up for reporters on dangerous assignments
- Have conversations between editors and correspondents before heading out to understand mutual responsibilities and what will happen if something goes wrong
- Provide trainings for media editors and managers to sensitize them to safety issues
- Provide training and mentoring to staff, fixers and freelance journalists on a variety of topics such as;
 - i. Conducting security assessments
 - ii. Security in hostile environments
 - iii. Kidnap prevention
 - iv. Medical care
- Adapt universal training manuals to local circumstances

Judging the results of the survey against these protocols, it is clear that there is a yawning gap between what is expected and what media owners and managers are delivering in terms of proactive safety of journalists' protocols and practices in Ghana.

Table 7: *Media Houses with Safety Policy and Insurance Package*

Item	Name of Station	Insurance Package
1	Joy FM	Yes
2	Peace FM	No
3	TV3	Yes
4.	3FM	Yes
5.	Kessben	No
6.	Bryt FM	No
7.	Royal FM	No
8.	Modernghana.com	Yes
9.	Ghanaweb	Yes
10.	ATL FM	No

Source: Field Data, 2020

Only 5 out of the 15 respondents whose media organisations had safety policies had an Insurance package included. The majority of the media organisations have no safety policies and those that had the policies did not also have insurance package.

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on safety practices at media houses

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, media houses, like many organisations, have the responsibility to ensure the safety of their workers. When the media practitioners were asked about the frequency of their meetings during the COVID-19 period, they agreed that the pandemic had resulted in increased safety meetings. This increase in safety meetings has implication for the general safety awareness among media practitioners. The respondents when asked whether COVID-19 pandemic had influenced their awareness for safety issues, answered in the affirmative. While media practitioners considered the pandemic as an eye opener on safety issues, some also thought their safety awareness had not changed. This indicates that some media houses had done little to warrant this increased awareness for safety issues. In Figure 3, 90% of the media practitioners believed that COVID-19 pandemic had highly raised their awareness for safety issues while 8.7% disagreed.

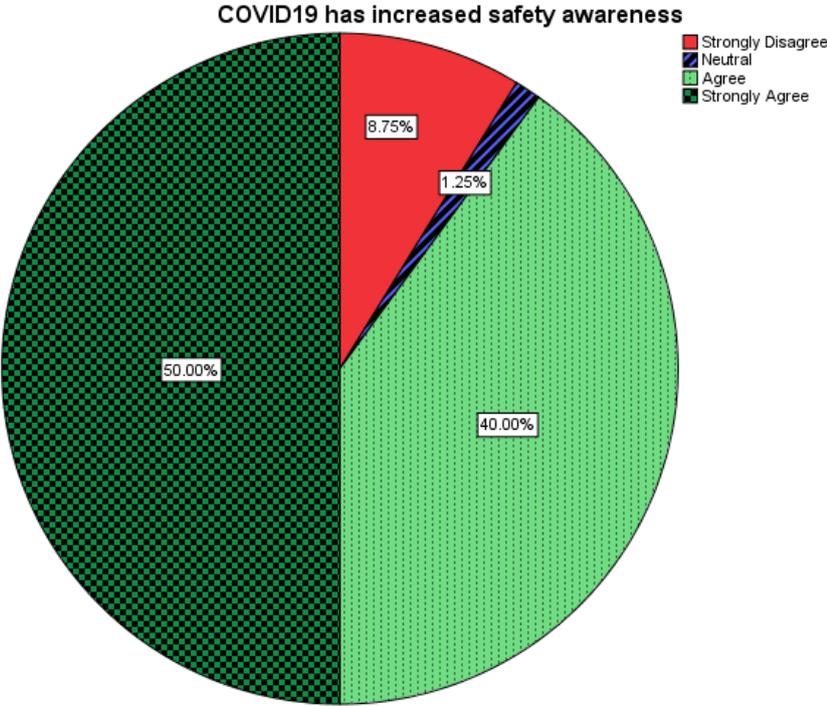


Figure 2. *Effects of safety meetings during COVID-19 on journalists' safety awareness*

The document analysis shows that although labelled safety policies, the documents that the few media houses had as their safety manual contained just a sentence or two regarding safety issues. These policies cannot guide standard safety practices among journalists. Apart from that, female safety issues could not be assessed since safety policies were not generally available even in media houses that had experienced abuses of their staff.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The state of journalists' safety policies and practices in Ghana is inconsistent with the impressive world press freedom ranking the country has enjoyed over the years. To ensure that safety policies and practices are in keeping with the status of press freedom, the journalists pointed to a need for their enforcement. Regarding the media regulatory bodies' role in this enforcement process, the journalists agreed largely that regulatory bodies should have a useful role in the implementation of safety policies in Ghana.

The journalists agreed that media houses that failed to develop and implement safety policies and practices should be sanctioned by regulatory bodies. The regulatory bodies here include NMC, GIBA, GJA and PRINPAG. However, a few journalists strongly disagreed with the call for sanctions. The case summary indicates that the 12 strong disagreements came only from respondents working in the broadcast media organisations, mostly radio stations.

Media practitioners in Ghana perceive threats, harassments and physical attacks as rampant; which represents a bad assessment as far as the UNESCO national safety indicators is concerned. They also argued that crime against journalists is not very well prosecuted. While these aforementioned assessments of the UNESCO safety of journalist's indicators remain a perception among the journalists, there are incidents of forced closures of media houses, absence of policies protecting health and safety of journalists and virtually no social protection mechanism for journalists generally. Many of the journalists also point to some form of self-censorship to remain safe. In general, the UNESCO safety of journalist's indicators in Ghana were rated very poorly by journalists and this evaluation can largely be confirmed due to the general lack of any meaningful safety policy among media houses in Ghana.

The media in Ghana, like many others in West Africa, are faced with persistent issues of violence against journalists with victims receiving little or no compensation from the perpetrators, their organisations or the judicial system. There is therefore an urgent need for implementing an institutional support for journalists and media organisations as well as interventions to improve the journalists' safety. Interventions that are already running ought to be intensified.

To achieve this end, all the media actors and regulatory bodies in Ghana such as the NMC, GJA, PRINPAG and GIBA must come together to design an appropriate safety policy that can be adapted and implemented by media houses in Ghana to promote safety of journalists in the country. The safety policy for media practitioners must include conditions of service that spell out insurance packages in the case of attacks that happen in the discharge of their duties. The policies must be drafted to provide complete frameworks for their implementation and should consider including female-specific dimensions.

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