

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON INDIAN PHOTOJOURNALIST

Dr Pradeep Tewari

Principal Photojournalist, The Tribune, India

DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2020.v05i12.021 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2020.v05i12.021>

ABSTRACT

This research shows that COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on India's Photojournalists. 71% of photojournalists are worried about their future due to the current economic situation of the newspaper in India. 52.7% photojournalists say their organisation has started the cut in salary. 59.1% of photojournalists started getting afraid of COVID 19 during covering the COVID related assignments. 49.5% photojournalists say their reporting staff didn't go out for the coverage of COVID 19, while 38.7% photojournalists say sometimes reporters also accompany them for COVID 19 coverage. Most of the photojournalists 54.8% say that their organization did not give them any safety gadgets to cover COVID 19 pandemic. 51.6% photojournalists are going to the office occasionally, while 21.5% admit that their organisation has allowed work from home and 26.9% say they are not allowed to work from home.

Keywords: Photojournalism, COVID 19 coverage, COVID-19 pandemic, Indian Photojournalist,

Introduction

In journalism, a journalist informs, educates and enlightens the readers about contemporary issues, in the same way a photojournalist also narrates through the photos of those incidents. Photographs enhance the credibility of the news. A photojournalist can authenticate the news only by the photo, the reader sees the photo and considers himself to be present at the same place.

A photograph captures the attention of a reader, as per the Chinese proverb, a picture speaks more than a thousand words. The most important thing is that no formal education is required to understand a picture. That's why we also say that photography is a universal language. Photojournalism can be dangerous, when it comes to covering critical events like wars and conflict zones (P. Tewari, 2019).

In recent year's mankind has faced the worst disease Ebola, SARS and H1N1 flu and in the beginning of 2020, while the world is facing COVID 19 crisis. During the lockdown many people spread the fake news about the COVID 19 on the social media, in such a situation, the responsibility of photojournalists went even further because misleading information was being put in social media, then only the photojournalist went to the worst affected area to get the correct information and increased the awareness of the disease among the people by publishing the real photo from the ground.

Photographs taken by the photojournalist in the Wuhan city of China shows China is grappling with the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak as 12 cities are quarantined and hospitals run out of space. Photographs show the ground report of how the market is closed, people are scared they are seen wearing the mask and long queues in the Airports. These visuals show the impact of the outbreak on society (Colarossi, 2020). Photos published in The Atlantic show the isolated Wuhan city, Shanghai and empty Jianguomen subway station in Beijing, which was earlier considered as a busiest city of China (Taylor, 2020).

Corona virus or Covid-19 infection is a disease that has been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). The novel Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was first identified in Wuhan China in December 2019. It has emerged as a respiratory infection starting with initial suspicions of animal to the human transmission for earlier cases, the paradigm has shifted towards human-to-human transmission via droplets, contacts and fomites (Sahu et al., 2020). Soon this virus spread to 210 countries throughout the world. on Jan 30, 2020 World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a pandemic.

In India the 1st case of corona virus was found in a 20 years old female student of Kerala on 27th January 2020. The girl said that she came back to Kerala from Wuhan city, China on January 23, 2020 owing to COVID-19 outbreak there. The student said that she had reached Kolkata city from Wuhan, China on the night of 23 January and came to Kochi the next day from where she had gone to her hometown in Thrissur.

On the auspicious occasion of Navratri, on March 19, The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi gave a message to a nation to counter the challenge of Covid-19, in which he urged the citizens to impose Janata Curfew on March 22 from 7:00 to 9:00. No one will be allowed to leave the houses, except people associated with essential services. The Prime Minister also appealed to the citizens not to fall prey to misinformation and said that at this time it is important for us to ensure that humanity wins and India wins (Tewari, 2020).

The COVID-19 outbreak spread worldwide within days, as of Jul 15, 2020, more than 13 million people have been affected by this disease (Anwar et al., 2020). India's media industry was

already fighting due to the economic slowdown, due to the arrival of covid, India's media is seen to be in deep trouble. Media groups began cutting jobs and salaries on a large scale, and many organizations closed their bureau offices and editions (Priyadarshini, 2020).

I am a photojournalist having more than 25 years' experience based in Chandigarh. I have been speaking with photojournalists since the lockdown was announced. I was trying to understand the current situation in various media houses around India. As COVID 19 has started affecting the photojournalists job in India. Business Standard laid off journalists and three designers across Delhi and Mumbai. Indian Express laid off video editors from its online team and journalists from Jansatta online. The Hindu, The Hindustan Times and Scroll.in and many other media houses laid off journalists (Sam, 2020).

Review of literature

The decline in the number of people reading newspapers started even before Covid 19. According to research there was a decline in print newspaper readership in America and Europe much before the Covid 19. Research shows that media publication shifted to online editions because of a decline in advertising revenues (Franklin, 2008). Even in India print has started losing young readers between the 15-20 age group (P. Tewari, 2016).

The print media had suffered the greatest losses due to online media, the loss which the TV media could not do. As per the study by the Hussman School of Journalism and Media within the 15 years between 2004 to 2019, the United States lost 2300 newspapers as in 2004 they had 9,000 newspapers which reduced to 6,700 in 2004. Half of the newspaper readers vanished and 36,000 writers have lost their jobs over the past 15 years and circulation decreased by 55 million (Abernathy, 2020).

As per the report of International Labour Organization (ILO), COVID-19 pandemic could increase global unemployment by almost 25 million, which also includes the media industry (A. Tewari, 2020b). For example, Newsweek, one of the reputed print media companies, announced in October 2012 its complete phasing out of its paper version from the beginning of 2013 and its transition to digital (BBC News, 2012).

After the COVID-19 newspapers in India are going through a huge economic crisis. Most of the media houses in India cut their salaries to manage the crisis. Even big media houses like Bennett Coleman & Co Ltd (BCCL), which owns Times of India, Economic Times, Mirror, Nav Bharat Times, Maharashtra Times, Vijay Karnataka, etc., The Indian Express, The Tribune Publication, The Business Standard, Amar Ujala, India Ahead News, Patrika, The Hindu, NDTV, JaiHind TV

and The Caravan magazine announced deferring of increments, restructuring of salary and salary cuts (Sam, 2020).

According to a report, after the onset of coronavirus, most of the employees of the newspaper are working from home, but photojournalists do not have any such luxury, they always have to go to the field to do their work, whether it is rain, storm or any disease. When senior journalists are also nervous, seeing this pandemic, then photojournalists are working in the field to show the correct news to the people, no matter how much risk they face (Ricchiardi, 2020).

Some photojournalists spent several days in the field to expose the government, for example Belaúnde cemetery in the Comas district, north of Lima. Here, Lucas secured an invitation from family and friends of a Venezuelan victim of COVID-19 to attend the burial. Photojournalist James Oatway says he worked like a war photographer's approach to covering violence linked to the pandemic, he captured brutality of police and security forces during the lockdown in South Africa. AP's Goldman says "The challenging thing for photographers in this pandemic is that access is so restricted" (Philp, 2020).

UNICEF issued the Safety guidelines for Indian journalists reporting on COVID-19, which says Our responsibilities are to cover news and not to become the news, wash your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds, maintain 6 feet distance during recording, avoid lapel mics, use sanitizer, wear a mask, maintain a healthy diet and distant seating (Safety Guidelines for Journalists Reporting on COVID-19, n.d.).

The COVID 19 pandemic will damage human life and public health, now food systems are facing unprecedented challenges, economic and social damage due to the pandemic, according to one report, millions of people could become extremely poor and undernourished, unemployment will also be increase (Impact of COVID-19 on People's Livelihoods, Their Health and Our Food Systems, 2020). Ramnath Goenka award winning photojournalist of HT Media BurhaanKinu having nearly eight years with HT was also sacked in May by HT Media, he asked to resign (Priyadarshini, 2020).

Many journalists died around the world due to COVID 19, even in India many journalists died, a senior cameraman age 41years passed away due to Covid-19, he was working in a Tamil channel (Viswanathan, 2020), Patna based senior photojournalist Krishna Mohan Sharma (63), died of corona complications who worked for Times of India (2020). 46 years old journalist of Odia news daily died while undergoing treatment of COVID 19 (Jena, 2020). Senior correspondent of the Punjab Kesari group Ashwani Kapoor (70) died at a private hospital in Ludhiana, Chandigarh based 43 years old journalist Davinder Pal Singh died due to COVID-19 (Tribune News Service,

2020, 2020a). 46-year-old Video journalist of Tripura, Jitendra Debbarma succumbed to the coronavirus he was admitted to the Khumulwng Hospital (Panday, 2020).

Methodology

In this study the respondents participated from all over the India and various languages newspapers and magazine, with a minimum circulation of 10,000 and 10,000 viewership for online news portal. The questionnaire was prepared in English, as all the working photojournalist can easily understand the English, it was sent through the google form on their mail and WhatsApp and printed copies for the Punjab and Haryana photojournalist were distributed. The list of photojournalists was compiled with the help of Press Information Bureau and press club of various states. The questionnaire WhatsApp and emailed to 300 photojournalists in June 2020, followed by personal calls on the mobile phone and three-time reminder on email and WhatsApp and printed questionnaire distributed among 100 photojournalists. The survey was closed on 30th September 2020 by that time 150 photojournalists participated in this research, 90 respondents fill their form online and 60 on the given questionnaire. The sample was selected from all over the India, the sample size was not big but even then, it represents the whole country. I have used SPSS to analyse the research.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To find out the Impact of COVID 19 on photojournalists of India.
2. To examine the working condition during COVID 19.
3. To examine the official attitude during COVID 19.

Research Questions

Did your organisation allow you to work from home?

Does the reporter also accompany you when you go for COVID 19 coverage?

What protection gadgets have you got from the office for the COVID 19 coverage?

What protection gadgets have you got from the NGO/Govt for COVID 19 coverage?

Did your organisation give you the safety guidelines and advice for how to properly protect yourself on COVID 19 assignment?

Did you follow the physical distancing norms during the assignments?

Have you ever been afraid of covid 19 while doing duty?

Did your organization increase your salary for doing risky jobs?

Did your organization reduce your salary due to the current financial situation?

Has your organization fired or given notice to any journalist yet?

Do you fear the job in the future due to the current economic situation of the newspaper in India?

Findings of the study achieved during the survey are as follows.

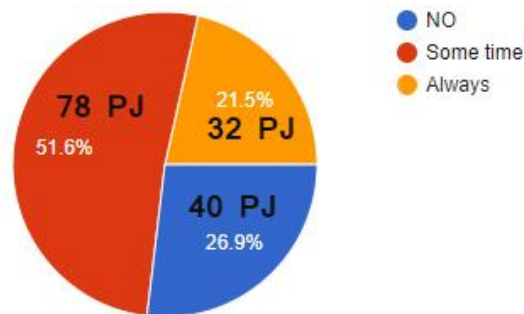


Table 1: Did your organisation allow you to work from home?

As per the table number 1, 51.6% photojournalists are going to the office occasionally, while 21.5% admit that their organisation has allowed work from home and 26.9% say they are not allowed to work from home.

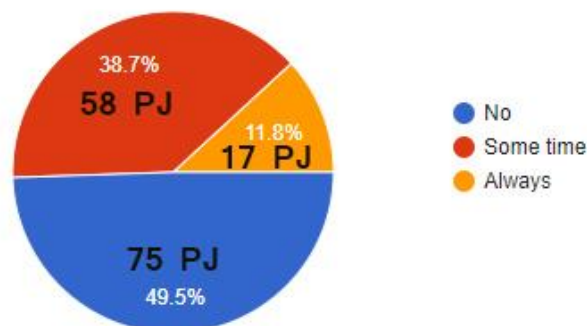


Table 2: Does the reporter also accompany you when you go for COVID 19 coverage?

Photojournalist and reporter used to go together to cover most of the assignments but during COVID 19, study reveals that most of the journalists 49.5% did not go out to cover COVID 19 affected area with the photojournalists, 38.7% photojournalists say sometimes reporter also accompany them to cover COVID 19 related news. Whereas 11.8% photojournalists accept that reporters were always accompanied by the photojournalist.

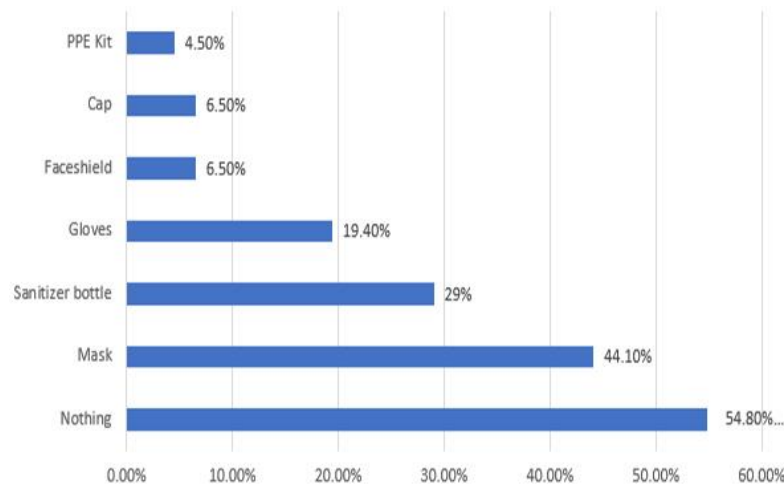


Table 3: What protection gadgets have you got from the office for the COVID 19 coverage?

Most of the photojournalists 54.8% say that their organization did not give them any safety gadgets to cover an COVID 19 pandemic, 44.10% say that their media house gave them masks and 29% say they were given a bottle of sanitizer, about 19.4% say they got gloves from office and 6.5% say they got caps and face shield from the office.

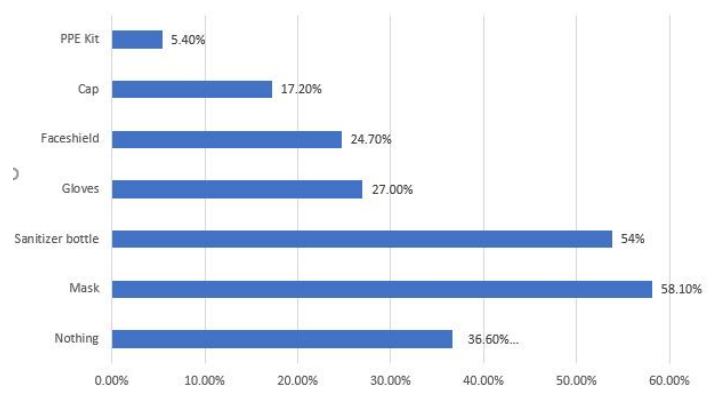


Table 4: What protection gadgets have you got from the NGO/Govt for COVID 19 coverage?

Many social service and government organizations were distributing COVID 19 protection gadgets most of the photojournalists accept that they were given masks 58.10% and 54% say they also got sanitizer bottles, 27% say they were also given gloves, while 24.7% got face shield, 17% photojournalists say they got caps and 5.4% say they were also given PPE kits while 36% say they got nothing.

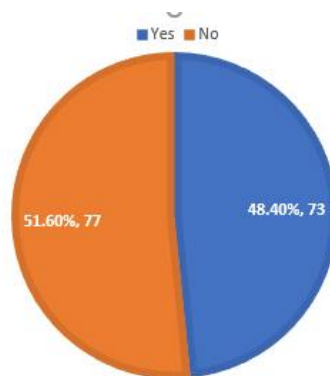


Table 5: Did your organisation give you the safety guidelines and advice for how to properly protect yourself on COVID 19 assignment?

Guidelines were issued by the government, how to work in the environment of COVID 19? UNICEF also issued guidelines for the journalists, in the same way the various newspaper groups also gave safety guidelines to their employees. 51.6% of photojournalists accepted that their organisation gives the safety guidelines and advice for how to properly protect yourself during the assignment, while 48.4% say that they have not received any guidelines from the office.

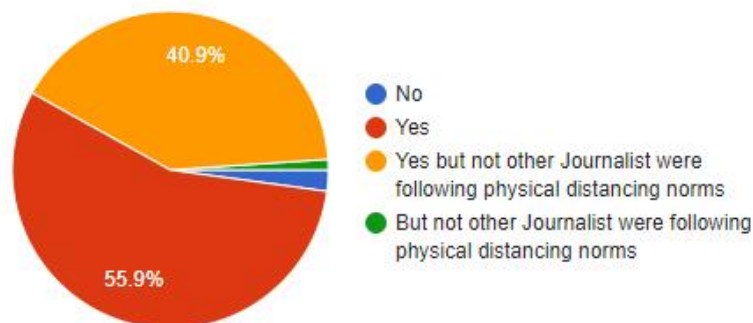


Table 6: Did you follow the physical distancing norms during the assignments?

Some rules were made to eliminate this pandemic and journalists were also asked to adopt the rules of physical distance during the work. Most of the photojournalists 55.9% were following the COVID-19 norms, at the same time, there were 40.9% photojournalists who did not follow the physical distancing norms during the assignments.

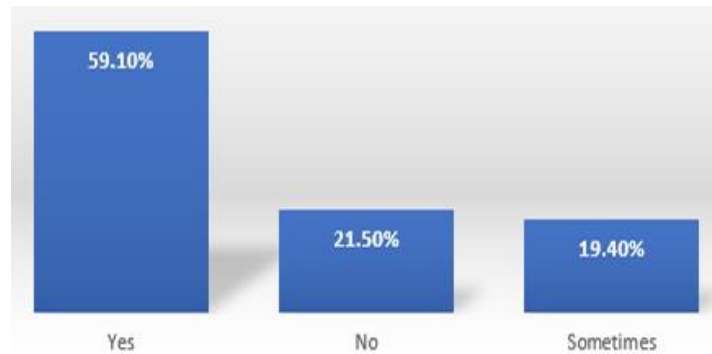


Table 7: Have you ever been afraid of covid 19 while doing duty?

Due to COVID 19, many deaths were happening around the world, India was also not untouched by it, every person had suffered after seeing the news of daily deaths. At the same time, 59.1% of photojournalists believe that they too started getting afraid of COVID 19 while doing duty, 19.40% of the photojournalists say that they are afraid sometimes, while 21.50% say that they never felt afraid of covid while doing duty.

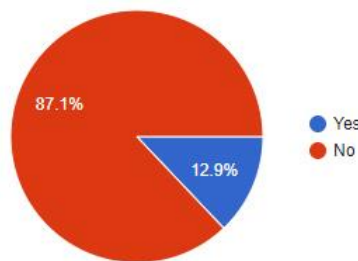


Table 8: Did your organization increase your salary for doing risky jobs?

Most of them noticed that people who work under risk get more salary for doing risky work. Photojournalists were also doing risky work to cover the COVID 19 related assignments. But 87.1% of photojournalists say that their organization did not raise their salaries for doing a high-risk job, while 12.9% say their pay was raised.

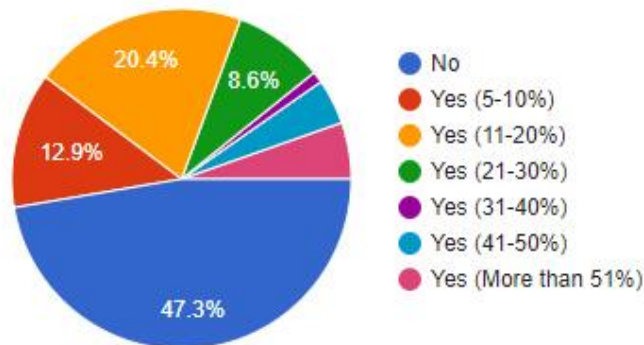


Table 9: Did your organization reduce your salary due to the current financial situation?

Advertisement has drastically reduced in the newspapers due to Covid 19, most of the newspapers are suffering with huge revenue loss. In some cases, people were also fired due to the big revenue loss. But an option was put by the union leader in many news organisations that the salary should be cut. But the employee should not be fired in this hour of crisis. Some newspapers took pay cuts to overcome this dire situation. 47.3% photojournalists say their organisation didn't reduce the salary, while 12.9% accept that their salary reduced 5-10%, 20.4% say 11-20% and 8.6% photojournalists accept that their newspaper is reducing 21-30% salary in a month.

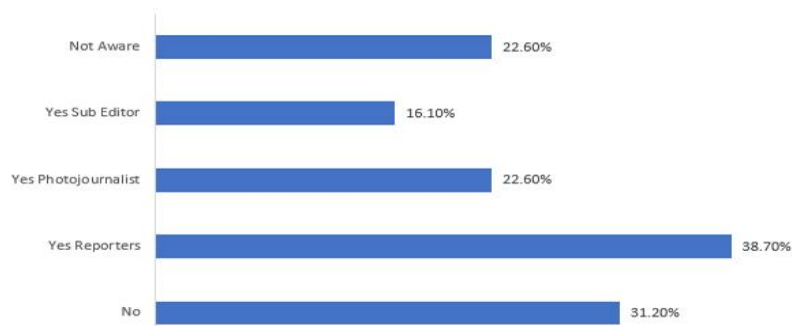


Table 10: Has your organization fired or given notice to any journalist yet?

Prestigious newspaper groups around the world have fired their journalists because they were suffering from a financial crisis. India is no exception. Table 10 shows reporter photojournalist sub editors were also fired in India too. 38.7% photojournalists say their newspaper fired reporters, followed by the 22.6% photojournalists, 16.1% sub editors and 22.6% are not aware about the development. 31.2% say their organization hasn't fired or given notice to any journalist yet.

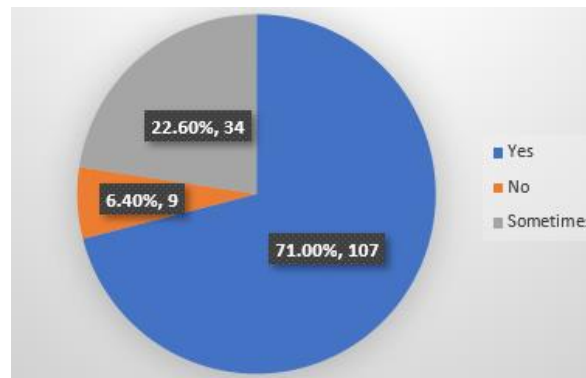


Table 11: Do you fear the job in the future due to the current economic situation of the newspaper in India?

Reputed newspapers all over the world fired their reporters and photojournalists due to COVID 19 financial crisis and its effect was seen in India too, large media houses of India also fired journalists. After seeing all this 71% of photojournalists are worried about their future due to the current economic situation of the newspaper in India and 22% say they also feel scared sometimes only 6% of photojournalists don't fear being fired.

Conclusion

- 51.6% photojournalists are going to the office occasionally, while 21.5% admit that their organisation has allowed work from home and 26.9%.
- 49.5% journalists did not go out to cover COVID 19 affected areas with the photojournalists, 38.7% photojournalists say sometimes reporters also accompany them to cover COVID 19 related news.
- Most of the photojournalists 54.8% say that their organization did not give them any safety gadgets to cover an COVID 19 pandemic, 44.10% say that their media house gave them masks and 29% say they were given a bottle of sanitizer.
- 58.10% of photojournalists admitted that NGOs/government organizations have given them gadgets like masks, and 54% said that sanitizer bottles and 27% have also received gloves.
- 51.6% of photojournalists accepted that their organisation gives the safety guidelines and advice for how to properly protect yourself during the assignment.

- 55.9% photojournalists are following the COVID-19 norms, at the same time, there were 40.9% photojournalists who did not follow the physical distancing norms during the assignments.
- 59.1% of photojournalists believe that they too started getting afraid of COVID 19 while doing duty.
- 87.1% of photojournalists say that their organization did not raise their salaries for doing a high-risk job, while 12.9% say their pay was raised.
- 47.3% photojournalists say their organisation didn't reduce the salary, while 12.9% accept that their salary reduced 5-10%.
- 38.7% photojournalists say their newspaper fired reporters, followed by the 22.6% photojournalists.
- 71% of photojournalists are worried about their future due to the current economic situation of the Indian newspapers.

Suggestions

Newspaper groups which have less space should not call their editorial staff to the office, if they are calling, they should be called in small numbers. In the last few years, a working style has arisen among journalists that rarely go to the field. Same style of work being seen during the coverage of COVID 19, as most of the photojournalists say reporting staff didn't go out in the COVID 19 affected area for the coverage, while some say that sometimes they went. If journalists continue to work in this way, then it will affect the quality of journalism. The editor should ensure that the journalist must go to the field for quality journalism.

Most of the media group newspaper group did not give safety gadgets to its field staff to avoid COVID 19, every media group must give them sanitizer bottles, mask, gloves and face shields for the safety of their employees. Most of the photojournalists say in this research NGOs and government organizations have given them safety gadgets to work in the COVID 19 affected areas. It is a further request to the government and other NGOs to help photojournalists like other Corona warriors.

It was also found in the research that many organizations did not give any guidelines to their employees for working in the COVID 19 affected areas, all the organizations are urged to provide the guidelines to their journalists. All journalists are requested to follow the rules made

by the government while working during COVID 19, they should first protect themselves and then work with the aim of spreading the news to the people.

Most of the photojournalists working in newspapers in India are in fear that their organization might fire them. Only those are seen comfortable, who are working as per the wage board. In this critical situation, the photojournalist will have to maintain his spirits and he should learn the news writing as well as taking photos and also have to learn video making and editing. Because whenever there is cost cutting, if you can do more than you work, then the company will definitely keep you, because they can get many jobs from the same person, so you start writing and making videos along with taking photos.

Do not be intimidated by the atmosphere of fear that has been created due to the deaths happening all over the world today. Whenever you go to covid assignment, follow all the guidelines and use the gadgets that you have. Get as close to your subject as you think is appropriate for security. Whenever you come back home, first wash your laundry and wash your hands thoroughly with soap. Do yoga every day by making regular rules and exercise to make your lunch stronger. Whatever negative thoughts come in your mind; you have to give up.

Reference

Abernathy, P. M. (2020, June 20). *News Deserts and Ghost Newspapers: Will Local News Survive?*

https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/wpcontent/uploads/2020/06/2020_News_Deserts_and_Ghost_Newspapers.pdf

Anwar, A., Malik, M., Raees, V., & Anwar, A. (2020). Role of Mass Media and Public Health Communications in the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Cureus*. Published.

<https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.10453>

Barthel, M., Matsa, K. E., & Worden, K. (2020, October 29). *Coronavirus-Driven Downturn Hits Newspapers Hard as TV News Thrives*. Pew Research Center's Journalism Project. <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2020/10/29/coronavirus-driven-downturn-hits-newspapers-hard-as-tv-news-thrives/>

BBC News. (2012, October 18). *Newsweek magazine ends print edition to go online-only*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-19989346>

Colarossi, N. (2020, January 25). *Photos show how China is grappling with the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak as 12 cities are quarantined and hospi*. Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.in/politics/news/photos-show-how-china-is-grappling-with-the->

wuhan-coronavirus-outbreak-as-12-cities-are-quarantined-and-hospitals-run-out-of-space/articleshow/73598753.cms

Franklin, B. (2008). THE FUTURE OF NEWSPAPERS. *Journalism Studies*, 9(5), 630–641. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700802280307>

Horner, D., Ivacko, T. M., & Fitzpatrick, N. (2020). The Initial Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Michigan Communities and Local Governments. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. Published. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3636436>

Impact of COVID-19 on people's livelihoods, their health and our food systems. (2020, October 13). Www.Who.Int. <https://www.who.int/news/item/13-10-2020-impact-of-covid-19-on-people's-livelihoods-their-health-and-our-food-systems>

Jena, S. (2020, July 11). *Journalist Of Odia Daily Dies Of Covid19*. As Covid-19 Continues to Take a Toll, Another “Corona Warrior” from a Popular Odia News Daily Has Succumbed to the Virus. <https://odishatv.in/odisha-news/journalist-of-odia-daily-dies-of-covid19-461671>

Panday, C. (2020, Oct 20). *Tripura: 46-year-old becomes first journalist casualty of COVID-19*. EastMojo. <https://www.eastmojo.com/news/2020/10/20/tripura-46-year-old-becomes-first-journalist-casualty-of-covid-19/>

Philp, R. (2020, August 27). *How Leading Photojournalists Around the World Are Documenting COVID-19*. Global Investigative Journalism Network. <https://gijn.org/2020/07/27/how-leading-photojournalists-around-the-world-are-documenting-covid-19/>

Priyadarshini, A. (2020, September 9). *'Can't rely entirely on journalism now': How media workers laid off during the pandemic are coping*. NewsLaundry. <https://www.newslaundry.com/2020/09/09/cant-rely-entirely-on-journalism-how-media-workers-laid-off-during-the-pandemic-are-coping>

Ricchiardi, S. (2020, August 11). *Photojournalists at risk covering protests, coronavirus*. International Journalists' Network. <https://ijnet.org/en/story/photojournalists-risk-covering-protests-coronavirus>

Safety guidelines for journalists reporting on COVID-19. (n.d.). UNICEF India. <https://www.unicef.org/india/coronavirus/safety-guidelines-journalists-reporting-covid-19>

Sahu, K. K., Mishra, A. K., & Lal, A. (2020). Comprehensive update on current outbreak of novel coronavirus infection (2019-nCoV). *Annals of Translational Medicine*, 8(6), 393. <https://doi.org/10.21037/atm.2020.02.92>

Sam, C. (2020, August 7). *Lay-offs and cutbacks in Indian newsrooms 2020: What we know*. Medium. <https://medium.com/news-covid19/lay-offs-and-cutbacks-in-indian-newsrooms-2020-what-we-know-bdba9dec1644>

T. (2020, October 16). *Noted lensman K M Sharma dies of Covid*. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/patna/noted-lensman-k-m-sharma-dies-of-covid/articleshow/78688286.cms>

Taylor, A. (2020, March 6). *Photos: Life in the Time of Coronavirus*. The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2020/02/photos-life-in-the-time-of-covid-19/606706/>

Tewari, A. (2020, June 1). *'Janta Curfew' to be observed on 22 March from 7 AM to 9 PM | The India Post*. The India Post: Breaking News from India. <https://www.theindiapost.com/headline/janta-curfew-to-be-observed-on-22-march-from-7-am-to-9-pm-2/>

Tewari, A. (2020b, October 16). *The economic and labour crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic could increase global unemployment by almost 25 million : ILO | The India Post*. The India Post : Breaking News from India. <https://www.theindiapost.com/headline/the-economic-and-labour-crisis-created-by-the-covid-19-pandemic-could-increase-global-unemployment-by-almost-25-million-ilo/>

Tewari, P. (2016). *Is Print Readers Declining? A Survey of Indian Online Newspaper Readers*. *Journal of Socialomics*, 05(04). <https://doi.org/10.4172/2167-0358.1000177>

Tewari, P. (2019). *TasveerBolti Hai*. Vandana Publication.

Tribune News Service. (2020a, June 30). *PTC news anchor Davinder Pal Singh dies of Covid*. Tribuneindia News Service. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/ptc-news-anchor-davinder-pal-singh-dies-of-covid-106614>

Tribune News Service. (2020, September 30). *Jalandhar reports 4 deaths, 150 +ve cases*. Tribuneindia News Service. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/jalandhar/jalandhar-reports-4-deaths-150-ve-cases-148809>

Viswanathan, N. (202-06-28). *This Chennai TV cameraman knew just how to bring out a story*. <https://www.newindianexpress.com>. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/chennai/2020/jun/28/this-tv-cameraman-brought-stories-to-life-2162495.html>