

Coping Mechanisms of Press Under Threat and Attack: The Case of Select Bicol Journalists

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Abstract. This study discusses, through Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm Theory, the coping mechanisms of the press under threat and attack. These coping mechanisms were discussed through descriptive research as a type of qualitative approach.

Purposive sampling was utilized to determine the participants of this study who experienced threat, attack, and harassment in line with their profession. The participants underwent in-depth interviews in a secure and safe place to ensure the confidentiality of their identities and narratives.

This study found out that the participants had various forms of threat, attack, and harassment and coping mechanisms which are written threat, verbal threat, name-calling, censorship, bribery, unannounced house and station visits, physical assault, and arrest. It was also found that the participants employed four coping mechanisms based on Folkman et al. (2004) which are problem-focused, meaning-focused, emotion-focused, and social coping (seeking support).

Keywords: *Narrative paradigm, Bicol journalists, coping mechanisms*

INTRODUCTION

The word “media”, as mentioned in the study of Dr. Bhava Sood in 2018, is rooted in the word “medium” which means a signifying mode or carrier. It intends to target a large audience. It was previously used to refer to books and newspapers. Nowadays, with the advancement in technology, the word media means television, movies, radio, and the internet. Media plays a vital role in society as it serves as an overseer to guard the public interest against any malpractice, oppression, misdeed, and injustice. Media informs the public of what is happening around them and uncovers the underlying facts. Hence, its responsibility to its audience includes control over misinformation, conceptions, and myths (Falcone, 2018).

However, on November 23, 2018, the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) issued figures of around 99 direct and indirect incidents against media networks and journalists for July 1-October 31, 2018. These occurrences, according to CMFR, pose a danger to the Philippines' journalism industry, which was formerly regarded as having one of Asia's freest and strongest presses.

The latest figure, which is 99, shows an increase in cases documented until April 30, 2018, which is part of the first 22 months of Duterte. These attacks and threats include 17 cases of online harassment, 12 cases both for killing and libel, 11 cases of threat through short message service (SMS), 7 cases of slay attempt, 6 cases of intimidation, 5 cases both for verbal threat/assault and physical assault, 4 cases each for website attack and cyber libel, 3 cases each for arrest, corporation-related case, barred from coverage, and physical harassment, and 2 cases both for article takedown and strafing/shooting incident.

The literature and articles on the various threats, attacks, harassment, and killings of journalists, clearly state that journalists all over the world are at great risk in performing their roles. In the Philippines, the Bicol region was identified by PTFoMS as one of the most vulnerable and dangerous areas for media. Hence, the researcher decided to conduct a study on the coping mechanisms of selected journalists who were threatened, attacked, and harassed in the said locale given that there is no existing literature on this yet. Additionally, the researcher, as a broadcasting graduate and a former media practitioner, is highly interested in this subject matter.

Statement of the Problem

This paper addressed the following research objectives: 1) profile of the media practitioner in terms of media affiliation, journalist's beat, position/designation and years in service; 2) the act of threat, attack, or harassment that the participants experienced; 3) how the participants the type of threat, attack, or harassment that the participants encountered; 4) the coping mechanisms of the participants after being threatened, attacked or harassed; and 5) determine the actions taken by the chapter of Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP) based on the narratives of the participants.

Significance

This paper contributes to the awareness and understanding of the various coping mechanisms of local journalists who were threatened, attacked or harassed. This is also significant in terms of crafting guidelines to protect journalists against different forms of violence directed to them while performing their duties. Lastly, this study is anchored on United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 16 which is Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The first comprehensive picture of the dangers being faced by women in the news media around the world was reported by the International Women's Media Foundation and International News Safety Institute in 2014 titled, "Violence and Harassment Against Women in the News Media: A Global Picture". The study aimed to gauge the nature and frequency of violations such as the types of violence and threats committed by perpetrators. More importantly, offers suggestions to individuals and organizations to mitigate the dangers in their work and provide a safe working environment. It had 977 responses across the globe with different job roles such as journalist, editor, photographer, producer, presenter, and media support worker. The findings of this study showed that nearly 2/3 of the respondents experienced intimidation, threats, and abuse that include abuse of power or authority (217), attempt to damage reputation/honor (181), insults of criticism published online (138), name-calling or insults (124), other (not specified) (31), public humiliation/threats to humiliate (91), repeated insults (76), the threat of job loss if pregnant (19), threats of violence (91), verbal,

written, physical intimidation (204), and verbal, written, physical intimidation to family and friends (111). These acts took place in the office, in the field (when reporting), at home, in the street, and online. As a result, some of them became depressed and experienced psychological trauma, some started using pseudonyms or pen names, decided to relocate, were forced to give up their journalism career, and left their jobs.

According to “The News Manual”, a journalist is a man who presents information as news to the readers and viewers of newspapers, magazines, radio or television stations, or the Internet. Some journalists are reporters who present news stories, feature articles, or documentaries based on gathered information; Sub-editors who manage stories written by the reporters and include these in newspapers, magazines, bulletins, or web pages; Photojournalists who make use of pictures to tell news; Editors who make the final decision on what should be in the newspaper, magazine or news bulletin; and, news editors, feature writers, or special writers. Janowitz (2015) argued that journalists’ roles are categorized into two. First is the gatekeeper’s function which refers to the processing and relaying of information from various sources. And second is the advocate’s function where journalists act as vocal representatives of the public.

A report titled “Threats Against Journalists” (Dan et al., 2020) stressed that the threats being faced by journalists are becoming more complex given the rising hostility against them and the emergence of technology. These identified threats which imply the freedom of expression and access to information are physical, legal, online, and economic. In Novi Sad, the second largest city in Serbia, seven journalists were threatened and assaulted in a span of 10 days. The recorded cases were physical assault, verbal abuse, online harassment, or death threats. According to Tamara Filipovic, the project manager of the Association of Independent Journalists of Serbia (NUNS), there is an increase in the number of threats and insults that journalists are experiencing, and yet these remain unresolved (International Press Institute, 2024). Further, Clark et al. (2017) conducted a study titled “Journalists Under Pressure: Unwarranted Interference, fear and self-censorship in Europe.” The results showed that 40% of the respondents claimed that the interference affected their personal lives. Sixty-nine (69%) of the respondents revealed that the most common type of unwarranted interference was psychological violence. This includes humiliation, belittlement, intimidation, various threats, slandering, and smear campaigning. Fifty-three (53%) of the respondents said that the second

most unwarranted interference was cyberbullying such as accusations of being partisan, personal attacks, public defamation, and smear campaigns. Meanwhile, other forms of unwarranted interference include intimidation by interest groups, threats with force, intimidation by political groups, targeted surveillance, intimidation by the police, physical assault, robbery, confiscation or destruction of property, non-contact personal theft, and sexual harassment or violence. It also stated that 23% of the respondents claimed that they were arrested, investigated, threatened with prosecution, and prosecuted.

Coping, according to Folkman et al. (2004), refers to the thoughts and behaviors that primarily aim to manage stressful events internally and externally. It is a term used typically for acts, either subconscious or unconscious, to reduce or manage stress (Venner, 1988). Coping is categorized into four. These categories are problem-focused coping mechanisms which aim to address the problem causing the distress including active coping, planning, limiting coping, and suppressing activities; emotion-focused coping mechanisms like positive reframing, acceptance, turning to religion, and humor are being employed to reduce the negative emotions related to the problem; meaning-focused on the other hand, utilizes an individual's cognitive strategies to understand and manage the meaning of the situation they are in, and; social coping (support-seeking) mechanism wherein a person reduces stress through looking for emotional and instrumental support from his/her community (Folkman et al., 2004).

To upraise professional and ethical standards of broadcasting in the Philippines, promote social responsibility, uphold advancement in the broadcast scene, and safeguard the rights and interests of the broadcasters, the KBP was formed. It is a self-regulatory body composed of owners and operators of radio and television stations and their stations. Therefore, the station becomes a member of the organization. Its members, however, must first pass the accreditation exam. The KBP, according to its website, also teams up with its members to conduct public service campaigns to raise awareness, educate, and inspire action on various societal issues. Additionally, KBP holds trainings to help its members enhance their skills and knowledge to deliver timely and accurate information, and help the public prepare for and respond to possible disasters, emergencies, and hazards. KBP tied up with various government agencies such as the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), and the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) and came

up with a manual regarding effective broadcast communication warnings and advisories during disasters and calamities.

Meanwhile, the Broadcast Code contains professional and ethical standards intended for broadcasting and guides the broadcasters in performing their duties and responsibilities. It is expected that members of the KBP must follow its standard authority stipulated in the code. It discusses three major parts – program standards, implementing rules and regulations, and penalties.

The Philippines has been one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists since 1986 (Witchel, 2018). Thus, the Philippine Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists (PPASJ) was crafted as part of Safeguarding Press Freedom in the Philippines project (2018-2020). The project's goal is to uphold press freedom and establish safety mechanisms for journalists and media workers locally anchored and sustainable. The PPASJ is a national plan aligned with the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. It seeks to protect press freedom in the country where there are threats and attacks against journalists despite the initiatives of the different sectors of the country and the government to resolve the situation (PPASJ, 2019). As posted on the website of the office of the CHR, they noticed a decline in terms of media freedom in the entire country. Some factors such as persisting attacks on journalists online or offline, increasing detention of journalists, and use of defamation laws and Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation Laws (SLAPPS). OCHR, however, is promoting and safeguarding the rights of journalists. They implement the mandates of the General Assembly and Human Rights Council on the safety of journalists as well as the UN Plan of Action on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity; co-chair with UNESCO the United Nations Network of Focal Points on the safety of journalists and the issue on impunity; monitor and report violations against journalists; raise awareness on individual cases and media clampdowns; engage with member states, international and regional organizations and civil society organizations on media freedom and safety of journalists; organize and participate in conferences, roundtables and events related to media freedom and safety of journalists, including the World Press Freedom Day and the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists; train journalists, journalists' associations, civil society organizations, government officials, law practitioners, and security forces on international standards applicable to media freedom and the safety of journalists; provide technical advice, including through OHCHR country and regional presences, on setting

up and operating specific protection mechanisms for journalists; engage with relevant Human Rights Council special procedure mandates and human rights treaty bodies on media freedom and the safety of journalists, and; report under SDG indicator 16.10.1 as custodian agency.

METHODOLOGY

Data Gathering

The study involved ten local journalists from the Bicol Region as participants. These local journalists are broadcast and print media. A communication letter was sent to them individually to request their permission to participate in this study. They were interviewed separately to observe confidentiality.

Types of threat, attack, and harassment experienced by selected local journalists

The type of threat, attack, or harassment that the participants experienced were written, verbal, name-calling, censorship, bribery, unannounced visit, physical violence, libel and cyber libel.

Description of threat, attack, and harassment

The participants described that they were direct and indirectly threatened, attacked or harassed.

Coping Mechanisms

Coping, according to Folkman et al. (2004), is defined as the thoughts and behaviors that primarily aim to manage internal and external stressful events. It is a term used typically for acts, either subconscious or unconscious, to reduce or manage stress (Venner, 1988). Folkman et al. (2004) categorized coping into four. The researcher of this study decided to classify the results based on the narratives of the participants. The problem-focused, emotion-focused, meaning-focused, and social-coping (seeking support).

Actions taken by KBP

Based on the narratives of the participants, some cases were not reported to the KBP because the circumstances are still manageable or not their concern. However, some participants mentioned that the organization is not capable of helping or handling such concerns.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profiling and Backgrounding

Based on the data gathered, the participants are connected with broadcast and print media. It can be noted that the participants' positions/designation are broadcast journalists, news anchors, news writers, and disc jockeys (DJ). Gloi and Ike are station managers but still anchor their respective programs. In terms of years in service, only Gloi has the shortest time in the media, as of writing, with seven years while others have been working as journalists for decades. The participants' length of service revealed that they have been covering various journalist's beats, most particularly the police.

Types of threat, attack, and harassment experienced by selected local journalists

The following discussions identified the type of threat, attack, or harassment that the participants experienced.

Deadly Note Delivered

In an article posted on the website of NUJP, threats are a common experience of journalists covering critical stories. Some of them received threats through anonymous text messages while others over televised Senate hearings into the government's red-tagging of activist groups (De Santos, 2020). Clyde and Hola shared that they both experienced being threatened through text messages, profanities included, which made mention of their family members. Aia was also shocked when he received a message from an unknown sender after discussing an issue with illegal parking in his program.

*“Huwag kang bababa, pag bumaba ka, papatayin kita, babarilin
kita!”*

This is similar to the case of Fernan Angeles, an InterAksyon correspondent who survived a slaying attempt in March 2012. Angeles started receiving threatening messages like, “*You have nowhere to run. You’re at a dead end*” in 2013. Gloi and Eren, on the other hand, said that they both received a threat-like message from the New People’s Army (NPA) through email and Facebook page respectively. This followed after their discussion on the encounter involving the said group. The threat caused fear to Gloi and Eren. Drake (2022) defined fear as a natural emotion in humans and animals that can help detect and respond to real or perceived danger.

Stern Warning Voiced Out

Verbal threat is one of the most common responses from the participants of this study. This is congruent with the results of the study conducted in 2014 by the International Women’s Foundation and International Safety Institute, where 204 out of 977 respondents said that they were verbally, non-verbally, and physically intimidated. Bria, a veteran radio personality, shared that there was an instance when a certain policeman, whom he mentioned in his program, called the radio station he previously worked for and humiliated him on air. He also disclosed stories of public intimidation involving politicians and their supporters whenever he was out in the field to gather news.

“Ikaw grabe yung banat mo kanina sa boss namin ah, umayos ka!”

Eren’s story is nothing different from Bria’s as he received unpleasant feedback from his interviewee coming from a political party. He stressed that the said interviewee sternly warned him in choosing who to interview. Flynn also felt threatened when a member of a prominent political family in his province called him up and said that mentioning their family name in a controversial issue was not necessary. He then explained that he just quoted it from another source. Aia, on the other hand, was verbally attacked on air by a fellow broadcaster who happens to be a supporter of a certain politician.

Shameful Names Given

Gordon (2022) defined name-calling as a form of relational bullying that is abusive, derogatory, and an insult. It associates an individual, group, or idea with a negative symbol (Delwiche, 2018) to provoke and create fear (Feline, 2021). Dia and Gloi revealed that one of

the insults they experienced as journalists were being called names such as “*bayaran*” and “*fake news peddler*”. Flynn, on the other hand, was called “*Tuta ni Marcos*” since during that time he was working as a Station Manager in a politically-owned radio station.

“Merong nagsasabi na fake news, bayaran, ganon.”

Similarly, Inday Espina-Varona, a Filipina journalist, said that she and other journalists had been repeatedly called “*presstitutes*”, “*bayaran*”, “*dilawan*”, “*komunista*”, and many more (Villavecer, 2020).

Blatant Censorship Request

Censorship, as defined by Muzikova et al. (2013), is drawing boundaries on what to write or not by outside powers such as governments and companies. Aia shared that as a broadcast journalist, he already received several phone calls, messages via Facebook page, and other forms of censorship requests from a politician or a prominent individual to not air or publish controversial issues involving them. He added that in the case of politicians, this kind of request is frequent during election season.

“Pwedeng ano, pwedeng huwag mo ng ibalita?”

Moreover, Bria pointed out in his conversation with the researcher that he considers censorship as a form of threat against him as a journalist. He then explained that it starts within the person or the so-called self-censorship. According to the findings of a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center and the Columbia Journalism Review, self-censoring is common in the news media today. It also stated that about 25% of the local and national journalists revealed that they have avoided newsworthy stories intentionally and nearly as many acknowledged that they have softened the tone of stories for the benefit of their news organizations’ interest (Self-censorship: How open and why, 2000).

*“Ay wag ko na lang yan komentaryuhan si governor kasi ano yan eh...
ano yan yung mga pinsan ko naka-employ sa kanya”*

He further said that peer, company, and government censorship happen in the media industry.

“Wag mo na yan kasi sponsor natin yan”. So, tapos yung iba sasabihin naman, “Wag mong banatan yan kasi maimpluwensya yan baka may mangyari sa’yo o mangyari sa station natin o sa dyaryo natin”

[...] yung sa government, diba yung ila-libel ka, kakasuhan ka ng batas.

The study by Yesil (2014) titled “The Invisible Threat for the Future of Journalism: Self-Censorship and Conflicting Interests in an Increasingly Competitive Media Environment” revealed that self-censorship is a prevalent problem among journalists and is widely practiced worldwide. The primary reasons that oblige journalists to censor news items are political and economic pressures and life threats. Self-censorship puts journalism in danger but preventing such acts seems to be difficult. Lastly, it would be useful to educate journalists on the ethical rules of journalism, laws, government regulations, and values of society.

Money Matters

Corruption may occur in various forms in the media landscape. This may be in the form of abuse of confidence or position when hiring or firing staff making editorial decisions, inducting editorial content, and influencing media coverage. Although there are limited research studies on corruption in the media, there is anecdotal evidence that manifests itself through bribery, gifts and advertisement, nepotism, and media capture (Transparency International, 2013).

Ike recalled that he was offered Php 50,000 weekly by a politician. Unfortunately, when he refused the offer, the slaying attempt happened.

I was offered like 50,000 a week so in one month ilan yan? 200,000. Sabi ko, “I don’t need money”.

Ristow (2010) said that bribery is a serious problem worldwide. Some journalists, editors, and media houses took bribes and paid material masked as news stories either for the publication of favorable stories—or for the non-publication of damaging ones.

Unannounced House and Station Visit

Aia and Bria recounted how they felt when they had unannounced visitors at their respective places. Aia felt shocked when police officers appeared at their home, so he immediately called the Chief of Police and reported the incident.

*“[...] police yung pumunta sa bahay at tinanong ko kung paano nila nakuha
yung bahay yung address.”*

Bria, on the other hand, felt anxious when members of “*mag jue-jueteng*” visited his house almost every day. This was because of the “*jueteng*” issue he used to talk about in his radio program. He narrated that although these people were not hurting him, he was still worried about the safety of his family. This eventually made him decide to relocate.

*So ang ginawa ko binenta ko yung bahay ko dito sa [confidential] tapos
pumunta kami ng Manila.*

This was also the concern of JP Soriano from GMA TV. Soriano posted on X previously known as Twitter that a police officer in plainclothes came to his house unannounced to allegedly check his security. Soriano said that the policeman showed him his identification and later introduced himself properly. The unannounced visit was confirmed by Brig. General Jonnel Estomo, then head of the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO) of the Philippine National Police (PNP) as part of their efforts to secure the safety of the journalists after the assassination of Percival “Percy” Lapid, a broadcaster and vlogger. Meanwhile, the NUJP said that the said visit only added to the anxiety of the journalists since it was done without proper coordination (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2022).

The case of welcoming unwelcomed visitors also happened to Eren, Flynn, and Joie, this time in their workplace. For Eren, the alleged abusive brother of the story sender in his

program went to their station. Fortunately, he was not around that time and his Station Manager (SM) took charge of the circumstance.

After commenting on the stealing issue that took place in a bus that got into an accident, Flynn was confronted by some of the passengers at the station. He said that they were pointing out that his comment created a negative implication that those who were not hurt were the ones who stole the money inside the bus. While the confrontation was going on, he noticed that one of them was holding a gun.

Joie, on the other hand, had two unforgettable stories of confrontation at the station involving politicians. One was between him and the son of the seated governor in their province, and the other was between him and the Provincial Administrator that almost led to physical assault. Correspondingly, in the study of Frey (2023), nine reporters from five countries were verbally and physically attacked by the police, protestors, interviewees, ordinary people, and other individuals.

Choosing Physical Violence

Physical hazards include physical attacks, disgrace, and threats to lives (Onuoha et al., 2021). Dia revealed that there was an instance when she, together with other local journalists, went to the field and experienced being stoned and shot. Additionally, Joie was assaulted by a family member of a prominent politician in 2012. He was outside a coffee shop talking to some media personnel and government officials when the incident happened. The report was published nationally.

“I was assaulted by ano kapatid ng ano isang mayor who felt slighted.

In Novi Sad, the second largest city in Serbia, seven journalists were threatened and assaulted in a span of ten days. The recorded cases were physical assault, verbal abuse, online harassment, or death threats. According to Tamara Filipovic, the project manager of the Association of Independent Journalists of Serbia (NUNS), there is an increase in the number of threats and insults that journalists are experiencing, and yet these remain unresolved (International Press Institute, 2024).

Meanwhile, Ike experienced a slay attempt when he transferred to a new province. He recalled that he was pounding names of prominent personalities in his commentary program who were involved in island mining. Fortunately, he was warned by his team about the presence of assassins outside his house.

“Sir, wag mong bubuksan ang ilaw mo, wag kang lalabas, wag kang gagalaw, may mga armadong lalaki sa labas, inaantay ang pag uwi mo.”

On March 1, 2022, Aldwin Quitasol, President of Baguio Correspondents and Broadcasters Club Inc. (BCBC), also experienced the same situation. This has triggered the Commission on Human Rights to issue a statement. Quitasol is a vocal critic of the administration’s campaign against illegal drugs. The CHR, through its spokesperson, Atty. Jacqueline Ann de Guia said that they are committed to helping reveal the truth. They also condemn any attempt on the life of any media personality and such acts should never be normalized (CHR, 2022).

Behind the Bars

Libel and cyber libel are criminal offenses in the Philippines and journalists, bloggers, and even social media users have been arrested and jailed because of this (Conde, 2021). In the case of Dia, one of the participants who owns an internet radio, she was already put into jail and was charged with libel cases. She stressed that cyber libel is being used as a threat against the media force in the province.

Similarly, on June 15, 2020, Maria Ressa and Reynaldo Santos, Rappler’s CEO and researcher respectively were convicted of cyber libel by the Manila Regional Trial Court. They were sentenced between 6 months to 1 day to 6 years imprisonment for charges filed by a businessman, Wilfredo Keng. The triggering issue was Rappler’s published investigative report in May 2012 about the alleged sports vehicle which was lent to former Chief Justice Renato Corona.

The penalties for online libel and other restrictions pose a serious threat to the freedom of expression in the Philippines. Several cases have been filed to declare such laws unconstitutional. Bryan Adams, Asia Director of Human Rights Watch, said that it violates the

right to free expression. In Article 365 of the Philippines Revised Penal Code, criminal libel applies to acts committed through a computer system or any other similar means that may be devised in the future (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Further, Ike, a well-known broadcaster in the same province as Dia, was arrested and put to jail due to a fight involving their Mayor and Chief of Police.

“The worst that I experienced is when I was placed inside the jail in [confidential] because I had a fight with the Mayor and the Chief of Police of [confidential].”

Meanwhile, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and its affiliate, the NUJP, condemn the arrest and subsequent detention of Jose Rizal Pajares, reporter of Radyo Natin in Iriga City, Camarines Sur. According to the reports, on August 2, Pajares was arrested after allegedly scanning the Iriga City Police Station’s blotter which violates Republic Act 10173 or the Data Privacy Act. He was detained for three days and was later released through bail.

Description of threat, attack, and harassment

In this objective, the researcher asked the participants to describe how they were threatened, attacked or harassed.

Direct Attack/Threat

In 2018, the International Women’s Federation and Troll Busters.com conducted a study on “Attacks and Harassment: The Impact on Female Journalists and Their Reporting”. They have categorized three areas of threats experienced by female journalists and these are direct harassment, invasion of privacy, and denial of access. Direct harassment refers to things that people do directly to one another. Examples include being called offensive names, being threatened physically, and being stalked.

Correspondingly, Dia, Flynn, and Gloi recounted that they felt insulted when they were called “fake news peddlers”, “bayaran”, and “Tuta ni Marcos”, respectively. Aia and Bria, on the other hand, felt anxious when unwelcomed visitors came to their respective homes. Bria’s visitors were the worst since they were members of a syndicate involved in gambling called “jueteng”.

“Lagi po akong pinupuntahan sa bahay [...]

Further, the participants stressed that there were verbal threats made against them involving politicians and prominent individuals. These threats include confrontation with a gun, censorship, bribery, physical assault, cyber libel, arrest, and slaying attempts.

The worst that I experienced is when I was placed in jail.

Albionetë Ademi, a Board Member of the Association of Journalists in Kosovo (AGK) noted that political actors often attack journalists, and they never suffer from any consequences even legal. She stressed that in the rarest case, politicians apologize only if there is pressure from the public.

Indirect Attack/Threat

The Finnish Union of Journalists surveyed its members in 2016 on the experiences of threats and verbal attacks. Sixteen percent (16%) revealed that they received messages containing threats for two years. Meanwhile in Estonia, a journalist and his family became the target of threats violence, and online harassment which led to his publication of said threats. The journalist’s act made other media workers publish the same threats they received via social media to help raise awareness on the issue. (FRA, 2016)

Aia, Clyde, and Hola experienced the feeling of receiving hateful and even threatening text messages in their careers as broadcast journalists. These messages came from various unknown senders who they believe are supporters of politicians or prominent individuals involved in controversial issues they discuss in their respective programs.

“huwag kang bababa, pag bumaba ka, papatayin kita, babarilin kita” totoo man yun o hindi, nag eextra ano tayo...extra careful.

Meanwhile, Eren and Gloi pointed out that they felt scared upon learning that members of the NPA sent them a warning through their email and Facebook page. This was after they broadcast the recent encounter between the NPA and militant group in the locality.

*Yung may nagpadala sa amin na threat coming from NPA ano lang kasi is
about the incident na nangyari sa Camarines Sur.*

Coping Mechanisms

Coping, according to Folkman et al. (2004), is defined as the thoughts and behaviors that primarily aim to manage internal and external stressful events. It is a term used typically for acts, either subconscious or unconscious, to reduce or manage stress (Venner, 1988). Folkman et al. (2004) categorized coping into four. The researcher of this study decided to classify the results based on the narratives of the participants.

Solve the Problem Right Away

According to Folkman et al (2004), the problem-focused coping mechanisms aim to address the problem causing the distress. It includes active coping, planning, limiting coping, and suppressing activities. Flynn and Joie stressed that filing a case against their perpetrators solved their problems.

*“I just filed a complaint before the police which later reached the court and
eventually was found guilty of the charges.*

Aia and Clyde revealed that limiting their social media engagement helped them distance themselves from stressors. To do this, they both do not post pictures of their family members on their social media accounts. Aia’s profile picture does not display his real face. Clyde, on the other hand, locked his account.

*Sa yung sa social media account ko eh ngayon medyo delikado na din kasi
andun yung mga pictures nyo, andun yung pictures ng mga anak, pamilya,
so ginawa ko nilock ko na lang yung sa facebook account ko.*

In the study of Onuoha in 2014, one of the coping mechanisms employed by the research participants was self-censorship. Self-censorship was defined as the act of avoiding issues that would lead to danger, sidestepping controversial sources, and safely making content.

Clyde also employed this type of coping mechanism. He described that his experiences of threat made him decide to temporarily shift his career to avoid putting his life at risk. He eventually came back to the industry after some time but chose to work in an FM station where his job description focuses more on the entertainment side. While Gloi, tried to avoid airing commentaries on controversial issues in his program for some time until these issues died down.

Kailangan mo pa ring mag lie low sa mga binabalita and then minsan you have to change your career magpahinga ka ng mga ilang buwan and then balik ka na naman ulit, iba na so that's from AM lumipat na ko ng FM, doon medyo natahimik yung buhay ko.

Similarly, Aia disclosed that as someone who has been in the industry for a couple of decades, he has been employing a change of routine and lifestyle. This includes the time of going out and coming back home, frequent detours, and limited socialization and interaction with people. After receiving a threat-like message from the NPA, Gloi also decided to shift from walking to commuting in reporting to work and going home.

“sa personal security ah yung sa intelligence halimbawa anong oras ka dapat lumabas, anong oras ka dapat umuwi? Yung bang dinadaan mo ba ay regular mong dinadaan o pabago bago ka ng dinadaan?”

Additionally, Aia and Hola divulged that during critical times, they opt to visit a friend and share their whereabouts so that if anything happens, there will be people who know the real story.

“Hindi muna ako umuwi ng bahay. Pumunta ako sa barkada, uminom, sinabi ko yung istorya ko para ano't ano pa man ang mangyari, may nakakaalam”

The coping styles mentioned are in congruence with the results of the study on “Journalists and mental health”. The study revealed various coping mechanisms employed by journalists after traumatic reporting. This includes disconnecting from work in several ways,

purging emotions, talking about the trauma itself, and reminding themselves of the higher purposes of their jobs.

Another coping style based on Onuoha et al. (2021) was selective appearance which means going to places that they think are safe and avoiding places with safety concerns. Bria and Clyde relocated to feel at peace. The daily appearance of the members of “*jueteng*” in Bria’s home made him decide to relocate. He was worried about the safety of his family, so he requested to be transferred instead. They went back after three years when the “*jueteng*” issue died down. Additionally, Ike, after being arrested and put to jail, also decided to relocate. Although he believed he was still doing good, he felt like the people would associate him with the governor who helped him get out of jail.

“That is a coping mechanism. If you cannot handle the heat of the kitchen, get out of the kitchen. [...] So, you better ano, transfer.”

The study of Iesue et al. (2021) shared that one of the adaptive strategies employed by the journalists in Mexico and Brazil was to leave their work for a better job environment or change of journalist’s beat.

Apologizing is Good

The **emotion-focused** coping mechanisms like positive reframing, acceptance, turning to religion, and humor are being employed to reduce the negative emotions related to the problem (Folkman et al., 2004). Bria, Eren, and Flynn know when to apologize. They admitted that sometimes threat happens when something was wrongly said or broadcasted. Therefore, they try to correct themselves by showing humility and asking for forgiveness.

“Ako naman kung mali, mali eh. Nag-apologize ako, okay naman.”

Interpreting the Meaning of Circumstances

The study of Folkman et al. (2004) stated that a meaning-focused coping style utilizes an individual’s cognitive strategies to understand and manage the meaning of the situation they are in. This was what Flynn and Hola did. Both of them revealed that it is important to evaluate

the message and its source since this would tell them whether to act or not. Hola emphasized that sometimes the sources of threat are supporters of politicians who are just trying to throw a bluff.

“Syempre siguraduhin mo na muna na yung mga nagmi-message sayo ay legit ba siya o baka niloloko ka lang o baka gusto ka lang patigilin.”

Dia, on the other hand, chooses to respond when she thinks it is just a form of bashing. However, after evaluating the message, she just ignores it. The results of the study in Nigeria (Ounuha, 2014) stated that self-motivation is a coping mechanism. This means having the desire for recognition as a human rights journalist, owning the desire to perform social responsibility, and having personal fulfillment.

Aia, who is a veteran in the broadcast media, ensures he understands the situation and finds a way to cope after being threatened or attacked. He shared that he attends trainings such as covering hostile environments and debriefing talks sponsored by private entities or schools to acquire new knowledge on these topics and eventually apply it in his work. He added that in his previous network, he was able to attend various trainings spearheaded by the Center for Investigative Journalism (CIJ).

“[...] nagsasariling pamamaraan lang para...kasi wala ditong training yung media kung paano yung debriefing. Halimbawa kagagaling mo lang pagcover ng encounter, ano ba yung ano, uuwi ka ba agad? kasi makikita mo magbabago ang ugali ng mamamahayag temperamental, hindi umiimik at ahh maraming impluwensya, mag si-sink in sa kanya kung ano yung environment nila, yun ang wala. Kailangan siguro, personally, ako na lang nag aadjust ng ano ng mga kasi yung unang company namin meron dun pinapadala sa Center for Investigative Journalism.”

Ike, who is a Station Manager, stressed that he understands that it is not easy to quit a job; therefore, it is important to establish one's financial aspect. He underscored that if one is financially stable, it will not be difficult to leave work and decide to put up a radio station or a business.

“You have to be kwan financially stable. Kasi, you know people specially the politicians, talagang masisilaw ka talaga sa offer. Now if you don’t have the money but you want to run an office and then you have to help your people uhmmm and then you ask for money from other people, you know, sort of resources, hindi maganda kasi ano parang hindi ka magiging strong tulad nun magkakaroon ka ng utang na loob.

Support System is Instrumental

The social coping (support-seeking) mechanism wherein a person reduces stress by looking for emotional and instrumental support from his/her community (Folkman et al., 2004). Consequently, this was one of the coping styles employed by Eren, Aia, Bria, and Joie.

Given Eren’s less experience and knowledge in the industry, he revealed that whenever he feels threatened or attacked, he consults his manager and seniors and asks for guidance. Aia also guided his family members by orienting and training them in terms of disclosing information on his whereabouts. He reminded them not to tell anybody where he was or what time is he coming home so all of them would be safe from danger. Moreover, Aia and Bria admitted that they would look for a go-between. The role of the go-between friend/colleague is to relay their message and somehow mitigate the threat towards them.

Nag -aano ako, Ma’am, kumukuha ako Ma’am ng go between. Halimbawa may ano...may ano kilala akong tao na kaibigan nung tao na nasaktan ko kumbaga diba yung naoffend ko. Sinasabihan ko, ini-explainan ko “pakisabi na lang kay ano ganito yun...” Wala naman personalan.

Meanwhile, Joie strongly believes that to cope after an attack or threat, one needs a strong team. He also added he does not rely on “*lakas at tibay ng loob*”. He highlighted the importance of a support system for you to move on.

“[...] you have to have a strong team. Like inside your organization, you have to trust your men. That they are there to support you and you are there

to support them. Because you are disunited, you cannot use that as a coping mechanism. You have to be a strong team. One for all, all for one.

The social coping style which includes consulting matters with seniors, friends, and family members, was also one of the coping mechanisms that emerged in the study conducted in Nigeria (Onuoha et al., 2021).

Actions taken by KBP

The KBP Broadcast Code contains professional and ethical standards intended for broadcasting and guides the broadcasters in performing their duties and responsibilities. It is expected that members of the KBP must follow its standard authority stipulated in the code. It discusses three major parts – program standards, implementing rules and regulations, and penalties.

Circumstances are still Manageable

When the participants were asked this question, they provided varied answers. In the case of Clyde, Eren, and Gloi, they chose not to report the threat, attack, or harassment that they experienced because they could still handle their respective situation. However, they believe that the KBP is doing its work to protect them as journalists.

[...] In a way, pag nagbigay ka sa kanila ng reklamo, iimbestigahan nila yun and then after that kapag napatunayan nila na legit naman yung reklamo mong ibinibigay so pinapasa nila yun sa isang government agency para asikasuhin kung ano yung reklamo at bigyan ng solusyon.

Bria also did not report cases of threats and attacks against him because he knows how to handle things. Also, he seems happy with the KBP chapter in their place since most of the time, the association invites him as a lecturer in various media seminars and trainings.

Ako ang kinukuha nilang maglecture sa Media Ethics, Media Laws, Networking with Media mga ganun Ma'am, so bale ako rin yung nag-aadvise sa marami na ganyan.

Meanwhile, Flynn, as a former Chairman of one of the chapters in Bicol, believes that KBP has this mechanism for addressing concerns. He added that he encourages the organization to continuously implement its scheme in handling complaints.

Sabi ko, if there are complains, sige. Meron naman tayong mekanismo diyan para mapakinggan 'yong mga reklamo ng mga tagapakinig. And then there are corresponding sanctions or punishments.

Incapable of Helping

In the case of Aia, Hola, and Ike, they revealed in their narratives that KBP cannot do anything about their concerns, therefore, they did not bother to report cases of threat, attack, and harassment. OCHR, however, is working to promote and protect the rights of journalists.

Sa akin lang, wala namang magagawa yan.

Similarly, Dia, who was the only one who reported her case to the KBP, stressed that the association usually does not act with regard to the concerns of the journalists in their province. According to her:

“Actually, wala namang naitulong ang KBP e. Wala siyang naitulong dito sa mga nangyayaring pang attack sa mga journalists dito sa [confidential] e, wala. Ang NUJP pa ang nasandalan naming. Naglabas ng statement, tumulong sa amin, pero ang KBP, wala”.

Concerns not Theirs to Address

Joie, who was physically assaulted mentioned that his case was not a concern of KBP since the triggering factor of the attack was an article published in their newspaper. He said,

“Actually, it’s a not concern of the KBP kasi sa dyaryo yun. I wrote that in a local newspaper. Although I also discussed that on-air pero ang pinaka-root nun was the published news article”.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study on the Coping Mechanisms of Press Under Threat and Attack: The Case of Select Bicol Journalists discussed the following: First, as to the profile of the participants, they are connected with broadcast and print. Their length of service ranges from 7-35 years. They held various positions such as news writer, DJ, broadcast journalist, Production Director, and Station Manager. They were also assigned to different beats like police, government, and local government units (LGUs). Second, the types of attacks, threats, and harassment experienced by the participants include written threats, verbal threats, name-calling, censorship, bribery, unannounced house and station visits, physical assault and slaying attempts, and arrest. Third, as to the description of the attack, threat, and harassment, the narratives illustrated two types, the first one is direct threat/attack which means the act was done directly to the journalist. It could be either a phone call or face-to-face. The other one is indirect, which means the perpetrators used a channel to threaten or attack the journalist. Fourth, the researcher concluded that the participants employed varied coping mechanisms which later were categorized into four based on Folkman et al. (2004). These are problem-focused, emotion-focused, meaning-focused, and social coping (seeking support); and fifth, in terms of the actions taken by the KBP, the participants said that they did not report manageable incidents of attacks and threats. They also said that the KBP has no power to solve such issues.

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