

Assess the Ethical Challenges faced by Journalists of Nawabshah City in maintaining their Professional Integrity while Reporting on Sensitive Issues

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ABSTRACT

Journalists around the world including Pakistan, face threats while performing their duties. The role of journalists in any society is crucial, as they are responsible for informing the public about recent events. Media professionals, governmental regulatory bodies, and news organizations from many countries have developed specific ethical guidelines for journalists while covering the news reports to ensure responsible news coverage of this issue. Journalists frequently encounter ethical challenges, especially when balancing truthful reporting with minimizing harm. They must navigate ethics of reporting like Accuracy, objectivity, and maintaining balance, in news reports, particularly while covering sensitive issues. The study examined the ethical challenges to journalists. This research aims to understand how journalists encounter these challenges while maintaining professional integrity. This study used a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to understand the research problem comprehensively. In this study, the researcher used a purposive sampling of journalists in Nawabshah City. Data were collected through a survey questionnaire from journalists, reporters, editors, and media professionals. The research explored the realities that journalists are facing issues of limited salary packages, which are insufficient for their personal needs, and facing threats from politicians and feudalism.

Key Words: Ethical challenges, journalists of Nawabshah City, professional integrity, sensitive issues

INTRODUCTION

Media is the most powerful instrument of communication and can change or motivate people's opinions. According to Stanley J. Baran (2004), media is so pervasive daily that we frequently fail to recognize its influence. Mass media are the technological tools used to transmit the message of mass communication. Mass communication is a process of sharing information or messages with many audiences.

Media plays a significant role in nation-building, making people aware of different issues, educating people, and informing people about recent events. Media is known as the fourth pillar of the state. Media is responsible for collecting information, covering the issues, balancing news, accuracy, fairness, impartiality, and truthfulness, and keeping in mind the privacy of individual and journalistic principles to maintain the honor of news. (Safdar et al., 2018).

The role of journalists in any society is crucial, as they are responsible for informing the public about recent events and maintaining their professional integrity. Journalists face many challenges when reporting on sensitive issues. They are responsible for the reliability of news. Most of the time sources don't give accurate news. During high risk, while they cover news; we have to appreciate their work. Journalism is now recognized as one of the deadliest professions (Carlson & Poyhatri 2017; Jamil & Appia- adjei 2020a). Ethical challenges are faced by journalists when reporting on sensitive issues. They face many challenges which include, political pressure, personal bias, and independence, they are often threatened by kidnapping and murder. (Adnan et al., 2019)

The ethical challenges faced by Pakistani journalists include coverage of different topics that are considered taboos yet to be addressed accuracy, truthfulness, impartiality, fairness and respect for the individual's privacy (Raza Akbar 2013, Waqar 2002) argued that for the competition of rating Pakistani Media has sensitive, controversial and negative information. (Adnan et al., 2019)

Reporting is conducting research, compiling data, and obtaining facts as reporting. Every news organization employs reporters whose responsibility it is to go out into the field and collect information. A reporter is sent to a location when an incident happens to collect information about the incident. When he gets back to the office, she gathers the data and puts it into a news article or report. Sensitive reporting reports sensitive topics, including conflict, war, investigative, etc. (Adnan et al., 2019).

Professional integrity in journalism refers to a commitment to ethical standards and accountability, ensuring the accuracy, fairness, and honesty of reporting. Journalists adhering to professional integrity are expected to provide unbiased information, based on verified facts, and free from conflicts of interest. They are also transparent about their sources and ready to correct any errors. (Spj, 2014).

Pakistani journalists encounter several ethical issues, such as covering taboo subjects that need to be addressed and maintaining accuracy, truthfulness, impartiality, fairness, and respect for people's privacy (Raza & Akbar, 2013). According to Waqar (2002), Pakistani media frequently presents sensational, contentious, and unfavorable information to compete with other outlets for viewers' attention. In an attempt to get the highest ratings when covering a certain topic, the media is regularly involved in unethical and illegal behavior. According to observations made regarding journalism practices in developing nations, profit orientation continues to be the primary driving force behind participatory journalism practices (Vujnovic et al., 2010).

The majority of research conducted across various nations identifies threats to media professionals and journalism as a profession. In his PhD thesis, Bajomi-Lazar (2003) states that journalists in Hungary operate in a fearful atmosphere due to both known and unknown sources. In a similar vein, Salleh (2005) discovered

in her thesis that Australian journalists face dangers. In the same vein, Arioba (2012) concludes his thesis that media organization owners, politicians, and other stakeholders in Tanzania are pressuring and threatening journalists. In his Ph.D. dissertation, Gecer (2014) asserts that the press and journalists are subject to authoritarian pressure and are unable to effectively contribute to public discourses, thus reinforcing this hold. According to McCargo's (1999) research, journalists and the media in South Asia are subject to competing interests in terms of presentation and content. (Fazli Hussain et al., 2022).

Significance Of Study

This study proposed ethical challenges faced by journalists are crucial for promoting responsible journalism, preserving press freedom, and upholding professional integrity. Besides, this study aims to gather the opinions of Nawabshah journalists about the ethical challenges they face while covering sensitive topics. In This research, we will highlight the issues of Nawabshah journalists which may be fruitful for society. This research will also contribute to the academic literature on media ethics and serve as a valuable resource for media organizations, policymakers, and journalism educators in Nawabshah and beyond.

This study will have both practical and theoretical significance. Practically, this study is the first to examine Nawabshah journalists. This will help to understand the ethical challenges of journalists that they face while reporting on sensitive issues. Besides, this will also help media experts and policymakers to make policies accordingly. This study will help people who wish to know about the ethical challenges of journalists.

Theoretically, this is the first study on ethical challenges to the journalist of Nawabshah and how they maintain their professional integrity. This study will explore the challenges to journalists that they face when covering sensitive issues. Besides, this will provide how journalist of Nawabshah maintains their professional integrity and guide journalists on how to treat with sensitive issues.

Problem Statement

The role of journalists in shaping public opinion is crucial, but their profession is not without ethical challenges. Reporting on sensitive issues such as terrorism, political pressure, safety concerns, cultural sensitivities, corruption, and human rights violations requires careful consideration of ethical principles. With the rise of digital media, journalists face new challenges such as the spread of misinformation and pressure to prioritize speed over accuracy. Journalists have to navigate these challenges with responsibility and integrity.

In Pakistan, journalists face ethical challenges such as unbiased reporting, balance, and accuracy in the news due to political pressure, safety concerns, loss of jobs, etc. To maintain the trustworthiness and credibility of journalism in Nawabshah, addressing these ethical challenges is crucial. A comprehensive study should focus on providing ethical training, creating a safe environment, and promoting independent journalism to maintain professional integrity. In Pakistan, many researchers conducted research on the ethical challenges of Pakistani journalists but no one has yet conducted a study on Nawabshah journalists their role is important in society so this study aims to highlight the issues that Nawabshah journalists face.

Theoretical Framework

Social Responsibility Theory

A normative theory that takes over the media industry and public responsibility. This theory emphasizes the need for an independent press that observes other social institutions and provides accurate news. This theory defines the duties of media industries and individuals. Moreover, this theory advocates that journalists and media organizations are responsible for providing information, discussion, and debates on public affairs. This theory helps us understand how media professionals face organizations' outside pressures and regulations and provide accurate, balanced, and objective reports.

According to Middleton (2009), Social Responsibility theory generally holds that the media serves as a social institution by providing the audience with the appropriate information. Society expects the news media to inform and educate the masses about issues affecting their well-being. According to Ravi (2012), the media platforms in this situation serve as "a watchdog," empowering the audience's social awareness and evaluation processes. According to Hedblom et al. (2019), Hutchins's philosophy was the foundation for Social Responsibility theory. He was under the impression that newspapers serve as a resource for social awareness and seeking solutions. The central idea is that the media should work in the public interest and be free from government and political control. Reporting suicides is a more pressing issue today in this regard. Several media monitoring programs and policies address the news media's reporting of self-destructive behaviors. Media practices are kept within the prescribed guidelines by these policies (Machlin et al., 2004). The number of suicide attempts will decrease as a result of cautious media coverage. Despite the newsworthiness and public awareness of some suicides, it is strongly recommended to still adhere to ethical guidelines and ensure accuracy (WHO, 2008).

Objectives of Study

1. To identify ethical challenges (Accuracy, Balance & Objectivity) faced by Nawabshah journalists, while reporting on sensitive issues
2. To study the impact of these challenges on journalistic professional integrity and freedom of the press.
3. To determine the impact of societal pressures, which include cultural and religious factors, on the decision-making processes of journalists.

Research Questions

1. What type of challenges do Journalists of Nawabshah face during coverage of sensitive issues?
2. What are the reasons for violating the ethics (accuracy, balance & objectivity) of reporting by journalists of Nawabshah?

3. Are Political, Feudal, and Religious influence journalists for biased decision-making in reporting?

Hypothesis

H1: Journalists face ethical challenges (accuracy, balance & objectivity) due to Political, Social, and Religious pressure during coverage of sensitive issues.

H2: Due to limited salary packages journalists are violating the ethics (Accuracy, Balance & Objectivity) of news and reporting.

H3: Political, Feudal, and Religious factors in our society affect the decision-making of journalists.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This part will examine the literature on the ethical challenges to journalists and maintaining professional integrity during coverage of sensitive issues in Pakistan. All NGOs of the world carry out a great deal of work to provide data and information on the subject. But, there is too much academic literature accessible on this subject. Reports containing information and data on violations of journalists' rights and threats to their safety are frequently released by organizations dedicated to defending journalists' rights around the world, including Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and others. Data and information on various forms of violence against journalists worldwide, supplied by such organizations, will be covered in this chapter. (Masood, Aisha, 2017)

Pakistan is at the top of the list of journalists who were killed during reporting on risky assignments since 1992 with a huge number of 23. According to the reports of the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) published in 2012, International Media has ranked Pakistan as the most dangerous place for journalists in the world. (Ricciardi, 2012). Pakistani journalists deal with the rights of people to know, and clashing with their right to safety (Rehamt, 2014). Local journalists of Pakistan also face different threats regularly but also look upon mistrust with the community and government (Aslam, 2011).

Journalists have to follow the rules of truth and objectivity when reporting ethically; these rules are especially crucial for peace journalism. In contrast to intensifying violence, peace journalism, as defined by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005), prioritizes accurate and impartial reporting that aids in conflict resolution (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2006). Peace journalism strives to explore viable solutions and produce positive results by identifying factors that are both in favor of and against peace (Galtung, 2015).

According to Siddiqua, Ayesha (2020) and et. al (In Pakistan, field journalists covering violent conflicts have frequently compromised their physical, emotional, and financial security in the course of doing their journalistic duties. This has been particularly evident in the aftermath of the conflicts in Baluchistan, Karachi, and the former FATA region. The current study's primary goal is to investigate the responses of Pakistani field journalists to the difficulties they encounter in their livelihood and personal safety. The author has used a purposeful sample of fifteen field journalists from Pakistan's major newspapers and

television networks chosen for the qualitative in-depth interviews. The majority of respondents agreed that imposing self-censorship measures is how attempts to limit freedom of expression are handled. The finding of this study is expressed when the author asked the question about professional challenges and restrictions regarding freedom of expression, mostly respondents stated that the exchange of information was further impeded by the application of Sharia laws that were strictly defined. Journalists typically engage in intense self-censorship as a result of the government and Taliban's intermittent peace talks, as any unbiased reporting was seen as potentially dangerous for the peace process. Further, respondents said that media organizations frequently told journalists not to question the official narrative and to exercise self-censorship, particularly when covering stories about extreme religious and sectarian beliefs. A senior field journalist from the former FATA said. "Stories related to religious extremism are extremely sensitive and as Pakistani journalists, we practice extreme caution while reporting such stories because our own lives are at great risk". A Baluchistani journalist claimed that in sensitive operations in a region, you are escorted by government and military organization public relations officers or media managers an additional example of indirect censorship. (Siddiqua, Ayesha and et.al 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Method

This study adopted a mixed-method approach based on text and numerical data. The data is collected through close-ended and open-ended questions to understand the ethical challenges to the journalists of Nawabshah City in maintaining their professional integrity while reporting on sensitive issues. This study investigated ethical challenges to the journalists of Nawabshah city while covering sensitive issues (Political, Religious, Economic, Social, and other).

Sampling Method

A purposive sampling technique was used in this study. The sample of this study consisted of 50 Journalists from Nawabshah city.

Sample size

The sample size of this study was 50 Journalists of Nawabshah city.

Data Collection Technique

This research uses the primary data type in the present study. The data was collected directly from journalists, reporters, editors, and media professionals. The questionnaire was distributed among 50 journalists of Nawabshah City. Questionnaires consisted of both open-ended and close-ended questions. A variety of questions were asked from journalists, reporters, editors, and media professionals. The study employed primary data to accurately understand the ethical challenges journalists face and the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges and uphold their professional integrity.

DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The quantitative data from the questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS and the qualitative data from the surveys was analyzed using content analysis.

Variable Model

Professional Integrity (IV): This variable will assess the professional integrity of journalists. When they cover sensitive issues.

Accuracy

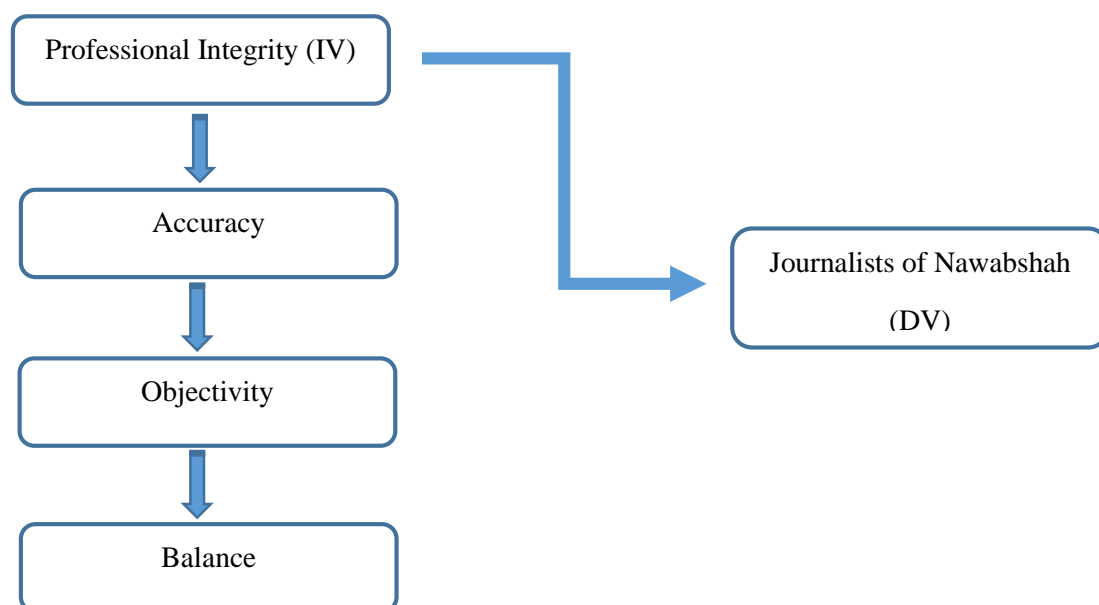
Accurate reporting ensures that all information presented in a story is factually correct and verified.

Objectivity

Objectivity is the practice of maintaining neutrality and objectivity while reporting. Journalists strive to report facts without letting personal beliefs or emotions influence the story.

Balance

Balance in journalism means presenting all sides of an issue fairly, without favoritism or bias. It ensures that no single perspective dominates the narrative.



RESULTS & FINDINGS

The study examined sixteen survey research questions. The survey questionnaire was distributed among 50 journalists in Nawabshah. Thirty-seven were successfully returned, producing a seventy-four percent (74%) response rate. This suggests that the local journalism community is quite involved, offering insightful

information about their opinions and experiences. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. One was the se Demographical question in which seven questions were asked of the respondents, in which the first question was about optional names, and the other section was the descriptive question in which nine questions were asked seven were close-ended and two questions were open-ended. The collected responses to close-ended questions were entered into the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software for analysis and interpretation. Here are the results.

RQ1: What type of sensitive issues do you mostly cover?

The results of this question show sensitive issues that journalists or media professionals of Nawabshah City mostly cover. The findings of (RQ1) are discussed in detail in the following text.

Table 1

What type of sensitive issues do you mostly cover?

Types of Sensitive Issues	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Political	7	18.9	18.9	18.9
Religious	5	13.5	13.5	32.4
Economic	3	8.1	8.1	40.5
Social	10	27.0	27.0	67.6
Other	12	32.4	32.4	100.0
Total	37	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 shows the detail about sensitive issues which mostly cover the respondents. Participants were asked about what type of sensitive issues they mostly cover. Out of 37 respondents, 12 respondents, or 32.4% percentage of the total said they cover other sensitive issues that were not listed, and 10 respondents, or 27.0% indicated they mostly cover social issues. 7 respondents, or 18.9% said political issues, 5 respondents, or 13.5% participants said they cover religious issues and 3 respondents, or 8.1% said they cover economic issues.

Table 2

RQ2: What type of ethical challenges do you face during coverage of sensitive issues?

The second question asked the participants about the ethical challenges that they face while covering sensitive issues. Following are the ethical challenges that journalists come across.

What type of ethical challenges do you face during coverage of sensitive issues?

Ethical challenges	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Political	12	32.4	32.4	32.4
Pressure Group (Feudal)	21	56.8	56.8	89.2
Public	4	10.8	10.8	100.0
Total	37	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 displays the details of the ethical challenges that journalists face while cover sensitive issues. Participants were asked (RQ3) What type of ethical challenges do you face during coverage of sensitive issues? Out of 37 respondents, 21 respondents, or 56.8% percentage of the total said, they face pressure from feudal, 12 respondents, or 32.4% indicated they face political pressure from politicians, and 4 respondents, or 10.8% participants said they face ethical challenges from the public.

Table 3

RQ3: What are the reasons for violating the ethics (accuracy, balance & objectivity) of reporting?

The third question was asked from the respondents about the reasons for violation of reporting ethics. Following are the reason stated the respondents.

What are the reasons for violating the ethics (accuracy, balance & objectivity) of reporting?

Reasons	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Political Pressure	14	37.8	37.8	37.8
Societal Pressure	5	13.5	13.5	51.4
Religious Pressure	7	18.9	18.9	70.3
Financial Constraints (Limited Salary Packages)	11	29.7	29.7	100.0
Total	37	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 displays the details of the reasons that force journalists to violate the ethics of reporting. Participants were asked (RQ3) What are the reasons for violating the ethics (accuracy, balance & objectivity) of reporting? Out of 37 respondents, 14 respondents, or 37.8% percentage of the total said, due to political pressure they violated the ethics of reporting, 11 respondents, or 29.7% indicated due to limited salary packages, 7 respondents, or 18.9% participants said due to religious pressure, and 5 respondents or 13.5% agreed that due to societal pressure, they violate the ethics of reporting.

Table 4

RQ4: Do you think the above challenges affect the journalist's professional integrity and freedom?

The fourth question was asked from the respondents about the challenges affect the journalists professional integrity and freedom. Following are the results of this questions

**Do you think the above challenges affect the journalist's
professional integrity and freedom?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	29	78.4	78.4	78.4

No	8	21.6	21.6	100.0
Total	37	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 shows the details of the challenges either its affect the professional integrity of freedom of journalists or not. Participants were asked (RQ4) Do you think the above challenges affect the journalist's professional integrity and freedom? Majority of the respondents, or 29 respondents, (78.4%) said, yes these challenges affects the professional integrity and freedom of journalists, and 8 respondents, or 21.6% indicated that these challenges have no affect on the professional integrity and freedom of journalists.

Table 5

RQ5: Do you think these kinds affect the decision-making process of journalists and Media houses?

The fifth question was asked from the respondents that these kinds of challenges affect the process of decision making of journalist and media houses. Following are the findings of this question.

**Do you think these kinds affect the decision-making process of journalists
and Media houses?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	22	59.5	59.5	59.5
No	14	37.8	37.8	97.3
To Some Extent	1	2.7	2.7	100.0
Total	37	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 displays the findings of the (RQ5) Do you think these kinds affect the decision-making process of journalists and Media houses? Majority of the respondents, or 22 respondents, (59.5%) said, these kinds don't affect the decision of journalists and media houses, and 14 respondents, or 37.8% indicated that these kinds affect the decision of journalists and media houses, and 1 respondents, indicated to some The following questions were open ended and answers were given by respondents.

RQ6: How do you think what kind of strategies are required to face these challenges?

When the researcher asked the participants about what kind of strategies are required to face these challenges. Out of 37 respondents, 10 respondents indicated, that government and media organizations should make a plan for the journalist's safety training, 6 respondents said that journalists are not independent. Media organizations also interfere in the reports, change the reports, and don't give freedom to the journalists, journalists are biased because they have to follow the organization's orders. If any journalist covered the report against any politician or feudal they were threatened by different ways loss of job. One of the participants expressed that they face most of the challenges such as different pressures from politicians and feudal to change the report either we will kill your family. 3 participants indicated that after the death of a journalist Media organizations or the government should make a plan for quality education, health, accommodation, and expenditure of the journalist children's.

RQ7: Your recommendation to the Government, Media organizations and Journalists?

This question asked participants to give their recommendations to the government, Media organizations, and Journalists. Out of 37 respondents, 12 respondents said that many of the journalists work without salaries, and organizations don't pay journalists if they pay some journalists who are experienced little salary packages. Organizations should have to work for society not for money. 4 respondents indicated that media organizations should have to protect the journalists. Government or media organizations should give all the facilities to journalists, which includes Accommodation, education for children, and medical facilities for their families. 3 respondents said that journalists' responsibility is to cover the reports, and media organizations and the government are responsible for the protection of journalists. Government should make strategies for journalist's protection. One journalist said that media organizations or governments should hire lawyers for journalists because most journalists face cases and lawyers will protect them. One journalist said that journalists should report the news as news mostly journalists don't tell accurate news, and they take money from the people and change the report.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight ethical challenges to journalists while reporting on sensitive issues. This study aims to identify ethical challenges to journalists and the impact of these challenges on the professional integrity of journalists. It also provides recommendations and guidelines to journalists who encounter these challenges. The respondents were asked four questions. The first research question (RQ1) examined ethical challenges to journalists when they cover sensitive issues. The second research question (RQ2) examined the reason for violating the ethics of reporting. The third research question (RQ3) examined biases in reporting due to different pressures.

The findings of (RQ1) show that the majority of the respondents surveyed 56.8% percentage of the total said, they face pressure from feudal, 32.4% of participants indicated they face political pressure from politicians, and 10.8% participants said they face ethical challenges from the public. The finding of (RQ2) shows that 37.8% percentage of the total said, due to political pressure they violated the ethics of reporting, 29.7% indicated due to limited salary packages, or 18.9% of participants said due to religious pressure, 13.5% agreed that due to societal pressure, they violate the ethics of reporting. The findings of (RQ3) show

that the majority of the respondents (78.4%) said, yes these challenges affect the professional integrity and freedom of journalists, and 21.6% indicated that these challenges do not affect the professional integrity and freedom of journalists.

The findings of open-ended questions suggest strategies and recommendations for encountering these challenges, the majority of the participants 27.02% said that safety training for journalists, and 16.21% said journalists are not independent. The majority of the respondents 32.43% of participants recommended salaries for journalists. 10.81% of the respondents recommended protection for journalists, and 8.10% of respondents, recommended organizations should take responsibility for protection for journalists.

CONCLUSION

This research has explored the substantial ethical problems that journalists encounter, especially when covering sensitive issues. It emphasizes how these challenges compromise the objectivity and sense of professional integrity of journalists, making it more difficult for them to report critically and accurately. All these challenges were examined from different angles by three research questions; these included internal factors like societal pressures and salary constraints, as well as external pressures from politicians, feudal, and the general public. The current study has concluded that ethical challenges impact the professional integrity of journalists. Journalists compromise their professional integrity, and also the compromise on the ethics of reporting. Moreover, journalists indicated that they are not independent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Government should provide training to journalist to help them report accurately and with responsibly.
- Government must also ensure safety of journalists and protecting them from threats and violence.
- The government should make Legal policies which safeguard press freedom, enabling journalists to work without fear.
- Media organizations should provide fair and competitive salaries for journalists.
- Media organizations should offer accommodations for those on assignments, especially in conflict zones.
- Media organization should offer insurance including health, life, and travel insurance, is essential for protecting journalists from potential risks.
- Journalists should respect the ethics of reporting and report accurate, and balance reporting.
- Journalists should properly verify information in attempt to uphold their credibility and the trust of their audience.

- Journalists should prioritize self-care and seek support when necessary to handle the emotional demands of the profession
- It is recommended to journalists that they must use this profession for the wellbeing of society, not for their personal and professional needs.

LIMITATION

Even though this research added value to the existing research on the ethical challenges to journalists, the finding could not be generalized to the all journalists' community in Pakistan, because of the small responses from the city of Nawabshah and the purposive sample. Furthermore, it was observed that some respondents could not entirely convey their responses to the open-ended question, due to a lack of English writing skills. Therefore, future surveys could also be designed in Urdu or bilingual, so participants could choose to respond in their preferred language.

Suggestion for future research

- Several opportunities exist for future research on ethical challenges journalists face in maintaining their professional integrity while reporting on sensitive issues concerning Pakistan and elsewhere.
- Future research could include surveys and interviews in Urdu or bilingual (English and Urdu).
- Future studies can be included in region-based studies, focusing on one province.
- Future research can also include in-depth interviews with media professionals.

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