

Perception of Stress and Trauma Management in select Newspaper Organisations by Journalists in Lagos State



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Abstract

The practice of journalism is tasking and stressful, with some journalists experiencing trauma. Nonetheless, journalists and their organizations must cope with these challenges in the course of their duties. This study seeks to examine how journalists in *Punch* and the *Guardian* Newspapers perceive stress and trauma management among themselves and their organizations. The theory used to anchor the study is the influence theory of perception. To conduct the study, a survey design was adopted, while the population consisted of all journalists at the Lagos base of the newspapers which was 36 for the *Guardian* and 27 for *Punch*. It, therefore, meant that there was no sample and sampling technique. It was found that journalists seek leave, short breaks, sports, and fun as ways of managing stress and trauma. Also, findings revealed that *The Guardian* and *Punch* staff manage stress and Trauma through their organizations granting journalists annual and causal leaves, and approval of shift duties. Others include workshops, seminars, and the creation of relaxation spots for workers. The journalists, however, believe that there is no adequate provision for the management of stress and trauma both by individual journalists and the organizations under study. The study, therefore, recommends that the newspapers should establish psychological clinics to help journalists manage stress and trauma among other recommendations.

Keywords: *Perception, stress, trauma, newspaper organization, Journalists*

Introduction

Most if not all members of a given society yearn to be informed about the trending issue(s) in their immediate environment and beyond. In other words, every normal and educated (enlightened) citizen of a nation or society has the innate desire to know the things that are happening within human society. This indicates that every human society requires the services of a professional journalist who is burdened with the responsibility

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of informing the citizens about a current issue(s). This is because no information can move from its originating point to the media which in turn transmit it to the general public, without the journalist. A Journalist acts like a watchdog who informs the general public about the good and bad policies of the government or government agencies, and other current events in society such as crime, inventions, and outbreaks of disease. Simply put, a journalist keeps his or her heterogeneous audience informed about trending issues in his environment or society.

Given this, most media houses mount pressure on the journalist to beat a deadline. This shows that the work of a journalist requires haste. In struggling with haste, time, and space constraints, he/she is professionally under the obligation not to omit any details that might make the news story incomprehensible.

In addition to performing the tedious, critical role of updating society about trending issues, he/she is faced with professional hazards that are commonly associated with the profession (journalism). One of the professional hazards that may be associated with journalistic practice is stress and trauma. The term "stress" refers to a condition or feeling of tension arising from difficult situations. Nowadays, journalism is considered a stressful occupation, not only due to the stress in the journalists' daily work but also due to the critical, potentially traumatic events they report. Sometimes, reporting these events may put the life of the journalist at risk of assassination while omitting them makes the report incomplete. This reveals that journalists may face emotional stresses, which if not properly managed, will elicit severe consequences on his or her health. If this is not adequately managed, it will affect the journalist negatively. Some journalists experience trauma which is a negative mental state originating from the risky encounters in the course of their journalistic duties.

Granted that stress and trauma exist in the practice of journalism, media organizations, and individual journalists try to cope with it. This is because when the situation is tough, the tough gets going. Therefore, how stress and trauma are perceived to be managed is of concern to the media and journalists. Because of the foregoing, this study examines the perception of stress and trauma management in newspaper organizations by focusing on *The Guardian and Punch* based in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Every worker including a journalist is passing through one form of stress/trauma or the other in the workplace or situation. The causes of stress for a journalist may be said to be inexhaustible. Like other humans in society, they have personal needs which include psychological, social, and religious. They are usually under pressure to meet deadlines, visit disturbing sites, and satisfy the desire of their heterogeneous audience which may include getting up-to-date information about the trending issues and events in their immediate environment and the world in general. This indicates that every journalist and media house needs to be effective managers of stress and trauma to succeed. This is because if stress or trauma is not properly managed, it can result in mass desertion of the profession and it can also discourage young professionals from entering into the profession. Given the foregoing, this study posits that it is very critical to find out from media houses and journalists their view of the provisions they have for stress and trauma management to be effective in carrying out their professional responsibilities. Therefore, there is a need to find out the perception of stress management in newspaper organizations such as *The Guardian and Punch* by the journalists in the organizations. Data obtained would be useful to guide the practice of journalism and the management of newspapers and indeed the media.

Besides, studies have been done about the challenges of journalists in reporting news, management of journalism operations and tasks, stress and trauma management of staff, but little, if ever, or no studies have been done on how journalists perceive stress and trauma management in the media.

This paper aims to examine how journalists in *The Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers perceive stress and trauma management in their organizations. Its objectives are to:

- i. Identify the kinds of stress and trauma that are perceived to be commonly associated with journalistic practice in the *Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers;
- ii. ascertain the perceived causes of the stress and trauma among journalists in *The Guardian* and *Punch*
- iii. ascertain the attitude of the journalists in the newspaper toward stress and trauma management;
- iv. examine how journalists in *the Guardian* and *Punch* cope with the stress they encounter;
- v. find out how stress affects journalistic practice in *the Guardian* and *Punch*
- vi. investigate ways journalists in *The Guardian* and *Punch* perceive their media houses' management of stress and trauma

Review of related literature

Conceptual review

The definition of the term "journalists" has been fraught with several controversies. It is observed that most of the scholars who described the term habitually based their description on the activities they (the journalists) perform. The term 'journalists' encompasses those whose primary responsibilities lie in news gathering, news processing, and editing or the supervision or management of news operations. Similarly, Ndimele (1999), adds that for a practicing journalist to be effective in carrying out the responsibilities above, he must have the ability to explore stylistic contrasts in the interpretation of trending or current events.

Anyadike (2013) insists that journalists are generally saddled with the responsibility of serving as watchdogs in society. They (the journalists) expose the corrupt practices of government officials. He notes that this is usually a very herculean task for the media, especially in Nigerian society. Sometimes, these government officials use the police, thugs, and security operatives to harass, intimidate, abuse, and even attack or assault journalists. He notes that a reasonable number of journalists have lost their lives in the process of exploring very elusive and scandalous stories.

Nwanne (2016) and Njoku, Dike, and Vincent (2018) unanimously agree with Anyadike (2013) that journalists are usually faced with diverse challenges. Nwanne (2016) acknowledges that journalists carry out two basic functions in society. The functions include reporting the news and offering interpretation and opinion based on the news. He also insists that since media audiences are usually in a hurry because of other issues they need to attend to, journalists must learn the art of presenting their news in a relaxed and digestible way. The assertion of Ekwu (2019) indicates that every journalist is under pressure to be up to date in gathering news. This may lead to stress. Thus, suggests that every journalist is prone to stress which if not properly managed may result in the untimely death of the journalist. Also, a journalist may be a victim of trauma which destabilizes his mental state and affects his abilities.

James (2009), Mustapha (2009), Nwanne (2009), Enahoro & Isika (2009), Akpan (2009), Anaeto & Solo-Anaeto (2009), Ganiyu (2009) Nsude (2009) and Kogah (2009) unanimously affirm that the media have a prominent role to play. They also agree that the period of conflict management exposes journalists to many traumatic experiences.

No human being all over the world that is not experiencing one form of stress or the other. This is notwithstanding their race, ethnicity, professional or academic background. In other words, stress is a common challenge in all parts of the world. Accordingly, this denotes that stress is a part of human life and has many causes to it and that the degree of stress in our lives is greatly dependent on factors, such as the physical health of the individual, the quality of our interpersonal relationships, the number of commitments and responsibilities we shoulder, the degree of others' dependence on and expectations of us, the amount of support. We receive from others the number of changes of traumatic events we go through in our lives. This means that life itself is stress-related depending on the individual's lifestyle and the level of cultural development. Also, scholars such as Taylor (1999) and Steptoe (1997) identify numerous definitions of stress, used by psychologists, medics, and management consultants, among others. They unanimously stated that stress is made up of many things including a host of related experiences, pathways, responses, and outcomes caused by a range of different events or circumstances. Taylor (1999) and Steptoe (1997) opine that what complicated this was the fact that intuitively, we all felt that we knew stress since we had all experienced it in life. Thus, different people experience different aspects and identify with different definitions.

Taylor (1999) and Steptoe (1997) are of the view that one's knowledge and experiences of stress should also expose one to the causes of stress, such as time constraints, workload, health-related problems, and financial difficulties which may exert more pressure on the individual than he/she can cope with. It is in this light that Goldberger & Breznitz (1993) agreed with Lazarus & Folkman (1984) that stress was a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceived that demands exceeded the personal and social resources that the individual was able to mobilize. To them, people feel little stress when they have the time, experience, and resources to manage a situation. On the other hand, job demands or workload at the workplace may sometimes exert too much pressure than one can bear, leading to physical fatigue and breakdown.

For that reason, Hoak (2021) acknowledges that prolonged stress is commonplace among journalists, and an expected consequence of the career; however, organizational research in newsrooms has shown that asking journalists to take on additional, unfamiliar work adds stress and depletes coping mechanisms. On the other hand, perceived organizational support is a key determinant of the mental health of workers, such that greater perceived support is associated with lower stress and greater overall well-being. In journalism, perceived organizational support from both managers and colleagues is positively correlated with the job satisfaction of journalists.

Stress could result in long-lasting effects but can be healed. However, such healing may not be automatic. Terrible events have such effects as journalists experience in coverage of war, terrorism, health infections, and other courses of duty. The symptoms of trauma include anxiety, flashbacks, and sleep disruption. Others are shock, denial, and changes in the body, mind, and behavior. A traumatic experience may result in post-traumatic stress disorder. Managing trauma would require traumatic therapy. so, trauma management is a psychological intervention that aims to decrease the effects a traumatic

event has had on one's mental health. There are different types of trauma. They are acute, chronic, complex, and secondary trauma. Acute trauma is a single event that affects one's mental or emotional state. Chronic trauma is caused by a single event that is repeated continuously such that the effect is prolonged. In the case of complex trauma, many events are responsible while the secondary trauma comes from the transfer of trauma from a victim to one his experience is related to. Journalists, many times, suffer from this type of trauma.

Empirical review

Flannery (2021) evaluated news journalists and posttraumatic stress disorder: a review of literature, 2011–2020. The study postulates that first responders may develop psychological trauma! Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the performance of their duties. The researcher insists that a study of this nature is often overlooked especially in *these studies of police, firefighters, and paramedics* also, news journalists and photojournalists are not left out. Furthermore, Hoak (2021) carried out a study covering COVID-19: journalists' stress and perceived organizational support while reporting on the pandemic. The study observed that the COVID-19 pandemic forced unprecedented changes upon journalists in the United States as they attempted to cover the story while adhering to the same stay-at-home orders as the rest of the public. This study used organizational support theory to investigate the stress associated with the logistics of coverage early in the pandemic and how perceived organizational support played a role in either alleviating or adding to that stress. In total, 222 journalists responded to a survey sent out during the first few weeks of the stay-at-home orders issued across the United States. Results revealed varying degrees of logistical support provided by news organizations with nearly one quarter receiving no supplies, technology, or extra training at all. 72% perceived organizational support was associated with lower levels of stress and higher levels of work commitment. Female journalists and those who were younger and less experienced felt significantly more stress associated with pandemic coverage.

Perception Theory

The perception theory suggests that every member of the audience of mass communication has a predisposition towards the message of a media. According to Klapper (1960), any media message that does not fit into the predisposition of a particular member of the audience is likely to be recast to fit not only his span of comprehension and retention but also his personal needs and interests. Okunna (1999) contends that how an audience understands or interprets mass media messages is important in deciding their responses to the message and the influence of the messages on them. Okunna (1999) adds that "when members of the audience are exposed to mass media messages, the tendency is for them to interpret the messages to suit their existing attitudes, preconceptions, interests, or predispositions." In alliance Klapper (1960). and Okunna (1999), Igoya (2016) observes that the "predisposition is based on their world view of things and phenomena and guides them in the way such media messages are received, interpreted, understood, accepted and acted upon.

From the foregoing, it is clear that media messages are not just rejected by the audience; rather they make their subjective interpretation of them and choose to comply or ignore the information contained in it. Thus, the perception theory is believed to be very relevant to this study since the members of the public usually have their prejudices

and predispositions towards stress and trauma management. Journalists need to adopt this theory since it can help in the dissemination of information about stress management and the evaluation of public opinions about the issue.

Methodology

This work adopted the survey design. This implies that the views of journalists in *The Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers were solicited. The population of this study comprised all the journalists in *The Guardian* and *Punch* at the headquarters of the newspapers in Lagos. The population of journalists in *The Guardian* newspaper was thirty-six (36) while the current population of journalists in the *Punch* newspaper was twenty-seven (27). This suggested that the entire population of this study was sixty-three (63). This type of population is called census.

This study did not have any sample size and sampling technique since it adopted a census or complete enumeration research design. In other words, the entire population of this study was studied. The instrument for data collection in this study was the questionnaire and interview guide. The questionnaire was administered to the journalists in their chapel in Lagos State. A Likert scale of 4 points was used in the questionnaire as: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree; with a criterion rule of 2.5. Also, multiple-choice items were combined where appropriate.

Results and discussions

Table 1: Kinds of stress perceived to be associated with journalistic practice in the newspapers

S/n	Items	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	Wms	remarks
1	I experience physical stress	28	23	12	0	63	3.3	agreed
2	I encounter psychological stress	21	28	5	9	63	3.0	agreed
3	I am affected by psycho social stress	21	22	11	9	63	2.9	agreed

Table 1 shows that the journalists suffer from physical, psychological and psycho social stress.

Table 2: kinds of trauma associated with journalists practice in newspapers

S/n	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Wms	remarks
1	I experienced acute trauma	14	18	10	21	63	2.4	disagreed
2	I encountered chronic trauma	17	10	21	15	63	2.5	Agreed

3	I witnessed complex trauma	11	18	29	5	63	2.6	Agreed
4	I am affected by vicarious traumas	9	13	16	25	63	2.1	disagreed

Table 2 indicates that many of the journalists suffer from chronic and complex trauma.

Table 3: The perceived causes of stress typically encountered by journalists in the newspapers

S/n	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Wms	remark
1	Journalism overworks a person	20	24	8	11	63	2.8	agreed
2	The remunerations received does not compensate for extra work	32	19	9	3	63	3.3	Agreed
3	Trying to meet up deadline is the cause of stress	24	18	12	9	63	2.9	Agreed
4	My organization does not value my job which adds to my stress	16	12	21	14	63	2.5	agreed

Table 3 shows that the causes of stress are overworking by journalists, poor remuneration and striving to beat deadlines.

Table 4: The perceived causes of trauma typically encountered by journalists in the newspapers

S/n	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Wms	remarks
1	Harassment by governments/agents	15	13	24	11	63	2.5	agreed
2	Acts of terrorism	9	13	16	25	63	2.1	disagreed
3	Physical and psychological abuse	29	19	7	8	63	3.1	agreed
4	Natural disaster	14	18	10	11	63	2.4	disagree
5	War	9	8	15	31	63	1.9	Disagree

Table 4 shows that the causes of trauma are harassments by governments/agents on the journalists and physical/psychological abuse by news sources.

Table 5: The perceived attitudes of journalists towards stress and trauma management in the newspapers

S/n	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Wms	remarks
1	I work until I am exhausted despite the stress and trauma	14	22	17	10	63	2.6	agreed
2	Anytime I am stressed or traumatized, I feel like resigning from the work	14	13	27	9	63	2.5	agreed
3	I don't do my work well because of the stress and trauma	18	11	23	12	63	2.6	agreed
4	The stress and trauma I go through discourages my interest in journalism	17	12	25	9	63	2.6	Agreed

Table 5 indicates that the perceived attitudes of the journalists towards stress and trauma which are that journalists in spite of stress and trauma exhaust themselves in journalism work, journalists feel like resigning because of stress and trauma of their work, they also do not work well because of stress and trauma and also the stress and trauma discourages their interest in journalism as a career.

Table 6: How journalists in the newspapers cope with the stress they individually encounter

S/n	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Wms	remarks
1	I apply for leave anytime I am stressed or traumatized	21	15	18	9	63	2.8	agreed
2	I take a short break anytime I feel stressed or traumatized	24	25	14	0	63	2.8	agreed
3	I abandon my	16	7	26	14	63	2.4	disagreed

	work anytime I feel stressed or traumatized							
4	I engage in sports when I am stressed or traumatized	21	11	19	12	63	2.7	agreed
5	I observe/choose anything of fun to occupy my time when stressed or traumatized	22	15	15	11	63	2.8	agreed

Table 6 shows that the journalists cope with stress and trauma by resting through seeking for leave, short break, sometimes, engaging in sports and anything of fun.

Table 7: how stress and trauma affects journalistic practice in the newspapers

S/n	Items	SA	A	D	SA	Total	Wms	Remarks
1	Some journalists resign or abandon their work because of stress and trauma	17	20	9	17	63	2.6	Agreed
2	If I see another job, I will resign from my present work	24	14	16	9	63	2.8	Agreed
3	I do not do my job well because of stress and trauma	9	8	15	31	63	1.9	disagreed

Table 7 indicates that stress and trauma could affect journalistic practices in their newspapers such that journalists may want to resign, seek for other jobs and may not do their jobs thoroughly.

Table 8: How the media houses facilitate the management of stress and trauma in The Guardian and Punch

S/n	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Wms	remarks
1	Does your organization has any stress and trauma management strategy?	9	7	21	26	63	2	disagree
2	My organization usually organize the following to reduce stress and trauma: giving long break, organizing social activity, organizing sports activity, including counseling	6	14	5	38	63	1.8	disagree
3	It grants annual leave for staffs to relax in their homes	29	20	14	6	63	3.2	agree
4	It grants casual leave for staff who have stress or trauma challenges	15	18	17	13	63	2.6	agree
5	It allows for shift duty to lessen the stress and trauma of work	26	14	14	9	63	2.9	agree
6	It adopts other ways of managing	10	12	27	14	63	2.3	disagree

	stress and trauma in the newspaper such as approving work shift for staff							
7	It adopts training, seminars, workshops and give more time for relaxation	18	16	10	19	63	2.5	agree

Table 8 shows that the media houses under study ensure that journalists have rest by granting them annual and casual leaves, allowing for shift duties, seminars, training, workshops and relaxation spots to ease stress and trauma.

Discussion of findings

RQ1: what are the kinds of stresses and trauma perceived to be associated with journalistic practice in *the Guardian and Punch*?

The data presented and analyzed in this study attest that the kinds of stresses that are associated with journalistic practice in *the Guardian and Punch* newspapers are physical, psychological, and psycho-social stresses. Trauma, the kinds experienced are chronic and complex because of the constant exposure of journalists to terrible events constantly. In other words, a greater number of Journalists in *The Guardian and Punch* newspapers perceive that they go through the stresses and traumas earlier mentioned.

RQ2: what are the perceived causes of the stress typically encountered by journalists in *The Guardian and Punch* newspapers?

The available data for this study revealed that one of the major causes of the stress that journalists especially those in *The Guardian and Punch* are overworking, poor remuneration, trying to beat news deadlines, and bad feeling that the media organization does not care about the sacrifices of journalists. This is in agreement with the findings of Anyadike (2013) who says that some of the major challenges are stresses occasioned by poor remuneration and trying to beat deadlines. On the causes of trauma, it was found, that harassment by government/agents, and physical and psychological abuses from news sources orchestrated trauma in the journalists.

RQ3: what are the perceived attitudes of journalists in *The Guardian and Punch* newspapers towards stress and trauma management?

The perceived attitude of journalists towards stress and trauma was that they work until they are exhausted despite stress and trauma. They also feel like resigning from their jobs

because of how stress and trauma are managed. They also complain that stress and trauma discourage their interest in journalism. These findings lend credence to Anyadike 2013 which believes that the stress and trauma journalists experience affect their practice.

RQ4: How do journalists in *The Guardian* and *Punch* cope with the stress they encounter?

The study affirms that the journalists in *the Guardian* and *Punch newspapers* are perceived to manage stress and trauma through leave, short breaks, sports and other funs. Hamnick and Rosat O. (2003) are of the view that the degree of stress and trauma in our lives is greatly dependent on factors such as the physical health of the individual, the quality of his interpersonal relationships, the number of commitments we shoulder, including individual lifestyle and level of cultural development.

RQ5: How does stress affect journalistic practice in *The Guardian* and *Punch*?

The study shows that the journalists perceive that stress and trauma experienced in the practice influence journalists to abandon their work or resign. It makes them look for other less stressful and traumatic jobs. In addition, it may affect them in doing their work well. Flennerly (2021) agrees that events affect news and trauma.

RQ6: How do journalists in *The Guardian* and *Punch* perceive their media houses' management of stress and trauma?

The study found out that the management of *The Guardian* and *Punch* try to manage the stress and trauma of their journalists by ensuring that the journalists working with them have rest by granting them annual and casual leaves, approving shift duties, organizing workshops, seminars, and setting aside relaxation spots and counseling victims. The outcome is justified by Hoak (2021) who states that organizational support played a role in either alleviating or adding to stress and trauma.

Conclusion

A holistic analysis of the responses of the respondents proves that a greater majority of journalists in *The Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers perceive stress and trauma as existing in journalistic practice. It concludes that journalists perceive their management and newspaper as not doing enough but believe that they manage stress and trauma through rest in the form of leaves, shift duties, sports, and other fun.

Recommendations

This study recommends that the management of different media houses especially that of *The Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers should improve the remuneration of the journalists in the media houses since it was confirmed that poor remuneration is one of the main causes of stress faced by journalists. It also recommends that media houses should set up clear-cut strategies for the management of stress in their organization and a psychological clinic should be set up to counsel them on stress and trauma.

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