



International Journal
of Kashmir Studies

IJKS: Vol.4 – No. 1/2022

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The IJKS

provides a forum for scientific exchange and public dissemination of up-to-date scientific knowledge on the Kashmir conflict, The IJKS is an independent, peer-reviewed, open-access journal. The topics on which we concentrate—Kashmir conflict and violence—have always been central to various disciplines. Consequently, the journal encompasses contributions from a wide range of disciplines, including international affairs, political studies (geopolitics, political economy and other dynamics, diplomacy and public advocacy, law-based approaches, governance and economy (including micro and macroeconomics), self-determination, and other solidarity rights public international law (including human rights and humanitarian laws and intergovernmental organizations), criminology, economics, education, ethnology, history, political science, psychology, social anthropology, sociology.

All articles are gathered in yearly volumes, identified by a QR Code in print volume with article-wise pagination. For more information, please visit www.kpriijk.org

Suggested
Citation:

APA: Adeela, A. Tariq A., Rashida, A. (2021). Demographic Changes in Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK) and the Future of UN Resolutions. International Journal of Kashmir Studies, Vol.3. No. 2.

Harvard: Ahmed, A. Tariq, A. Abbas, R. (2021). Demographic Changes in Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK) and the Future of UN Resolutions. International Journal of Kashmir Studies, Vol. 3 No.2.



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Abstract

We are largely dependent on local media reports to keep informed about the ground realities and latest happenings in any region. These reports become the sole source of information in a conflict situation in any society or state wherein the parties involved in the conflict bar independent human rights observers and bodies to operate freely in the disputed territories. Due to journalism's unique and extremely powerful role in conflict situation, the key players involved in the dispute kept trying to exploit the media to influence public opinion, delude global community and legitimate their power. Consequently, journalists are facing serious challenges such as threats to their lives and livelihood, targeted killings, harassment, intimidation, and censorship. The article places a particular focus on the safety as the main challenge for journalists in both divided parts of Jammu and

Kashmir and examines that if they had been provided safe working environment or are they trained to tackle their safety issues. Seventy-three journalists representing both parts of the disputed state participated in the qualitative study by responding to a semi-structured questionnaire, in depth interviews and FGDs. The interviews were analyzed through NVivo software by using thematic analysis approach, a widely used technique to identify themes, i.e. patterns in the data that are important or interesting. Results showed that journalists working in Indian administered Kashmir (IaK) were facing more serious challenges than journalists in Pakistan administered Kashmir (PaK). These challenges were included unfavorable media environment, abusive treatment, violence and threats to their lives and livelihood. The study revealed that journalists working on both sides of LoC were not being adequately trained on safety issues in conflict zone.

Keywords: Kashmir, Conflict Zone, Journalism, Safety, Pakistan, India, Muzaffarabad, Srinagar, PaK, IaK, LoC

Introduction

There is a deep, complex, and ancient link between media and conflict. In conflict zones, news and views are being considered as bestselling commodities. The parties involved in the conflicts use media to enforce their viewpoints and ideologies to influence the opposing sides in conflict.¹

In such a situation, the role of journalists becomes very crucial as they serve the masses affected by the conflict with news and views on a regular basis. A news report published in a newspaper or broadcast on TV or Radio in a conflict zone can be the sole information for the readers or audience. Such important role of journalism in violent

¹Ivan Sigal, "Digital Media in Conflict Prone Societies," The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), October 19, 2009.

conflict zone invites numerous challenges for journalists as parties involved in the conflict seek to control the media which create greater risks for those reporting on the sensitive issues. Statistics showed that media workers are highly exposed to the hostilities, pressures, threats, unlawful detentions, and kidnappings and one journalist being killed each-week in the world. Not all these injustices with the journalists are investigated and unfortunately perpetrators normally walk away without proper prosecution.²

In its 2015 World Trend Report, UNESCO states that ‘international standards on the safety of journalists have been strengthened significantly in the past two years’ (p. 156). Despite these efforts, however, an increasing number of journalists face violence and murder because of doing their jobs.

In Kashmir, which is a major conflict between two neighboring atomic powered countries scores of journalists have lost their lives, kidnapped, and tortured in the line of their duties while reporting in conflict ridden state. Particularly after 1980’s, killing of Burhan Muzaffar Wani (July 2016) and August 5, 2019 Indian act of abrogating the articles 370 and 35-A of the constitution, the journalist’s community faces extreme hardships such as threats from the authorities, torture and targeted killings by the unknown assailants.³

The Committee to Protect Journalists, which is an independent, nonprofit organization established with the aim to promote press freedom worldwide published a report on November 14, 2018 titled *Kashmiri Journalists Face Multiple Restrictions, Attacks in October*.

² “Gender Matters in War Reporting,” Kilden, February 27, 2017, Accessed February 7, 2020, <http://kjonnsforskning.no/en/2017/02/gender-matters-war-reporting>.

³ “Human Rights Watch”, Human Rights Watch, January 14, 2020, Accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/14/india-mounting-human-rights-abuses>.

The report unveiled the facts how authorities in Indian administered Kashmir suppressing free voices and threatening journalists in the Valley.⁴ The New Arab also published a special report on January 8, 2019 that journalists in Kashmir facing tough challenges. The report stated that 21 journalists have so far been killed in Kashmir, either directly targeted or caught in the crossfire while reporting, as dozens more face hardships in their daily jobs.⁵

Terming Indian administered Kashmir among the most dangerous places for journalists, Kashmir Media Service (KMS) reported that people on journalistic assignments are performing their professional assignments in the hardest circumstances. According to data released by the research wing of the organization on the eve of the World Press Freedom Day 2019, nineteen media men killed, scores injured since 1989 in the Indian controlled parts of the Kashmir.⁶

Both India and Pakistan found labeling allegations on each other's that their rival, imposed curbs on independent media to silence the free voices, public sentiments and to hide the ground realities of the region. United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in its first-ever report on the situation in Kashmir published in 2018 also pointed out about the restrictions on the right to freedom of expression, violence against human rights defenders and abusive treatment by the authorities against the journalists working in the disputed region.⁷ This article particularly examined the working

⁴ "Kashmiri Journalists Face Multiple Restrictions, Attacks in October," Committee to Protect Journalist, November 14, 2018, Accessed June 24, 2019, <https://cpj.org/2018/11/kashmiri-journalists-face-multiple-restrictions-at.php>.

⁵ N. Sidiq, "In-depth: Journalists in Kashmir Face Tough Challenges," *The New Arab*, January 08, 2019, Accessed June 24, 2019, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2019/1/8/journalists-in-kashmir-face-tough-challenges>.

⁶ "Journalists Working in Difficult Situation in IOK," Kashmir Media Service, May 3, 2019, Accessed June 24, 2019, <https://kmsnews.org/news/2018/05/03/journalists-working-in-difficult-situation-in-iok/>.

⁷ "Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir", United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1018.

environment of the journalists on both sides of LoC about their safety challenges and measures.

Geo-political Significances and Historical Background

Kashmir officially known as Jammu and Kashmir has a great geopolitical significance and is a geographic bridge to central Asia, which is a vital geographic component to the Belt and Road Initiative. Its geographical connectivity to the central Asia via Afghanistan makes it a very important region in the South Asia.⁸ The state has massive energy deposits, huge tourism potential and abundant hydropower generation resources. With all its unrivaled natural landscape, God-gifted wealth and geopolitical significance, the state has also known as a longstanding conflict between two nuclear archrival neighboring countries India and Pakistan from last seven decades. The tension between these two important countries destabilized South Asian region and paved way for three full-fledged wars and other minor clashes. The unsettled dispute is also posing potential threat to the global peace.⁹

It has become a fact that durable peace in the region could not be achieved till the peaceful settlement of the dispute. Despite several major bilateral, multilateral efforts at diplomatic fronts, dialogues and mediations over its settlement, the goal has remained elusive.¹⁰

In between the international peace efforts, mediation offers by world powers and bilateral talks, India kept strengthening its control over

⁸ Bahauddin Foizee, "Kashmir's Geopolitical Significance is Growing by the Day", Geopolitical Monitor. May 24, 2018, Accessed June 30, 2019, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/kashmirs-geopolitical-significance-is-growing-by-the-day/>.

⁹ Peer Ghulam Nabi, and Muhammad Ammad Khan "Kashmir Conflict: Tracing the History Suggesting the Solution," *Asian Journal of Humanity, Art and Literature* 1, no. 1 (2014): 30-40.

¹⁰ Moeed Yusuf, & Adeel Najam. "Kashmir: Ripe for Resolution?" *Third World Quarterly*, (2009): 1503-1504.

the disputed territory using state might and on other side Pakistan kept extending its political, moral, and diplomatic support to Kashmiris for their UN acknowledged right to self-determination.¹¹

A credible Kashmiri independent research and news organization, Kashmir Media Service (KMS) compiled the data of casualties and other human rights abuses in Indian held territory during the indigenous liberation movement, which showed 95,670 total civilian killings out of which 7146 were custodial killings by the Indian military and paramilitary forces from January 1989 till September 7, 2020. The research institute reported that during this period 1,60,983 civilian were arrested, 110,355 structures arson/destroyed, 22,918 women become widows, 1,07,798 children were orphaned, and 11,219 Kashmiri women were gang raped or molested.¹²

Presently, the state of Jammu and Kashmir has been divided among three major Asian powers; India, Pakistan, and China. India controls the central and southern portions; Northwestern part of the state is being administered by Pakistan while China controls its Northeastern areas. India controls its largest portion 39,127 square miles, while an area of 33,145 square miles is under Pakistan's administration. China controls 14,500 square miles.¹³ Line of Control (LoC) refers to the de-facto border between the Pakistani and Indian controlled parts of the state.

Methodology

The study used qualitative inquiry in which thematic analysis technique was used to investigate the phenomenon. Qualitative

¹¹ Abdul Majid, and Dr Mahboob Hussin, "Kashmir: A Conflict between India and Pakistan," *South Asian Studies* 31, no. 1 (2020).

¹² "Kashmir Media Service", Kashmir Media Service/News, 2020, Accessed September 28, 2020, <https://kmsnews.org/news/>.

¹³ Amanda Briney, "Geography and History of Kashmir", Thought Co. May 25, 2019, Accessed June 30, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/geography-of-kashmir-1435549>.

inquiry is used when a problem or issue needs to be explored; it is focused on words not numbers.¹⁴ Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions. It is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set.¹⁵ The process begins at the initial stage of data collection and continues till transcribing, reading, re-reading, analyzing and interpreting the data.

- a) **Sample Size.** Fifteen (15) accredited and senior journalists from Kashmir Press Club (KPC) Srinagar and all members of Central Press Club (CPC) Muzaffarabad were taken as participants.
- b) **Sampling Technique.** In Indian administered Kashmir, snowball sampling technique has been used because the authorities in had imposed ban on communication after August 5, 2019 so it was almost impossible to locate the specific persons due to the inability of moving across the LoC. In Pak, Census Sampling technique was used to obtain maximum responses.
- c) **Period of Study.** The period of study was October 2019 to October 2020.
- d) **Data Collection Technique.** Face to face meetings, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) in PaK while Email and Google Survey questionnaire in Srinagar.
- e) **Research Design.** In-depth interviews of fifteen (15) accredited and senior journalists from Srinagar, Indian administered Kashmir and fifty-eight (58) including freelancers and independent journalists from Muzaffarabad, Pakistan administered Kashmir were conducted for the study.

¹⁴ Matthew B. Miles, and A. Michael Huberman. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. Sage, 1994.

¹⁵ V. Braun, and V. Clarke. "Using tThematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa, 2006.

Due to sensitive nature of the data and considering the threats to the lives of IaK based Kashmiri journalists, in-depth interviews of fifteen were chosen randomly with the commitment to keep them anonymous. However, in Muzaffarabad, PaK, the maximum interviews were conducted to obtain utmost primary data for the study.

In first phase, a semi-structured written interview questionnaire was sent to the journalists on both sides of LoC through emails, social media networking sites like Facebook, twitter and few through their WhatsApp numbers but due to security reasons and constant monitoring of the emails, Facebook and WhatsApp accounts of the IaK based journalists; the number of respondents was less than expectations. Later, the same questionnaire developed through Google Survey Form was sent to them with the help of a UK based university's professor, which received the desired results.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied on a dataset of texts including interview transcripts to minutely examine the data to identify common themes. The process involved examining the topics, patterns and ideas that came up repeatedly in the dataset.

Thematic analysis of the structured interviews was done using its most common six step process:

- 1) Familiarization/ reading, re-reading the data.
- 2) Process of coding
- 3) Generating/extracting themes
- 4) Reviewing the extracted themes
- 5) Defining and naming to the themes
- 6) Writing up/ analysis of the data

Familiarization

All primary data was carefully reviewed, transcribed audios and notes were prepared after thorough reading of the text. The process helped to get familiar with the qualitative data

Coding

In next step, the most used phrases and sentences in the respondent's answers were highlighted, assigned short labels/codes to describe their contents.

Generating Themes

After assigning codes, patterns were identified among the generated themes. It significantly helped to extract broader themes out of the assigned codes. Several codes were merged into a single theme. It also helped in eliminating some of the too vague codes.

Reviewing Themes

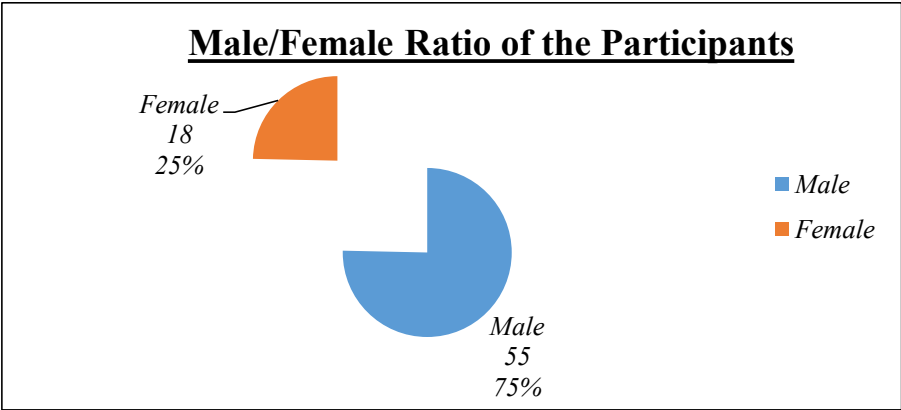
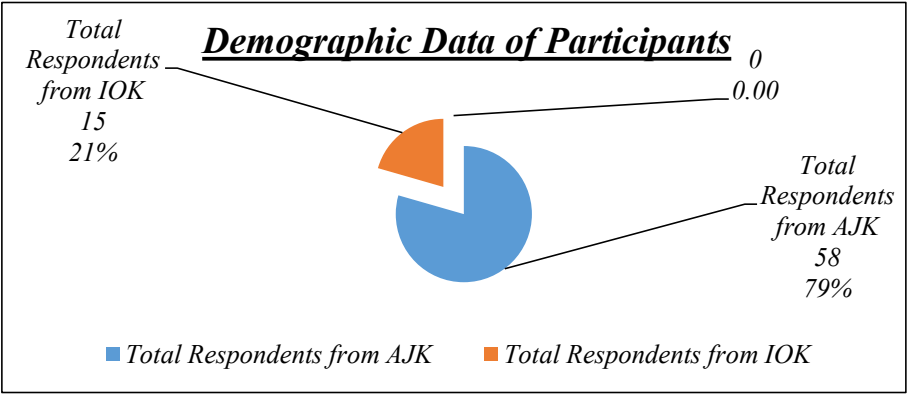
To make sure that extracted themes are the accurate representation of the data compared these with dataset. It helped to find out that if anything is missing or really present in the data. The review helped to further improve the themes. The process also helped splitting, combining, discarding, and creating new themes.

Defining and Naming the Themes

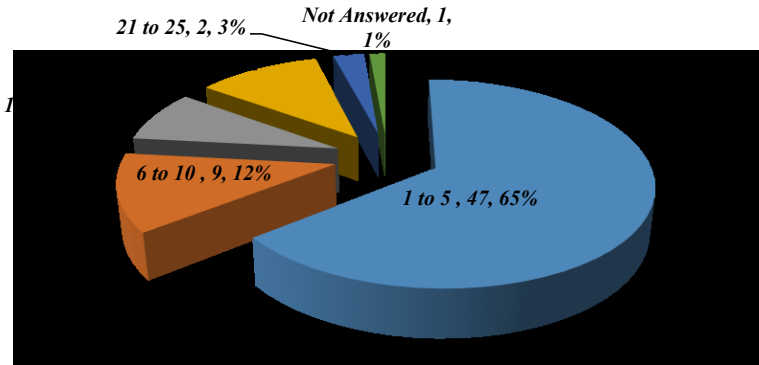
After having final list of themes, these were given names and proper definition. In this process, the priority was given to those names that were easy and understandable. To make it further easy, these themes were categorized according to questions asked to the respondents, under which qualitative data was obtained for further examination. Themes generated through the process are given below:

- 1) Hostile environment
- 2) Training on safety issues

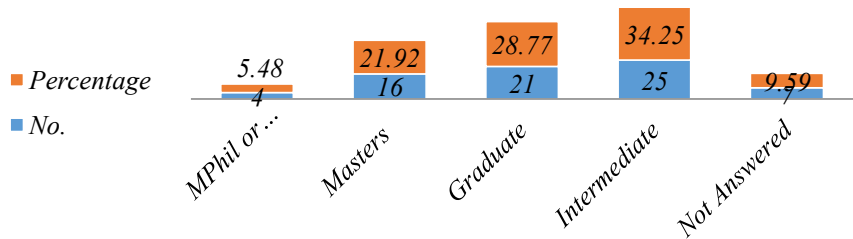
Participants



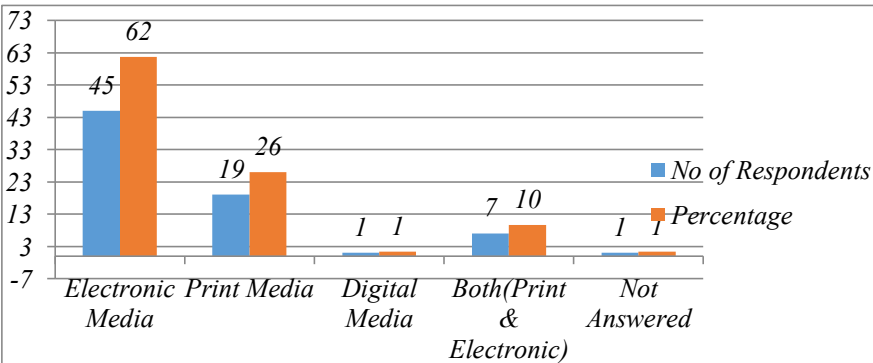
Journalistic experience of respondents in years



Educational Background of Participants



Medium-wise affiliation of Participants



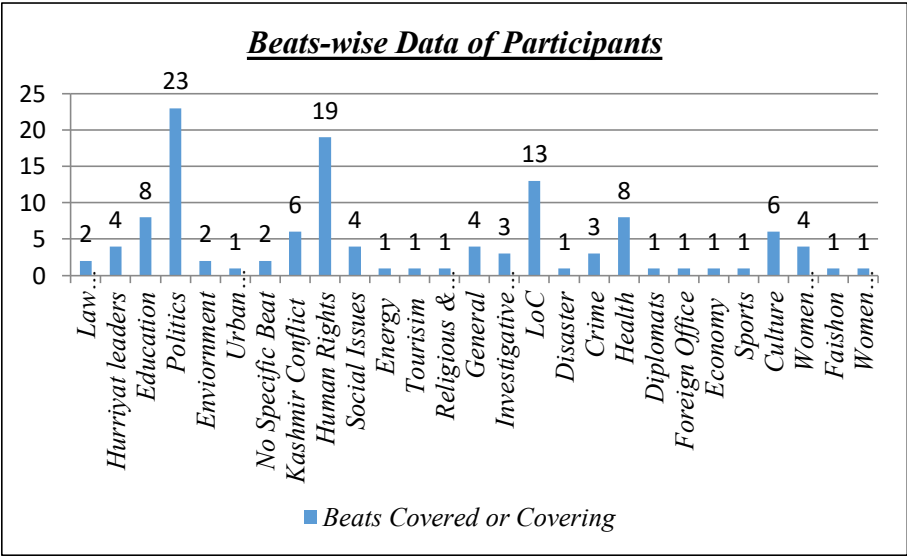
Writing up/Analysis of data

Each theme has been separately discussed in the light of the respondents’ answers.

Data Analysis and Interpretations

1. Hostile Environment

Q. Have you ever witnessed any violent behaviour from any state-owned institution to you or fellow journalist? If yes, then what was the reason behind it?



IaK Responses

Hundred percent respondents admitted that they had witnessed such offensive treatment to them or their colleagues by the state-owned institutions during their journalistic assignments. IaK based journalists who were covering pro-freedom or anti India beats were facing such intimidating behavior from state institutions on daily

basis. According to journalists they are being harassed, threatened, and summoned in police stations interrogated, tortured, and sometimes killed by the unidentified assailants. A respondent informed that they face such situation several times while covering the activities of All Parties Hurriyat leaders or anti India demos in different parts of the state. Tahira (Fake name) another journalist said that it happened many times and the reason behind the abusive treatment was to prevent us from covering law enforcement agencies' crimes which will expose them obviously.

PaK Responses

In Azad Jammu and Kashmir forty-five percent respondents, which comprise 77.59 percent of the total interviewees apprised that they had never experienced such obnoxious conduct by the any government body or law enforcement agencies throughout their professional journalistic career. However, thirteen percent respondents that constitute 22 percent admitted that they gone through such distasteful situation after publishing news reports related to corruption, favoritism and nepotism of politicians or their relatives. Journalists were warned through third party for serious consequences if they continue to highlight such issues.

Q. Who do you think is primarily responsible for such treatment against journalists?

Indian Administered Kashmir Responses

Fifty-three percent journalists believe that government is exclusively responsible for the abusive treatment against the media men in Jammu and Kashmir. However, twenty-seven percent consider that security agencies are directly involved in such actions.

Pakistan Administered Kashmir Responses

In Pakistan administered Kashmir, twenty-nine percent respondents think that media owners are responsible for the abuses against the journalists. However, twenty-one percent journalists believe that absence of media person's protection laws is the reason behind such obnoxious treatment to them. Twelve percent respondents alleged government, eight percent to law enforcement agencies and seven percent to non-professional attitude of journalists.

2) Training on Safety Issues

Q. Have you ever received any capacity building training particularly focused on safety issues of journalists working in conflict zone? If yes, then which agency arranged it?

Indian Administered Kashmir Responses

According to responses, thirteen respondents, which constitute eighty-seven percent of the interviewees, have never received any specialized training on the safety issues of the journalists in conflict zone. Only 2 out of 15 journalists received this training, which was jointly arranged by a nongovernmental organization and their employers.

Pakistan Administered Kashmir Responses

In PaK, forty-six respondents, 79.31 percent have also not received any specialized training on safety issues of journalists in conflict zone. Twelve, 20.69 percent who received it were including four trained from employers while eight journalists received safety training by nonprofit organizations.

Discussions

1. Hostile Environment

Reporters without border, a Paris based independent media watchdog described India among the most dangerous countries for the world. In its annual assessment of global press freedom, citing the ruling party's increased pressure on media to toe the Hindu nationalist government's line and an atmosphere of hostility towards journalists who report critically on the government. In its 2021 World Press Freedom Index, the organization stated that police are directly involved in violence against journalists in India as well as in Kashmir.¹⁶

Since the Indian unilateral and unlawful act of abrogating the special disputed status of the state, journalists have become the victim of constant harassment, violence and abusive treatment by the police and other law enforcement agencies. Reporters without Borders in an investigative report on March 5, 2020, published a summary of recent cases of police harassment of journalists and violation of confidentiality of their sources in IaK. It includes the incidents of confiscation of Cameras and Cell Phones of journalists such as Qayyume Khan, CNN, Qisar Mir TV9 Bharatvarsh due to the coverage of an operation carried out by Indian National Investigation Agency. The Report further highlighted the systematic violations particularly examining the personal belongings of the journalists like cell phones and cameras. Kamran Yousaf, a local reporter in Pulwama district was summoned in Police Station to examine his phone. Naseer Ahmed Ghani and Haroon Nabi, two journalists were also summoned in the police station and interrogated for hours regarding their work and sources. Local journalists Basharat Masood, Safwat Zargar were

¹⁶ "India: Kashmir Sees Surge in Intimidation of Journalists, Violation of Sources," Reporters Without Borders, March 05, 2020, <https://rsf.org/en/news/india-kashmir-sees-surge-intimidation-journalists-violation-sources>.

detained while reporting in Handwara. Similarly, Muzzamil Mattoo, Zubair Dar, Azaan Javed, Anees Zargar was beaten up by Police for covering protests in Srinagar. Masood and Hakeem Khan were also taken to counter insurgency centre for interrogation purpose on November 30, 2020. Pirzada Ashiq, a renowned journalist was summoned in Police Station Srinagar and ordered to reveal his source of the story.¹⁷

In this study, all fifteen participants from IaK admitted that they or their colleagues had faced the abusive treatment of the authorities particularly security agencies. They were of the view that Indian governments and law enforcement agencies were solely responsible for the abuses against the media professionals in Jammu and Kashmir.

On the other hand, study shows that majority of the PaK based journalists never experienced any incident of violence or abusive treatment throughout their professional career. Those witnessed any similar incident, accused influential political elites, business tycoons' particularly real estate businessmen and somewhere some top government functionaries. Twenty-one percent journalists of the study believe that absence of basic media person's protection laws is the basic reason behind such unpleasant treatment to their community.

2. Training on Safety Issues

Reporting from an armed conflict zone is a very dangerous job as the life of the reporter is always at the risk. Journalists who are discharging their professional duties in disputed areas facing numerous challenges such as danger to their security, meeting their basic physical needs, multifaceted information environment and many others. To tackle with the situation, they must be trained

¹⁷ "Journalists Working in Difficult Situation in IOK," Kashmir Media Service, May 3, 2019, Accessed June 24, 2019, <https://kmsnews.org/news/2018/05/03/journalists-working-in-difficult-situation-in-iok/>.

regarding safety protocols. Such as capacity building training opportunities that not only help journalists to minimize harm while covering their stories but also provide a sense of satisfaction during the work. Study revealed that majority of the journalists on both sides of LoC was not adequately trained either by the concerned governments, employers, or the media organizations/bodies. A small number however trained by different non-profit organizations operating in respective territories.

According to a CJP's analysis, local journalists become the soft target and are most vulnerable in armed conflict areas as compared to the others. Eighty-five percent journalists killed while discharging their professional duties in an armed conflict zone were not the foreign journalists but locals. Typically, they were murdered during their houses, office timings or on their commuters but not on their assignments. In such situation, the safety trainings for the local journalists become imperative to save their lives.¹⁸

Conclusion

The study concluded that hundred percent journalists working in Indian administered Kashmir have been facing abusive treatment, serious threats and violent behavior from government machinery particularly law enforcement agencies while discharging their professional assignments. However, eighty percent journalists belonging to PaK stated that they had never experienced such obnoxious conduct by the any government body or law enforcement agency throughout their professional journalistic career.

The study also concluded that journalists working on both sides of LoC were not being adequately trained on safety issues in conflict

¹⁸ UNESCO, "Safety of Journalists", UNESCO, June 01, 2016 <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/worldpress-freedom-day/previous-celebrations/worldpressfreedomday2009000/themes/safety-of-journalists/>.

zone. Both IaK and PaK governments and media houses are least bothered regarding the security challenges to the journalist community.