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Psychological and Physical Lived Experiences of Journalists Covering Terrorism in Kenya

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Abstract

This research is based on 28 in-depth interviews with Kenya-based journalists who report terrorism. The objective of the research was to recount their lived experiences. The theme of safety of journalists comprised psychological and physical safety of the newspeople, and there were various ways in which the psychological and individual safety of the journalists covering terrorism and related events was at risk. The psychological safety included traumatic events leading to sleeplessness and nightmares, loss of memory, and some journalists resorting to alcohol abuse in a bid to cope with the traumatic experiences. These physical safety concerns for some journalists included threats of death by fanatical religious groups, while other participants said that they were threatened with death because of their coverage of terrorism and related activities in Kenya.

Keywords

journalism, journalists, phenomenological study, qualitative research, trauma

Introduction

Journalists who cover terrorism and terror-related activities bear witness to gross violence on fellow human beings, with severe consequences on their personal lives. The personal cost of reporting terrorism and terror-related events can range from emotional or psychological to physical harm—which could extend to their families, relatives,

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friends, and colleagues. Previous studies in Africa, and Kenya, in specific, have focused on the content of the journalistic coverage of terrorism (end product), overlooking the lived experiences of the journalists involved.

While these studies are, by no means unimportant, what has been lacking is a focus on the journalistic narratives centered on their lived experiences. There has been a focus on epistemological enquiry of the content that the journalists produce effectively, putting framing studies at the heart of research in reporting terrorism and related activities in Kenya, but also in other parts of Africa. For instance, researchers who focused on terrorism reporting by groups such as the Boko Haram have in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Chad, and Benin tend to lean on framing and content analysis of news narratives (African Union, 2015; Emmanuel et al., 2017). The situation obtains for studies looking into reportage of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), now called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Libya and the Al-Shabaab in Somalia and the larger East African region (Emmanuel et al., 2017; Ireri, 2018; Ogenga, 2012, 2020).

Exceptionally, some studies have focused on the lived experiences of various actors who are involved in terrorism such as survivors of terror activities (Aswani, 2020; Feinstein et al., 2018; Fremont et al., 2005); psychological impact of witnessing terrorism violence (Feinstein et al., 2015, 2018); lived experiences of journalists covering terrorism in the Middle East, India, and Sri Lanka (Langer, 2012); lived experiences of journalists covering mass shootings in the United States (Petersen & Soundararajan, 2020); and the impact of terror experience on women and children in places such as Nigeria, Kenya, and the Middle Eastern countries (Aswani, 2020; Fremont et al., 2005; Schmid, 2012; Spencer, 2012). But they have all fallen short on enquiring about the lived experiences of journalists reporting terrorism.

In Kenya, Aswani (2020) focused on the lived experiences of victims of terror attack where he studied the case of the Garissa University College attack of 2015. His study was concerned with the victims' perceptions toward the Kenyan government communication on terrorism. Using interpretive phenomenological approach (Laverty, 2003), Aswani established that victims of the terrorism attack viewed government communication as a form of doublespeak. He concluded that the lived experiences and perceptions of the terror victims were communicated to them, anchored on religious opinions on life and death. Scholars such as Mbiti (1969) observed that the lived experiences and practices of Africans are dominated by religion, validating the findings by Aswani (2020).

Overlooking of the lived experiences of journalists covering this violence can be seen as a concerning oversight, especially so because the Kenya-based journalists have consistently reported on terrorism and related events for more than a decade now (Kimari & Ramadhan, 2017; START, 2021). Even before the threat of terrorism intensified on the Kenyan soil, the bombing of the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam concurrently in August 1998 received robust reportage by the Kenya-based journalists. In fact, this was the most lethal attack to be experienced in Kenya, that left more than 200 people dead and 4,000 others injured (START, 2021). Therefore, the lived experiences of the Kenya-based journalists covering such violence warranted investigation.

Phenomenological Theoretical Framework

This research employs a phenomenological approach to investigate the lived experiences of the Kenya-based journalists involved in reporting terrorism and terror-related activities, and structural forces that influence their reporting of the news topic. Phenomenology is the study of a particular phenomenon focusing on the nature and meaning of that phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Finlay, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology interrogates the lived experiences of a phenomenon or concept among several individuals. This explains why the approach is suitable for the present study, because involves documenting experiences of journalists covering terrorism and related events. Thematic meanings of this experience are then coded from the descriptive accounts through qualitative content analysis (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological researchers described their findings using the participants' words in verbatim as a means of boosting the validity of the findings (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2011). It is, therefore, ideal for this study that captures the lived experiences of journalists involved in the coverage of terror-related activities.

For the present work, a three-point systematic procedure for conducting phenomenological research is followed as proposed by Moustakas (1994) where journalists directly involved in the coverage of terrorism are the study's participants.

The second procedure is what Moustakas terms as "the data-generating situation." Here, in-depth interviews with the sampled journalists were used to generate the descriptive accounts, and then complemented by the relevant document analysis materials—for example—those touching on various laws, rules, and regulations governing govern reporting of terrorism and related events. The last stage involves data analysis where the narratives were "scrutinised so as to reveal their structure, meaning configuration, coherence and clustering" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 16). The emphasis is on the study of the configuration of meaning involving both the structural conditions and how they impact journalistic freedoms.

Research Question

Therefore, this literature paved the way for the research question:

> **RQ1:** What are the lived experiences of the Kenya-based journalists who are involved in the coverage of terrorism and related events?

Method

A triangulation of purposive sampling and snowball sampling was employed in interviewing 28 journalists between 2020 and 2021. Out of the 28 journalists, 17 were drawn from the local media houses, while 10 were international correspondents based in Nairobi. Thematic meanings of this experience were then coded from the descriptive accounts through content analysis (Moustakas, 1994).

Sampling Method and Procedures

The sampling methodology was keen on breadth and depth of the participants' views. The sampling framework in this study involved sampling for maximum variation (similarities and differences across sample), sampling for data richness (depth and breadth of participant views), and sampling for match of scope of the study (sample to match the research objectives and questions). In view of this framework, a triangulation of purposive sampling and snowball sampling was employed for the interviews. Purposive sampling is a nonprobability sampling method where samples are taken because they conform to a certain criterion. The criterion in this study is described below under Step 2 of the sampling protocols. In snowball sampling or referrals, the qualified respondents were contacted and asked for referral of fellow journalists who have been involved in coverage of terrorism and terror-related activities. It was not difficult for journalists to identify fellow journalists whom they have been working together in the field reporting terrorism and related news events (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

Step 1: Sampling for maximum variation and data richness

Judgment and quota sampling methods of purposive sampling were employed. Under judgment sampling, sample member conformed to certain parameters (described below in this section), whereas under quota sampling the relevant characteristics were that they are drawn from the population of the mainstream media houses that subscribe to a professional code of conduct. The starting point for this sampling was the journalists who first reported on terrorism in various parts of the country since 2011 and were later embedded with the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) in different stations in Somalia.

As observed earlier, as this research falls under nonprobability sampling procedure, factors as subgroups, cost issues among others were used to arrive at the sample size. However, an ideal size fitting for a phenomenological study was a key consideration in arriving at the ultimate sample. Finally, 28 participants were interviewed in line with previous studies on phenomenological studies. Ultimately, the researcher was keen on depth and saturation levels from the participants as opposed to the sheer numbers of the sampled population. Hence, the concern in this project was centered on depth, clarity, and nuanced responses that painted a deep-seated insight on how journalists experience and cover terrorism in Kenya, and how structural conditions impacted on their freedoms. In this regard, saturation of responses signaled and became an indicator of the end point of the sample.

Step 2: Sampling for Match of Scope of the Study

Under judgment sampling, the selected journalists conformed to the following parameters and in line with the scope of the study objectives and research questions:

1. They have consistently reported on terrorism and terror-related events since 2011 both in Kenya and in Somalia.

2. The journalists were drawn from the mainstream media houses that are based in Kenya. Mainstream media is governed by a professional code of conduct as well as in-house culture of gate keeping. Bloggers and alternative media personnel who do not subscribe to a professional code are excluded.
3. Those journalists who have been embedded with the KDF in Somalia for at least 14 days were included. Journalists who have flown to Somalia and returned on the same day or the next, that is, the touch-and-go sample, were excluded.

Findings: Safety of Journalists at Risk

There were various ways in which the psychological and individual safety of the journalists covering terrorism and related events was at risk, going by their narrations. The psychological safety included traumatic events leading to sleeplessness and nightmares, loss of memory, and some journalists resorting to alcohol abuse in a bid to cope with the traumatic experiences. These physical safety concerns for some journalists included threats of death by fanatical religious groups, while other participants said that they were threatened with death because of their coverage of terrorism and related activities in Kenya.

Loss of memory, trauma, and nightmares further emerged as a subtheme under the safety of journalists at risk theme. As observed in the introduction of this chapter, some journalists claimed that they suffered loss of memory as a result of covering terrorism and related activities, such as the Kenyan military incursion in Somalia. One journalist stated that they could not remember some things such as passwords, login (credentials), or even where they used to stay. Participant 9 said,

> When we got back (from Somalia), I had to be taken home by an office driver. I believe I had lost bits of memory because of the stay in the battlefield.

Participant 15 had similar observations and stated that when they came back (from Somalia):

> They would have *colleagues* log me onto the office computers.

This affected not just their personal lives, but also their capacity as a journalist to do their work:

> Thing is, if you have not written something instantly, you forget. So, everyone whose phones number I had saved using their first name, I could not remember their names to date. So, I was only able to do whatever I had written down. (Participant 15)

Journalists often rely on their notebooks and pens to chronicle important and newsworthy events while in the field. But while embedded with KDF, some recounted that it was difficult to take notes while in the battlefield. The reliance on a faulty memory became a challenge for some, inhibiting their journalistic work. Participant 3 explained,

> Considering the situation, it was not easy to be writing as we were always moving or it was at night. So, you cannot take the usual journalistic notes on a regular basis, you have to rely on your memory.

At the same time, recounting being a journalist in an active terrorism scene for the participants was a difficult experience as it brought to life memories of death—such as counting dead bodies in a church shooting, or visiting the morgue where relatives and the loved ones of the victims congregated after the terror incident. Participants recounted how they dealt with enervating stories, loss of lives, pain, and anguish, on one hand, and government officials they described as "whose job at this point is not to tell the truth," on the other:

> Telling the stories of the victims as truthfully as I could was one of those things you do, and sleep well at night, but having those stories playing in your head all day; you know, it can happen to anyone, and your life changes in a flash kind of nightmare; thinking about the wives or kids, or the crying parent, that teary stuff. (Participant 1)

One journalist was at pains explaining the difficulty of being sent to cover an aftermath of a terror attack in Garissa County counting dead bodies strewn on the floor and later following up the relatives and the loved ones in mortuaries and hospitals to get their stories. The struggle of remaining true to the media audiences in such difficult time was apparent as the participants explained:

> You have the blood and bodies, especially in Garissa (the church massacre in 2012) where we had to go into the mortuary and count the bodies one by one; jumping over others, looking for fresh ones, so that I don't get the count wrong; and after Garissa University attack (2015) going to Kenyatta National Hospital and talking with the victims, looking at their wounds, watching their tears and their pain, you know, the works. This is part of the job. It has to be done wholeheartedly, so that you are not shortchanging the reader. (Participant 1)

The experience of covering the trail of terror past the scene of violence was equally difficult for journalists as they followed relatives and the loved ones at places such as the morgue where the story was different. As Participant 27 averred,

> The smell of decomposing bodies threw me off and for weeks I could not eat meat. I was deeply conflicted by the fact that I had to report back with images of people suffering at the sight of the death of their loved ones. I would say this was more difficult to document than the actual scene. I had thoughts of what happens to bodies when they decompose. I thought of the workers in the morgue who were clearly overwhelmed by the number of bodies arriving but worked as if it was a regular day, exchanging casual stories, even managing to laugh and high five one another. I had thoughts of their mental states and wondered how they cope with this line of work.

Participant 8 added to this narrative and said that at the battlefield in Somalia, death and injuries were the order of the day for those embedded with KDF:

> My first casualty to see from the KDF side was a sergeant whom we had been together in the camp in Somalia. A few minutes later, there was an ambush and he was brought back into the camp in a body bag. It was heart breaking, especially so because moments ago, he was telling us that his son was to undergo circumcision that December. He was very excited about it.

These scenes led to a reconsideration of the journalistic call and what really mattered at that point for the participants:

> I developed mixed feelings for the entire coverage of the terrorism events. You have never been in active combat; you are the only station covering so in a way you are happy that this is an exclusive. As a journalist you stop thinking about your safety and just think about your story. Looking back now about the risks I took then, I would not take them now. (Participant 8)

Participant 6 added as follows:

> My own mortality was something that I thought of, but I also thought a lot about what the terrorists themselves might feel or think about what we were involved in as a country and as journalists.

Most participants who have since visited a professional counselor and noted that they were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following the coverage of terrorism and related events during the period covered in this study:

> The aftermath of viewing gory images, interacting with victims and coming to terms with how serious the threat of terrorism, left me traumatised. I remember after covering Westgate, I had terrible nightmares that I would wake up screaming at night—and this went on for some time. (Participant 2)

> During our stint in Somalia, we were forced to take a two-week break in December because one of my team members got emotionally sick. His feelings crossed such that when you told him a sad thing, he would laugh and when you told him a joke, he would cry. We were told to take him out of the war zone after the army doctor examined him. (Participant 8)

> Soon after we went back after the break, we all began getting emotionally and physically tired. I spoke to the officials to evacuate us. We lived in fear, and some of us resulted to avoiding churches, shopping malls, traffic jams, and other public places. (Participant 2)

One of the most recurrent subthemes in this study was fear and anxiety. All key participants at some point recounted experiences of fear and anxiety when covering terrorism and related events. This hindered their capacity to report critically and also objectively. Participant 7 calls it a scary affair. He noted the constant feeling of fear and dread the whole time he was there and remembers how he would sit back and wonder whether it was a dream (nightmare) that he would wake up from. This was

especially during the DusitD2 attack that he recounts as the worst experience. He explained,

> When I went to cover the attack, I was also sort of a victim. I kept thinking that should be me in there. I was also scared because I have always thought of what I would do in case an attack happened and I had my equipment. Most likely, I would have run towards the attack and maybe things would have been different.

The participant says that he cannot remember a longer night while covering an event, and this was made more so by the loud explosions and the sight of his fellow camerapersons crying. It was a somber moment, with journalists hugging and comforting each other.

Participant 1 observed that covering terrorism events had a negative psychological impact on the journalists, long after the dust of the events settled:

> This stuff gets to you. You don't notice it at first, but things stop scaring you. You get to notice how short life is, and you just live.

The participant noted that sometimes these journalists begin to do things that normal people consider reckless, but which they know they have to do because life is no longer a guarantee. One can die even while praying in church. One makes peace with every minute. The participant reflected on people who helped him do a story on grenade smuggling in Kenya after they were both killed.

> One was slaughtered in 2013 and his headless body dumped at a beach we used to hang out in Malindi, *he narrated, adding that*, I have never gone on holiday again to that beach in Malindi yet I used to escape there like every two months.

The other helper was shot in broad daylight in his car outside a police station. He was a very young boy, but he came from a relatively rich Muslim family. From the stories of these participants, the journalist realized that for them, engaging in terrorism and fighting on the side of the police, was because of specific motives. They were looking for money; however, it could come, including smuggling weapons or selling out their colleagues!

> Yet these sources somehow become tight with you. It's complicated.

Another participant (6) observed that fear and anxiety were the dominant feelings as I was going to be embedded because it was the first time that was happening in Kenya. This participant observed that one gets scared at a personal level because the frequency of ambush becomes too high. As soon as one starts to understand the army coding, they realize that they could be suspected to be a mole among them, feeding the Al-Shabaab with information. In such instances, yet another participant (8) noted that fear is enhanced by the fact that the soldiers, to whom they have entrusted themselves, are unsure of their real motives.

At the same time, some of the participants resorted to alcohol abuse and experienced sleepless nights because of the traumatic experiences of covering terrorism and related events, especially the ones who covered the conflict in Somalia and the border with Kenya. One participant said that he had noticed a similar pattern of behavior among his colleagues who were involved in the beat during the stint in Somalia. The participant noted,

> The level of alcohol abuse was high, sleep became elusive.

Daily images of raw blood and the smell of death were combined with the pressure to produce scoop copy on a daily basis, resulting in enhanced anxiety. In addition, because during such events there are no other forms of escape such as discussion groups, mentorship cells, or sports activities, the bottle was an escape route. Participant 4 observed,

> I noticed that because of the chaotic nature of activities, some colleagues sneaked whisky in the office car whenever they were deployed to volatile areas. There were also incidents of sneaking some into the office, things that ordinarily would not take place in "normal days."

He went on to note that a colleague was admitted to a psychiatric ward at that time. Upon examination, his case was linked to the images of covering violent deaths. He said that it was important to note that the newsroom did not have a pre- and post-trauma counseling for staff assigned to cover violence.

In observing the long-term impact, Participant 10 said that during the night, he would get dreams related to the Somalia war long after. His colleagues still get nightmares about the same. For that reason, he observed that "anyone involved with the war from Somalia requires a lot of emotional support . . ." This role to provide the emotional support, as he rightly observes, has been taken over by humanitarian organizations. Covering terrorism changed the perspectives and the worldview of the key participants in different ways. Those who were embedded with KDF in Somalia ultimately ended up in hospitals under psychiatric care soon after they came back to Kenya. Participant 10 noted that he had to be counseled as a result of the experiences in war. He observed,

> I realised I had changed as a person when we landed back at Eastleigh Moi Airbase. I could look at people and wonder if they are aliens because of their dress code and everything.

By the time he got back, he was used to the military clothing, guns, and talk of Al-Shabaab. He had only been on the assignment for 30 days. This made him wonder how much damage happens to the soldiers who stay in Somalia for more than a year. To him, such individuals need proper counseling.

Some key participants reported that they withheld their feelings when covering terrorism or related events, but were afraid that the delayed reaction to the violence

ultimately would end up catching up with them. One journalist, filing stories for an international media, noted that their feelings had become numb as a result of witnessing so much violence in the line of work. But ultimately, they admitted that there was a need for them to constantly debrief by visiting psychiatrist. As noted by Participant 11,

> I am not sure that I have feelings when am doing it. I think you sort of do the work and have the feelings later.

In reflecting about this, the participant noted that the danger lies in putting aside the feelings and then having to deal with their recurrence later. Most journalists delay these traumatic feelings, especially since there is no room for them during an assignment. As a trauma journalist, this participant feels that the impact on his work is greater because it relies on trying to imagine the emotional landscape of his interviewee and trying to figure out how to render that to the reader. He further observed,

> I have done it for so long; for instance, before I joined journalism, I spent my childhood interviewing holocaust survivors since I was about 12 years old and I have realised that a lot of what I do is based on the intuition of those early encounters . . . It means that I have honed the skill of talking to people who have been through something traumatic experience.

The catch, for this participant, is to master the ability to allow their interviewees to balance being emotionally accessible with what they are saying. This is especially because they are careful not to make sources feel overly exposed and vulnerable. A journalist in this situation, he says, needs to get the point and attain a narrative to be able to tell the story. For him, this is really a personal idiosyncratic spot in his journalistic practice, a tough balance to be able to do what you need to—sort of utterly empty yourself:

> I think we all screen ourselves out when we have to cover these things. *He added*, I found doing so is needed for the kind of interviewing I do. The job first, the feelings come later. I can't really tell you how it feels to cover a terrorist attack.

As the emotions take a toll on the journalists, they find themselves unable to do their job. One foreign journalist recounted how she was unable to file stories for many days, yet her editors were directing her to send the stories of the Garissa University College attack. She narrated,

> My friend was in Garissa on the same afternoon the attack happened—April second. I got there on April third and we were both there until she left on Saturday and I on Sunday.

By Monday, both journalists were at the mortuary, still chasing the "story." Although she considers her relationship with her editors to be excellent, these editors were impatient when the story was not submitted by that Wednesday. She had to make promises

to file the story later. Even with this, she did not get it emotionally together by the said Wednesday to file the story:

> I was having an emotional experience as I was doing the writing and not succeeding at compartmentalising the two and just couldn't do it. I just told them that I am not done yet and I filed it on Thursday.

Participant 11 further noted that the experience of sitting with the survivors for hours, most of whom were worried they might not live to call their mothers, was a very emotionally tiring experience.

The foreign correspondents that covered terrorism events such as the Garissa University College attack had a different approach to the story. They focused on the victims rather than the violence. Participant 11 further narrates that she felt as though the local journalists were totally missing the story, as that was just not the place to be doing the story she felt needed to be done. She had been a reporter in New York and covered the story of Newtown massacre where children were killed in the elementary school. In the American Press, the journalists focused on details such as who the children were, what stories they could tell, obituaries and families. In essence, she felt that the victims were at the center of the coverage. It was important to these journalists that the victims' families tell their stories. None of that was happening in Kenya, so she was sort of surprised by the focus on the violence, the terrorists, and the government.

The journalists also experienced emotional breakdown and trauma after covering these stories for a long time:

> For me, being able to write the long form story is a way of having an emotional life with the material. At some point, I broke down and cried but even though am pretty trauma aware, it was terrible for the course of my career as I was basically moving from the aftermath of one horrible event after another. I had to deal with the emotional side of the story for myself, which meant I ended up with acute PTSD. It is hard to articulate these feelings yourself, especially when you are aware of the power and privileges of your position, relative to the story you are telling. (Participant 11)

In a diary of the attack that occurred at the Westgate Mall in September 2013, Participant 27 recounted,

> There's no feeling of resolution in this text because there is no official resolution to any of the questions about what happened at Westgate. There is only a memorial on each anniversary.

The participant noted that although the mall reopened in July 2015, it looks much the same as it did before the Al-Shabaab attack, before the army fired that rocket, though there are fewer stores now. The same innocuous music, a fountain drops water into a pool, on a loop. The sound of the water is meant to be soothing and not distract from commerce. Empty storefronts are wallpapered over with life-size photographs and advertisements with people shopping and stores bustling: Something big is coming.

Participant 27, for instance, said that they were fortunate to arrive at the Westgate Mall in 2013 during the active terrorist event. Other participants noted the mixed feelings that came with this coverage. The assignment was exciting in that they were documenting a historical event, but also feared because they would rather it was of a different kind.

According to Participant 27, his coverage of the September 2013 Westgate attack was marked by excitement with a deeper sense of fear because of the adrenaline rush being in an unpredictable and potentially dangerous space. He added,

> Looking back, I feel I was fortunate to have arrived after the police had blocked access to journalists from entering the mall, because knowing myself, I would have gone in.

He ended up documenting from a nearby vantage point. He documented the location and the first responders bringing out casualties from the building. Later, he was posted to the morgues in Nairobi to document the families searching for their loved ones.

Journalists interviewed were lucky to have survived death, although they also suffered physically in various ways. Exhaustion and lack of sleep were some of the physical safety experiences they narrated, while others came to a close brush with death while in the battlefields of Somalia. Participant 8 narrated how the Al-Shabaab insurgents physically attacked them one night as they conducted a live TV broadcast link to their studios in Nairobi from Somalia for a primetime news show. For a journalist to do a live TV broadcast, they have to beam their lights so that the reporter can be visible to the lens of the video camera. It is the beam of light that attracted the attention of the insurgents, who hurled grenades at them, but they survived. The participant said that viewers could watch them on TV as they scampered for safety. The participant observed,

> We were later advised that we should never turn lights on during the night while in the battlefield because that attracts the attention of the enemy. All the subsequent live links had to be done during the day.

In another instance, a journalist and his media house became targeted for publishing terrorism stories as the participant narrated:

> I was breaking these news stories all through until it got to a point where the Jamia Mosque committee summoned me at their offices in Nairobi. They threatened to kill me and to bomb the Standard Group offices where I worked. I was shocked and threatened. It emerged that they knew my sources and they threatened to harm my family. My source in the government was aware of the threats and told me to report the threats at Central Police Station in Nairobi. I was torn. One of the committee members told me if I report the threat to the police, it would escalate as they will be arrested and taken to court. Once we are taken to court, all Muslims will protest against you, and the Standard. So, it was a push and pull between the forces telling me to report and those threatening me not to report. I had to go under for some time—about a week—in 2010 after the Kampala bombing.

The journalist went on to explain how he was duped with a fake invitation to a press conference but the main goal was to send a threat message because of the coverage. This is how it happened:

> The members of the Jamia Mosque Committee pretended that there was a press conference at Jamia Mosque after they saw a story I had done. I had gotten the structure of Al-Shabaab operations in Kenya and in Somalia, and how they were executing their missions, so they were very angry. They insisted that I attend the press conference, so while we were waiting, they said, "Let Xavier (not the participants real name) come in." When I entered, I found a gang of about 20 people seated waiting and the door was locked behind me. One of them, then an MP (Member of Parliament), began to say, "you know you are a Khafir and you are being used to vilify the Muslims, why don't you seek comments from us, you are portraying all Muslims as terrorists."

Because of the gravity of this threat, the journalist was advised by his employer to move from his current residential house and make other lifestyle adjustments, including his social life—where he visited and whom he met. After the confrontation at the mosque, he noted that he was advised to change houses and change his cell phone line before proceeding on leave. He then secured a license to own a gun for his personal protection. He went ahead and noted,

> My family lives out of Nairobi, so for me, it was for personal security. After I owned the gun, I realised that there was no point because those who plan to kill you will do it anyway, so I returned it.

Another journalist based in Mombasa was threatened by radical youths because of his critical coverage of their activities. He said that it took the intervention of his religious community elders to save him from harm from the youth who accused him of "working with the government" in reporting about them.

> This is basically an affront to journalistic freedoms. They want to silence you. (Participant 5)

Discussion

Findings of this study are a reflection of previous cases that have explored lived experiences of journalists covering terrorism. For instance, in some unfortunate cases, the ultimate cost of reporting terrorism is death, like that of London's *Sunday Times* correspondent Marie Colvin in the Middle East (Langer, 2012). In April 2018, nine journalists were killed in Kabul as they covered a terror event. This was after a suicide bomber, disguised as a cameraman, blew himself up in a pack of journalists (Horwitz, 2018). In addition, PTSD and physical injuries are also some of the personal costs of newspeople covering terrorism that are documented (Feinstein et al., 2018).

There were various ways in the Kenyan context, in which the psychological and individual safety of the journalists covering terrorism was at risk. The psychological safety included traumatic experiences leading to sleeplessness and nightmares, loss of memory, and some of them resorting to alcohol abuse. The physical safety concerns for some journalists included threats of death by fanatical (Islamic) religious groups, but also the risk of being killed in the battlefields of Somalia.

The findings touching on the traumatic experiences support the work of Feinstein et al. (2018) on the frequency and severity of trauma among journalists covering conflict, including Kenya's Al-Shabaab terror (specifically the Westgate Mall terror attack in 2013), 9/11 attacks in New York City, Iraq and Syria war. The researchers, collecting data since 1998, observed higher frequency and severity of trauma among journalists exposed to the threat of terrorism, with a relatively high level of PTSD among Kenyan journalists. In their research, Feinstein et al. (2018) had recommended that there was a need to carry out further research on individual journalists since the tool they used to analyze the traumatic experiences was standardized across the sample, and that it was highly quantitative in nature. This study, therefore, complements the work of Feinstein et al. (2018) in this regard, by presenting individual accounts of the journalists involved in the coverage of terrorism and related events in Kenya.

The safety of journalists in the Kenyan context was also highlighted in the work of Nyabuga (2016), who observed that between 2014 and 2015, Kenyan journalists were faced with serious challenges in the course of their work. This period marked the climax of terrorist attacks in the country by the Al-Shabaab. Nyabuga (2016) concluded that threats, harassment, and intimidation, as well as legal and personal attacks on journalists grew tremendously at this period. Curiously, Nyabuga (2016) observed that many of these threats originated from the security organs of the country. This position is actually supported by the journalists interviewed in this study who said that they were harassed and sometimes even taken to custody without legal counsel. Most participants in this research have since visited a professional counselor and said that they were diagnosed with PTSD following the coverage of terrorism and related events.

Recommendations and Conclusion

This study recommends that intense focus should be given to the mental health of the journalists covering terrorism and related events. Journalism schools and other training institutions should work on the development of a curriculum on reporting terrorism, as a new specialization. It should be evidence-based driven. The journalists interviewed noted that they lacked skills, knowledge, and proper approaches to the coverage of terrorism and related events during the period under study, blaming a lack of training as one of those setbacks. In fact, at one point, managing editors simply downloaded from the Internet "how to guides" on reporting terrorism and related events and gave them to the journalists. This underscores an important gap in the training of reporting terrorism and related events for the Kenya-based journalists

working in the local media houses. Training programs on this and peer-to-peer sessions would be some practical approaches to this. Also, local media houses should put in place comprehensive psychological briefing and debriefing protocols for journalists reporting within this specific beat. Finally, evidence drawn from this study suggests that physical and psychological lived experiences of Kenya-based journalists covering terror need reinforced structural interventions at micro, meso, and macro levels.

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