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RISKS AND SURVIVING STRATEGIES OF JOURNALISTS COVERING BANDITRY IN NIGER STATE (2015 TO 2023)

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Abstract
Covering armed violence by non-state actors comes with a lot of risks including killing, kidnapping and psychological trauma. The risks associated with journalism profession is sometime, extended to even the families of the journalists, as they also face threats and some even get killed. Precisely between 2015 and 2023, Niger State citizens in Shiroro, Rafi, Munya and Magama local government areas of Niger State in Nigeria have been traumatized with the recurring attacks by the armed bandits who most of the time operate unchallenged by the security forces. In spite enormity of the risks involved, journalists are still engaged in routine coverage of the victims in the Internally Displaced Persons' Camps, and in their villages. This study was undertaken to uncover the risk management and safety strategies adopted by journalists in the coverage of activities of bandits in Niger State, Nigeria without existing viable safety protocols. This study relied on Social Responsibility Theory with its focus on ethics in media practice. This study covered only journalists in national newspapers and broadcast media organisations in Niger State. Seventy-two correspondents who are professional journalists covering news for national newspapers and electronic media constitute the population of this study. The study collected data using questionnaire. The study concludes that reporting banditry in Niger State comes with a lot of risks, yet, journalists working in the state have been mitigating risks due to their commitment to the ethics of their profession. There are support from authorities in form of training, provision of gadgets and policy support for security reporters. However, life insurance support should be part of what journalists covering security beats are expected to enjoin in case of fatal accident in their line of duty.
Keywords: Risk, Survival, Strategy, Safety, Security, Journalist, Banditry

1.1 Introduction

It was reported by Daily Trust Newspaper that from 2015 to 2021 that there were abuses and violations against about 500 journalists and 7 unresolved killings which affected 300 media professionals in the media houses in Nigeria (March 3 2022 Abdulyassar Abdulhamid). Safety of journalists has continued to attract attention of the global community due to rising insecurity especially in developing countries, which requires media coverage, especially to guard the public against falling victims of violent non-state actors such as bandits. Specifically, the recent recurring insecurity, occasioned by the armed banditry in some parts of Nigeria, including Niger State has exposed the non-existence viable safety policy in Nigeria. but amidst of the armed violence and killings by the armed terrorism groups and other violent non-state actors like bandits, journalists demonstrated their resilience to report, knowing the severe consequences for their safety and professional integrity. Some were

killed, many injured, and most were threatened by armed non-state actors and authorities in the cause of reporting the events (Pate and Idris, 2017). The challenges these reporters face in the discharge of their social responsibility of keeping the public informed have not attracted adequate documentation, especially in third world countries including Nigeria.

Empirical evidence reveals that there is no visible safety and knowledge of any surviving strategy of risk management adopted by news reporters covering wars and violence even in the height of insecurity induced by the violent armed non-state actors.

1.2 Statement of the research problem

Niger State has of recent fallen among the few states severely hit by attacks of armed bandits. The attacks have become perennial especially in Local Governments of Shiroro, Munya, Rafi among others. Most of these attacks are mostly read on social media especially the facebook as reported by the survivors of the attacks. Against this backdrop, The International Declaration on the Protection of Journalists was released in 2015 to support the Global Safety Principles and Practices of journalism profession. The Declaration emphasizes the responsibilities of governments and relevant institutions to protect journalists and offered best practices for media organizations that highlight steps they and their staff can take to create safer conditions for media workers especially during the coverage of the violence or war (International Women's Media Foundation, 2016).

Specifically, in events of this nature, Pate (2015) points out that most journalists are not covered by any kind of insurance in the event of injury or death. Until of recent when Nigeria Union of Journalists began facilitating the insurance coverage for its members, Journalists were left to survive on their own means and devices as their employers did not provide them with such cover. Some journalists have suffered abuses while covering events of this nature, exposed to health hazards, violations of their rights, among others. The media organisations, however, lack the capacity and resources to provide the required safety cover their reporters (Adam and Akote, 2020). The problem of this study is that media houses who are employers of journalists seem not to have capacity or the resources to provide safety and security or forms of insurance for journalists reporting high risk events involving bandits in Niger State.

1.3 Research Questions of the Study

1. How are the journalists covering banditry shielded under safety and protective measures in Niger State from 2015 to 2023?
2. What are the identified survival strategies adopted by journalists covering banditry in Niger State from 2015 to 2023?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To find out if Journalists covering banditry are shielded under any safety and protective measures in place in Niger State 2015 to 2023.
2. To identify survival strategies adopted by journalists covering banditry in Niger State 2015 to 2023.

1.5 Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses will serve as guide to the study:

Hypothesis 1: The level at which journalists covering banditry are shielded under any safety and protective measures in place in Niger State 2015 to 2022 is not significant.

Hypothesis 2: The survival strategies adopted by journalists covering banditry in Niger State 2015 to 2022 is not significant.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study is significant and fits into teaching, research and advocacy goals in two major ways – to the body of knowledge and to the society. The study is a contribution to enrichment of the existing literature on the surviving strategies, safety and protection of journalists in Nigeria covering insecurity in Nigeria. It will provide data for advocacy on the safety and protection of journalists. Finding in this research can fit into teaching module that can be used in academic settings to train professional journalists whose contributions to the national development shall be appreciated.

The study is significant in two major ways – to the body of knowledge and to the society. The study is a contribution to enrichment of the existing literatures on the surviving strategies, safety and protection of journalists in Nigeria covering insecurity in Nigeria. it can be used in academics to build professional and enduring journalists whose contributions to the national development shall be appreciated.

Secondly, the study will enrich the knowledge and understanding of the public on the challenges of the journalists face in the discharge of their social responsibilities of keeping the public abreast with happenings around them.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study covered only Journalists national newspapers and broadcast media organisations in Niger State. This covered 87 correspondents of the national and local media organisations in Niger State. Hoverver, this paper focuses on the qualitative aspect of the data collected in the field. The study covered activities of bandits and its reportage by journalists from 2015 to 2023. This period signifies the time when the incidences of banditry took another dimension in which students in secondary schools are being kidnapped by bandits from ransom. It has been turned to a commercial activity by the bandits hiding in rural setting. This has made their activities to gain more attention in the media in Nigeria and beyond.

2.1 Literature Review

Insurgency and banditry are major security challenges that are restricting fundamental human rights of citizens in Nigeria in this democratic dispensation. Its consolidation has to do with freedom of speech and journalists are at the centre of pursuit of these ideal. Journalist reportage of events involving insurgents and bandits have made journalists to become target of these non-state violent actors (Hamza and Ayodele, 2020). On the other hand, the government is also suspicious of journalsits in due to the ways, attention has been given to events involving these non-state violent actors. The journalist is now at the receiving end of both the non-state violent actors and the government. Thus, the attention of scholars and researcher on the conflict between the media and the military is a way of scrutinizing the role of the journalist in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria (Hamza and Joseph, 2021).

At no time has journalists faced high level risks and dangers to their personal, professional and institutional safety in Nigeria as they currently do under heightened insecurity caused by violent non-state actors. Securing safety of journalists is a prominent issue in several party of the world because of the recurring attacks on journalists (Berger, 2017). At no time has journalists faced high level risks and dangers to their personal, professional and institutional safety in Nigeria as they currently do under heightened insecurity caused by violent non-state actors (Pate and Idris, 2017). The factors that pose threats journalists include conflicts, civil unrest, hit squads, rogue militias, rape and other gender--based attacks, digital harassment, emotional trauma, drug cartels, bombs and crossfire. Unfortunately, many media

organizations, particularly in the developing world like Nigeria, cannot afford resources that might make journalists safe, such as security training, legal aid, encryption software, flak jackets, and bodyguards (International Women's Media Foundation, 2016).

Many journalists are being killed and threatened across the globe (Cottle, 2017). The recurring attacks by the armed bandits in Niger State has further opened journalism profession and practitioners to temptation, dangers and expensive risks. According to Akote (2012), the world over, many journalists had been killed, due to no carelessness of theirs. Amnesty International and other Human rights groups have records of events that exposed the dangers, trials and tribulations that journalists go through in developing countries in the cause of doing their job. Marcesse (2017) points out that journalists have in several occasions fall victim of armed conflicts and physical violence as well as psychological and digital attacks. Therefore, reporting armed conflict such as banditry attacks can be life-threatening that require the adaption to some risk management skills by the practitioners.

In addition, journalists usually suffer collateral damages being killed or injured by the stray bullets, they are in most cases direct targets of the of conflict actors (Sarikakis, 2017). In Nigeria, in particular, persistent insecurity, from terrorism to armed banditry and Fulani herdsmen attacks have revealed the dangerous trends that journalism profession has experienced and the murderous, perfidious encounters of the journalists over the years. Cottle (2017) notes that a several global trends and endemic conflicts have positioned journalists "at increased risk and in harm's way" (p. 22).

Journalists have continued to risk their lives in order to discharge their roles as information providers of happenings for public. To succeed in this challenging profession, requires skills and proper knowledge of risk management and safety protocols, either those develop by the professional bodies or those creatively adopted by journalists, themselves. The importance of media cannot be underestimated because of its central role in the dissemination of information on issues happening in the society. Mass Media do not only bring the daily happenings to the knowledge of the citizens; they also serve as survey the environment and set agenda for the people. Through surveillance function, media scans the environment and report dangers to citizens. Against this backdrop, mass media have become a vital part of social, political, economic, and environmental situations. The role of the mass media in any crisis or disaster cannot be denied, as the media facilitate access to information for government, policy makers, and citizens to assist in managing the situation (Ghassabi and Zare-Farashbandi, 2015).

However, in spite these significant roles, media practitioners have continued to face challenges – many of have been killed, jailed, while trying to report violence or wars. Even with series of global safety pronouncements and agitations, journalism remains an unsafe profession as evidenced by the number of journalists killed or injured annually in the desire to be at the scene of the action and gain dramatic stories for their respective media organisations (Rudin and Ibbotson, 2002). Violence, war and riots, disruptive mobs, targeted attacks by terrorist groups, can all pose potential risks to safety of journalists. Journalists also face threats and physical harm from terrorists in the cause of their jobs. To successfully do the job, a journalist ought device way to manage any potential risks.

Consequently, the Nigerian Constitution recognizes the importance of journalists in keeping the public informed of happening, as they also hold leaders accountable for their stewardships, but it "does not accord journalists any specified safety and protection

framework" (Pate and Idris, 2017, p. 161). Unaegbu (2017) also raises concern on the safety and protection of Nigerian journalists.

2.2 Theoretical framework

This study will rely on Social Responsibility Theory. The theory focuses ethics in media practice. How actions of the media are guided by rules. The obligation towards the environment are very important elements that should serve as code of operation for media professionals and organisations (which include, the social, cultural, political, economic and other spheres in the society). Media freedom is not devoid of responsibilities that must be carried out. These responsibilities are the promotion of the socio-cultural life of the society and the environment in relation to the economy of the life of the people that it serves. Siebert, Peterson and Scramm (1956) are the ones who espoused the theory. They posit that the freedom of the media means that it must be free from any form of control in order to be socially responsible to the society within the temporal and spatial setting in which they operate.

The major assumption of the social responsibility theory is its demand for equal access for the people to the mass media mass communication channels (Sambe, 2008). All forms of obstructions to access to the mass media must be removes. The media should be responsible in performing their role as a public service in disseminating proper information and responding to the needs and aspirations of the society. It should also respond to the aspirations of the people to improve the quality of life of the people it serves (Nkwocha, 1991).

2.3 Gap in literature

Banditry is one of the numerous security challenges that have further amplified risk side of the journalism profession especially in developing countries including Nigeria. There are no studies on the challenges of safety and security regarding journalist in their line of duty while reporting banditry events in Niger State using quantitative techniques and interview.

Empirical evidence reveals that there is no visible safety and knowledge of any surviving strategy of risk management adopted by news reporters covering wars and violence even in the height of insecurity induced by the violent armed non-state actors in globally and in Nigeria. This is why renown journalists are being killed at the war front year in year out.

3.1 Methodology

Quantitative research technique was adopted in the collection of primary data. Questionnaire items were distributed to media professional practitioners. The research covered reportage activities of bandits by journalists from 2015 to 2023. This period signifies the time when the incidences of banditry took another dimension in which students in secondary schools are being kidnapped by bandits from ransom. It has been turned to a commercial activity by the bandits hiding in rural setting. This has made their activities to gain more attention in the media in Nigeria and beyond.

The journalists within the defined parameter are those registered with the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ). Seventy-two questionnaire items were administered. The reporters were from print and electronics media. The correspondents from print media are from People's Daily Newspaper, Leadership Newspaper and Aljazira Newspaper. Those from radio are from Prestige FM Radio and Radio Niger. Others are from Niger State Television and Federal Ministry of Information.

3.2 Instrument and Method of Data Collection

The data was generated through questionnaire administered to Journalists reporting for national newspapers and broadcast media in Niger State. Although, the study also carried out a qualitative study, this article only concentrated on the quantitative data. The qualitative data was the preoccupation of an initial report on this same study. This report is a follow up to the findings of the qualitative paper.

3.3 Method of Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected through the use of questionnaire was uploaded to SPSS 26.0 and a contingency table showing frequency and simple percentages was generated. The hypotheses were analysed using chi-square. The two major variables are safety and protective measures and survival strategies adopted by journalists reporting banditry attacks in Niger State from 2015 to 2022.

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 72 questionnaires were distributed and 52 were retrieved. The 52 correspondents of national print, broadcast and online media organisations recognized by the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) as members in Niger State constituted the population of the study. The journalists were are the correspondents of national media organisation engaged more in coverage of the activities of bandits in the state.

4.2 Demographic Data of Respondents

The social demographic characteristics of correspondents are presented and explained in this segment.

Table 1: Age of respondents

Age Range	Output	Percentage
18-27	4	7.7
28-37	9	17.3
38-47	18	34.6
48-57	17	32.7
57 above	4	7.7
Total	52	100

Source: Field work, 2023

Table 1 represents the ages of the censured respondents who cover banditry in Niger State, North-Central Nigeria. as shown in the table, 18 journalists accounting for 34.6 percent were between the ages of 38 and 47 years; 17 journalists representing 32.7 percent were between the ages of 48 years and 57 years; 9 of the censured journalists accounting for 17.3 percent were 28 to 37 years old; 4 journalists accounting for 7.7 percent were of 18 to 27 years while 4 other journalists representing 7.7 percent were 57 and above years old.

Table 2: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Qualification	Output	Percentage
SSCE	-	-
ND/NCE	12	23.1
B. Sc/HND	32	61.5
M.Sc.	8	15.4

PhD	-	-
Total	52	100

Source: Field work, 2023

The educational qualification of the censured journalists ranged from National Diploma (ND) and Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) to Bachelor of Science degrees, Higher National Diploma and Master of Science Degree. Of the total number of journalists censured in this study, 32 of them representing 61.5 percent had Bachelor of Science degree and its equivalent; 12 journalists representing 23.1 percent had National Diploma and Nigerian Certificate in Education while 8 others representing 15.4 percent had Master of Science Degree.

Table 3: Media organisations of respondents

Media category	Number of Journalists	Percentage
Newspaper	26	50
Television	6	11.5
Radio	13	25
Online media	7	13.5
Total	52	100

Source: Field work, 2023

Forty-three of these journalists have had more than 5 years of experience in journalism practice including the coverage of banditry in Niger State. Forty-six journalists cover banditry in Niger State but only 27 of them report regularly in Niger State.

Table 4: Years of Experience of respondents

Years of Experience	Output	Percentage
Below 5 years	10	19.2
Above 10 years	34	65.4
Above 20 years	8	15.4
Total	52	100

Source: Field work, 2023

The censured journalists have had varying years of experiences in journalism practice. Of the censured journalists, 34 of them representing 65.4 percent have had over years of experience in journalism practice; 10 of them representing 19.2 percent have had below 5 years of experience in the practice while 8 others representing 15.4 percent have had over 20 years experience in journalism practice.

Table 5: Positions of Respondents

Position	Output	Percentage
Editor/News Manager	11	21.2
Reporter/Correspondent	41	78.8
Total	52	100

Source: Field work, 2023

Forty-one of the total number of censured journalists representing 78.8 percent were reporters and State Correspondents from various media organisations across the country while 11 others representing 21.2 percent were editors and manger news from various media organisations.

Table 6: Years as Niger State Correspondent

Years as Niger State Correspondents	Output	Percentage
1-2 years	4	7.7
3-4 years	5	9.6
5 years and above	43	82.7
Total	52	100

Source: Field work, 2023

The data in table 6 represents the years censured journalists have spent as correspondents and reporters in Niger State. Forty-three of the total number of censured journalists representing 82.7 percent have spent 5 years and above as correspondents in Niger State; 5 journalists representing 9.6 percent have spent between 3 and 4 years reporting from Niger State while 4 others, representing 7.7 percent have spent 1 to 2 years as Correspondents in Niger State.

Table 7: Respondents who cover bandits' attacks

Do you cover banditry in Niger State?	Output	Percentage
Yes	52	52
No	-	-
Total	52	100

Source: Field work, 2023

The respondents indicted they all report activities of bandits either the plights of victims or attacks by the non-state actors including casualty figures, humanitarian crisis in IDP camps, disruption of economic activities in the affected communities among other events related to the banditry. The response represents 100 percent validity.

Table 8: Frequency of coverage by respondents

Frequency of Coverage	Output	Percentage
Every Attack/event	27	51.9
Selected attacks/events	25	48.1
Total	52	100

Source: Field work, 2023

The number of correspondents who every activity of bandits bother from the attacks to plights of victims were 27 accounting for 51.9 percent while those who reported selected events were 25 in number accounting for 48.1 percent. The data shows that every censured journalist reports activities of bandits but not all reports every events.

Table 9: How respondents source information about attacks/events

Variables	Output	Percentage
Visitation to scenes of attacks/phone calls	9	17.3
Telephone calls to victims	19	36.5
Govt and police reports	8	15.4
Telephone calls and police/govt reports	7	13.5
Visit, phone calls and govt/police reports	9	17.3
Total	52	100

Source: Field work, 2023

Nine journalists accounting for 17.3 percent indicated that they combined visitations to the scenes of attacks and affected communities with phone calls to source information for their reports; 19 journalists, being the highest in number accounting for 36.5 percent make only telephone calls to the victims and sources of information for their report; 8 journalists, accounting for 15.4 only reported information obtained from the government and police as

authorities; 7 journalists accounting for 13.5 combined telephone calls with victims with information from police and government officials while 9 journalists accounting for 17.3 visit communities attacked by bandits to get information as well as making phone calls while also using government and police reports as sources of information.

Table 10: Insurance policy for of respondents (journalists who cover bandits' attacks)

Do you cover banditry in Niger State?	Output	Percentage
Yes	-	-
No	52	52
Total	52	100

Source: Field work, 2023

All the respondents indicated that they have no insurance policy cover for reporting high risk events like activities of bandits who are violent non-state actors or visiting affected communities among other events related to the banditry. The response represents 100 percent validity.

4.3 Test of hypotheses

The two hypotheses of this study on safety and protection and survival strategies of journalists will be tested in this segment.

Table 10: Safety and protective measures for journalists covering banditry

Measure	Chi-Square Value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Safety Policy	52.000	1	.000
Flak Jacket	4.240	1	.039

Source: computed on SPSS 26.0 from field data

Hypothesis 1: Journalists covering banditry are not shielded under any safety and protective measures in place in Niger State 2015 to 2022.

Interpretation:

The chi-square test results indicate that all the safety measures (Safety Policy and Flak Jacket) are significant with p-values less than 0.05. This indicates that there are statistically significant associations between journalists' safety measures and their adoption rates. Since a significant proportion of journalists have access to some form of safety measures (training, and flak jackets), we reject the null hypothesis Ho1, which states that journalists covering banditry are not shielded under any safety and protective measures in place in Niger State from 2015 to 2022.

Table 11: Survival strategies adopted for journalists covering banditry

Measure	Chi-Square Value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Training Attendance	28.000	1	.000
Legal Aid	17.280	1	.000
Encryption Software	12.600	1	.000

Source: computed on SPSS 26.0 from field data

Hypothesis 2: There are no survival strategies adopted by journalists covering banditry in Niger State 2015 to 2022.

Interpretation:
The chi-square test results indicate that all the safety measures Training Attendance, Legal Aid and Encryption Software) are significant with p-values less than 0.05. This indicates that there are statistically significant associations between journalists' safety measures and their adoption rates. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis Ho2, which states that there are no survival strategies adopted by journalists covering banditry in Niger State from 2015 to 2022. The evidence strongly supports that journalists have indeed adopted various survival strategies.

Policy implications
This research serves as source of data for advocacy on the safety and protection of journalists. Finding in this research fits into teaching module that can be used in academic settings to train professional journalists whose contributions to the national development shall be appreciated. Secondly, the study enriches the knowledge and understanding of the public on the challenges that journalists face in keeping the public abreast with happenings around them. Policy recommendations are made to strengthen the safety and protection of journalists by both government and privately owned media houses who are the employers of journalists. The consolidation of democracy could be achieved if the safety and security of journalists could be taken care off in Niger State and Nigeria.

Conclusion
The consolidation of democracy could be achieved if the safety and security of journalists is taken care off in Niger State and Nigeria. Reporting banditry in Niger State comes with a lot of risks and dangers. But despite the obvious risks associated with the coverage of attacks, journalists working in the state have no any form of insurance cover, support from authorities as well as training on the rudiments of security reporting.
This research provides data for advocacy on the safety and protection of journalists. Finding in this research fits into teaching module that can be used in academic settings to train professional journalists whose contributions to the national development shall be appreciated. The study enriches the knowledge and understanding of the public on the challenges that journalists face in keeping the public abreast with happenings around them.

Recommendations
In view of the conclusion of this study, it is recommended that

- International organisations like the United Nations, international Labour Organisation and other critical stakeholders should come up with strategies, plan of action or ways to protect journalists especially in Niger State. Niger State is one of the volatile states due to a decade of activities of bandits as well as Boko Haram. And while journalists working in the state are always ready to cover the issues holistically, protection and their safety are not guaranteed.
- Media organisations as employers of these reporters are not also living up to their responsibilities of ensuring the safety and protection of these journalists. After they are employed to do the job, journalists are left to survive on their own. Therefore, a law should be enacted to force media organisations to prioritise the welfare of Journalists and make it mandatory for every media Organization to implement good welfare package for their reporters.
- Both government and privately owned media houses who are the employers of journalists should strengthen the safety and protection of journalists during the discharge of their professional duties.

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