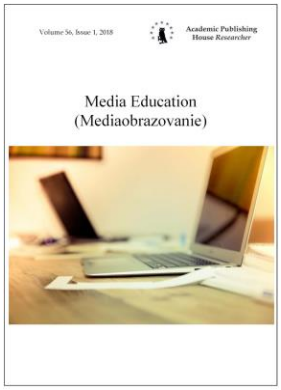
Copyright © 2021 by Academic Publishing House Researcher s.r.o.

Published in the Slovak Republic
Media Education (Mediaobrazovanie)
Has been issued since 2005
ISSN 1994-4160
E-ISSN 2729-8132
2021. 17(2): 217-230

DOI: 10.13187/me.2021.2.217
www.ejournal53.com



Challenges in Covering Women and Girls' Issues: Insights from Journalistic Practices in Bangladesh

Jewel Das [a, *]

[a] Dept. of Journalism and Media Studies, Port City International University, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Abstract

As a deep-rooted patriarchal and traditional value-centric society, women and girls are often treated as inferior to men to participate in key aspects of their socioeconomic lives in Bangladesh. This ill fate has made the female community vulnerable to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). Achieving the SDG's highly depends on the actual portrayal of women and girls by media professionals. However, media professionals, especially, journalists are yet facing deep challenges in covering news on women and girls' issues. The portrayal of women and girls in news thus remains poor and stereotyped. Under the given context what challenges journalists are facing in covering women and girls' issues and how to overcome these that are unidentified yet. Based on survey of 26 journalists working in Chittagong, an industrially developed south-eastern district of Bangladesh, and nine (9) in-depth interviews from gender and media analysts, this study explores to what extent socio-cultural attitudes, customs and practices and policies of media challenge the journalists in covering women or gender issues. The findings show that the challenges are ranged from 'very challenging' to 'somewhat challenging' to most of the journalists. The study suggests that trainings and workshops for journalists and rethinking media policies for information literacy can be effective tools for overcoming the challenges.

Keywords: gender inequalities, media professionals, media portrayal, SDGs, SEM.

1. Introduction

Despite different initiatives taken for ensuring gender equality in all sphere of society, women and girls are still considered inferior to men by many norms, cultures and traditions (Sultana, 2010), whether in developed, developing, or undeveloped societies. Inflexible socioeconomic conditions, rigid socio-cultural attitudes, religious factors, traditional customs and practices of the societies are the prime reasons to look upon women and girls in such a manner (Sharma, 2017). Societies having such harmful traditional cultural values and practices (Maluleke, 2012) "restrict women's mobility and reject their freedom over themselves" (Sultana, 2010: 7), often resulting in gender inequalities, marginalization and low prioritization of women and girls' rights.

Like the mentioned societies, women and girls' issues are also considered as low prioritized matters in Bangladesh, though women and girls constitute almost half of the total population of the country (BBS, 2017). Having highly patriarchal norms and traditions, women's access to social, economic, political and legal institutions is mainly mediated by men (Baden et al., 1994). Although women and girls are the prime assets for the development of a country (Kumari, Joshi, 2015), yet there

* Corresponding author
E-mail addresses: dasson143@gmail.com (J. Das)

is a higher level of gender gap between male and female in Bangladesh (Begum, 2005). This kind of gender gap is often responsible for the denial of women and girls' access to basic human rights (UNFPA, 2006). In such socio-cultural context, exploitation, oppression and underestimation of capabilities are pre-defined for women and girls (Nagindrappa, Radhika, 2013; Sultana, 2010). This ill fate has made the female community vulnerable to achieving development goals.

However, empirical evidence indicates that the scenario is being changed through some initiatives of government and non-governmental organizations. For instance, The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1979 adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) for legalizing elimination of all sort of violence against women. The CEDAW obligates state as the actor to ensure equal right to men and women, protection of discrimination against women and legal framework to address the prevailing inequality or discrimination (Fardosh, 2013). Besides, the SDG-5 of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) directly addresses and calls for achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls everywhere (UN, 2017). Achieving the SDG-5 highly depends on the actual portrayal of women and girls by media professionals. A. Kumari and H. Joshi confirm that the media has always been recognized as a significant tool of social transformation and social change. It has the power to mobilize people through building and shaping public opinion in society (Kumari, Joshi, 2015).

Under the given context, the 2030 agenda for sustainable development of the United Nations gives emphasis on enhancing information and communications to promote empowerment of women. The United Nations' 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing also called on media owners and professionals to develop and adopt codes or guidelines to promote a fair and accurate portrayal of women in the media (MAHR, 1996). In 2015, UNESCO signed an agreement with the International Network on Gender, Media and ICTs concerning the objectives of producing and publishing reliable evidence and data on gender, media and ICTs, particularly, comprehensive data on gender (Lourenco, 2016). Everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women and girls (UN, 1995). Media as well the media professionals can promote the women-centered sustainable development.

However, media professionals, especially, journalists are yet facing deep challenges in covering news on women and girls' issues of a gender sensitive society in which they live and execute professional duties. The political and economic determinants and community's cultural environment impact journalistic practice and news content (Hanusch, 2015). Journalists are also influenced by their morals, beliefs and opinions or internal factors when making news decisions, as well as, by external matters such as their news organization, guidelines and universal ethics (Gracia, 2015). J.T. Wood (Wood, 1994) describes that news media portray gender in stereotypical ways that reflect and sustain socially endorsed views of gender. The portrayal of women and girls in news thus remains poor and stereotyped.

K.M. Garcia asserts that "the way that a journalist works in the field and produces the news has been studied for many years" (Gracia, 2015: 6). In this line of studies, there had been researches in Bangladesh on female journalists' professional challenges (Safa, Akter, 2015) and gender representation on media. But, what challenges journalists encounter in covering women and girls' issues and how to overcome these that are unidentified yet. So, this study has been undertaken with a view to identifying the dimensions of the challenges. The main objective of the study is to explore to what extent socioeconomic and socio-cultural approaches challenge the journalists in covering news on women and girls or gender issues. The study based on the main objective also aims:

- To know the professional background of journalists;
- To discover journalistic trend to cover news on women and girls;
- To assess journalists' awareness and understanding level of gender issues, and
- To identify the ways of overcoming the challenges of news coverage on women and girls.

The study explores how personal beliefs, socio-cultural attitudes, customs and practices, and policies of media and state challenge the journalists in covering gender issues.

2. Materials and methods

The area of this study is Chittagong, an industrially developed south-eastern district of Bangladesh. This area had been selected as it was convenient for the researcher to collect data

within short time period as well as for research's easy accesses to the location. Furthermore, this research area represents distinct socio-cultural natures and social setting.

The study was conducted based on quantitative and qualitative research approach. A total of 26 samples of journalists working in different media in Chittagong were surveyed for the study. Using a convenient sampling technique, all the 26 journalists were drawn from television channels, national and local newspapers and online news media functioning in Chittagong region. Further, nine (9) in-depth interviews from gender and media analysts were also conducted for getting more clear ideas on the topic.

For quantitative study, a self-constructed survey questionnaire was administrated to collect primary data considering the objectives of the study. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions. It included close ended demographic questions (e.g. gender, age, education level, marital status, religion, ethnicity, etc.) and profession relating questions (e.g. work experiences, work areas, salary, etc.). It, within five-point Likert scale, also included questions relevant to the research topic.

For qualitative study, on the other hand, in-depth interview tool was applied. According to Ostbye researchers can test their own theories and hypothesis in qualitative interviews (in: Haland-Solheim, 2017), The in-depth interviewees (e.g. media and gender analyst) were asked mainly two open ended questions: 1) 'What kind of socio-economic and socio-cultural matters challenge the journalists in covering women and girls' issues for news and how?' and 2) 'Give your suggestions on how to address or overcome these challenges'.

Survey and in-depth interview data were collected between October, 2018 and November, 2018 by the researchers' initiatives. Both primary and secondary data sources were used for the study. Data analysis was done by using computer assisted software e.g. MS Excel and SPSS. Different statistical functions e.g. frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation were measured to analyze the answers given by the respondents. Data of in-depth interviews were also systematically analyzed.

3. Discussion

The literature review finds the relevance of the present study. There had been numerous studies to investigate women and girls' stereotyped portrayal on media. Aiming to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment in and through media of all forms, International Programme for the Development of Communication [IPDC] confirmed that media have the potential to propagate and perpetuate or to ameliorate inequalities and gender stereotypes as these exist in social structures and the minds of people (IPDC, 2012). IPDC recognized "the conscious or unconscious biases that many media professionals, both men and women, sometimes have towards one-sidedly reductionist masculinist perspectives is partially due to the lack of capacity to report on women and gender more broadly" (IPDC, 2012: 5). A guide for journalists published by Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual (MCEDSV) explained that more often media attention focuses on cases which reinforce stereotypes of sexual assault perpetrators as "sick," mentally ill, lower class, or a member of a minority or ethnic group. This guide provided insight into new trends and assist journalists in developing strategies to accurately frame the public discussion on sexual assault (MCEDSV, 2004).

A recent study by J. Fardosh confirmed patriarchal psychological domination, cultural or religious dogma, norms and superstitions are some of the major issues considered as the major factors for violent activities against women in Bangladesh. She, in her paper, highlighted the significant role of different media in disseminating information and awareness raising campaigns against women violence (Fardosh, 2013). Seminal contributions have been made by E.J. Mujkic. He undertook a research in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a part of the efforts to stop violence against women which gave importance on the media reporting in line with ethical and professional standards (Mujkic, 2016).

Some studies confirm that journalists find religious views as a challenging factor in their work. A comprehensive description can be found in a study on the struggles of Arab Palestinian journalists working in Israel. It is also well acknowledged that religious views, ethnic culture, social pressures, financial difficulties, traditional customs, workplace conditions and life security are the challenges to journalistic professionalism (Jamal, Awaisi, 2012). The qualitative study mentioned an interview contented as: "It is hard to work in a newspaper with ideological and religious views. For example, there is a problem with anything related to women. You can't publish a photo of an unveiled woman."

However, it has been discussed by a number of authors that journalists' news making ways are often influenced by the society in which they live and execute their professional duties. Squires and Adoni claimed that there is a problem of social affiliation and journalists' potentially conflicting obligations between the society to which they belong and their profession (as cited in Jamal, Awaisi, 2012). Zhu in a secondary analysis comparing media role perceptions among journalists in China, Taiwan, and the United States, found that societal influences have the strongest impact on journalists' view about media roles (Zhu et al., 1997).

Different theories have been proposed to analyze the cultural context and its influences on journalists. Peterson indicated that the cultural background of journalists and correspondents is important in selecting and gathering news (as cited in Al-Hasani, 2008). By using the culturological approach, M. Schudson introduced a new dimension to news production studies. He also viewed that media are influenced by the culture (Schudson, 1989). A study by M. Haland-Solheim on journalistic values and challenges is well documented one. The study identified that autonomy as one of the most important journalistic values. That means journalists' work is not to be influenced by anyone but themselves. The study examined that journalists face challenges to apply this core value to their work (Haland-Solheim, 2017). Under the given context, M.E. Lourenco (Lourenco, 2016) gave extensive insights into the articulations of academic studies, media organizations and media professionals.

However, none of the reviewed literatures explored the socio-cultural attitudes, customs and practices and the policies of media organizations as the challenges for journalists in covering news on women and girls issues. Furthermore, no complete and defined study was previously conducted for evaluating to what extent these are challenging for journalists, though covering women issues are gender sensitive matters in Bangladesh and beyond. This lack of research leaves a wide gulf in our knowledge of socioeconomic circumstances, socio-cultural customs and practices and their influences over journalists, their capabilities to report making and media policies in Bangladesh. Understanding the context in a clear way would assist us in finding adequate answers to overcome the persisting problem. So, a new approach is needed to explore the challenges for journalists in covering women and girls issues for news.

4. Results

Quantitative description

The findings based on quantitative data collected for the study have been presented as follows:

Background of journalists in Chittagong

Table 1 and Table 2 show that the average scenario of journalism in Chittagong is mainly male (77 %) dominated profession where most of the journalists religiously hold Islamic beliefs (77 %) and ethnically belong to Bengali identity affiliated to Chittagong culture (81 %). According to N. Kabeer (Kabeer, 2000), the inhabitants of Chittagong are generally considered to be more conservative than the rest of the country. Under this context, women's participation in journalism profession is discouraged by the social norms of this region. So, women's participation in this craft is still disappointingly low (Ullah, Akhter, 2016), comparing to the male journalists. The study demonstrates that only 06 (23 %) are female journalists out of 26 respondents.

Table 1. Properties of Journalists' Demography (1)

Items		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean	S.D
Gender	Male	20	77	N/A	N/A
	Female	06	23		
	Others	00	0		
	Total	26	100		
Age (in years)	16-25	03	11.54	33.19	9.19
	26-35	17	65.38		
		03	11.54		
		02	7.69		
	56-65	01	3.85		
	Total	26	100		

Marital Status	Married	12	46	N/A	N/A
	Unmarried	13	50		
	Others	01	4		
	Total	26	100		

Note: Researchers own field survey

On average, journalists of Chittagong are 33.19 years old (SD=9.19). Holding a strong academic background with college or university degree as well as journalism degree, they are contributing to the media sector in Chittagong. Of the 26 respondents in this study, 80.77 % journalists have post-graduate degree, whereas, 11.53 % holds graduate degree and 54 % of the total respondents have a specialized degree either in journalism or communication (Table 2).

Table 2. Properties of Journalists' Demography (2)

Items		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean	S.D
Religion	Islam	20	77	N/A	N/A
	Hinduism	05	19		
	Buddhism	01	4		
	Christianity	00	0		
	Others	00	0		
	Total	26	100		
Ethnicity	Chittagong based Bengali	21	81	N/A	N/A
	Non-Chittagong Bengali	05	19		
	Hill tract tribe	00	0		
	Plane land tribe	00	0		
	Others	00	0		
	Total	26	100		
Education Level	Post-graduation	21	80.77	N/A	N/A
	Graduation	03	11.53		
	Higher Secondary	01	3.85		
	Secondary	00	0		
	Others	01	3.85		
	Total	26	100		
Journalism Degree	Yes	14	54	N/A	N/A
	No	12	46		
	Total	26	100		

Note: Researchers own field survey

Field survey of this study (Figure 1) finds that out of 26 respondents, 26.92 % journalists are in senior level position (e.g. Executive news producer, Bureau chief, Head of news, senior reporter, etc.), 50 % are in mid-level position (e.g. Staff reporter, Staff correspondent, etc.) and 23.08 % journalists are in entry-level position (e.g. Reporter).

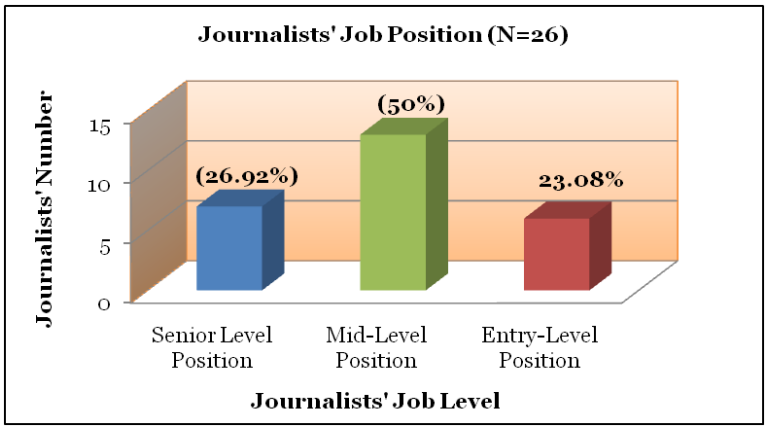


Fig. 1. Percentage of respondents' job position

Journalists' professional information

Table 3 shows that the average work experience of journalists working in Chittagong is 7.61 years (SD=4.54), and 30.79 % of them have six to ten years of professional experience. Of the 26 respondents, 62 % journalists, by their employment term, are full time employee but get a consolidate salary from their media houses. Only 38 % journalists indicated that they get wage board based salary with full time employment term. Whether wage board salary or consolidate salary, the average salary of the respondent journalists is BDT 24,807 and most of them (42 %) get a monthly salary ranged from BDT 20 thousands to 40 thousands.

Table 3. Professional Information of Journalists

Items		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean	S.D
Work Experience	0-2 years	6	23.07	7.61	4.54
	3-5 years	6	23.07		
	6-10 years	8	30.79		
	11-15 years	6	23.07		
	Total	26	100		
Employment Term	Full time (wage board based)	10	38	N/A	N/A
	Full time (consolidate salary based)	16	62		
	Part-time	00	0		
	Freelancer	00	0		
	Others	00	0		
	Total	26	100		
Produced News Number	0-2 News	3	80.77	6.42	3.06
	3-5 News	7	11.53		
	6-8 News	8	3.85		
	9-11 News	8	0		
	Total	26	100		
Monthly Salary (in BDT)	Less than 10 thousands	4	15	24,807 BDT	N/A
	10-20 thousands	7	27		
	20-40 thousands	11	42		
	40-50 thousands	3	12		
	50-60 thousands	1	4		
	Total	26	100		

Note: Researchers own field survey.

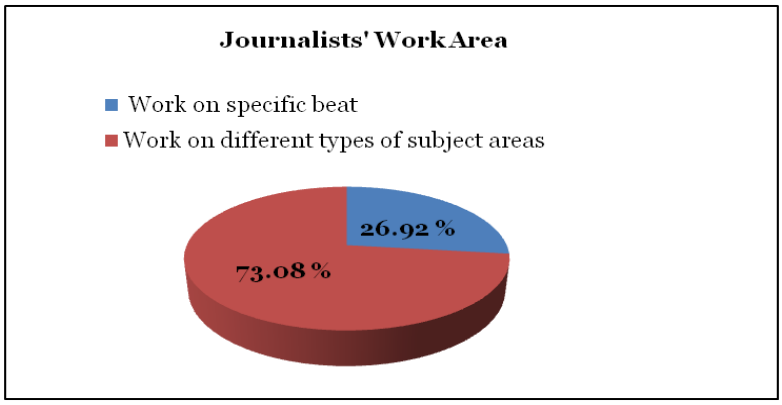


Fig. 2. Percentage of journalists' work area in pie chart

On average the respondent journalists produce 6.42 news (SD= 3.06) in a usual week. The majority of the respondents (73.08 %) do not have a specific working area and they work on different types of subject area (Figure 2). Table 4 demonstrates that their major subjects' areas are crime (50 %), environment (42.31 %), politics (34.61 %), society (34.46 %), etc.

Table 4. Journalists' Work Subjects or Topics*

Subjects	Respondents' Frequencies (N=26)	Percentage %
Politics	9	34.61
Crime	13	50
Business/Economy	10	34.46
Entertainment & Culture	7	26.92
Education	6	23.07
Environment	11	42.31
Sports	3	11.54
Administration	5	19.23
Society	10	34.46
Others	2	7.69

Note: Researchers own field survey. *Multiple answers were given.

Journalists' trends to cover women and girls or gender issues

The participants were asked a question to know their tendency to cover women and girls or gender issues. The question was "do you usually produce or write women and girls or gender related news story?" In response to the question, most of the journalists (84.92 %) indicated YES, whereas, 15.38 % replied that they usually do not produce these kinds of news story (Figure 3). Whether the answer YES or NO regarding women news story production, the study demonstrates that the 26 respondents cover different types of issues relating to women and girls or gender for their usual reporting purposes.

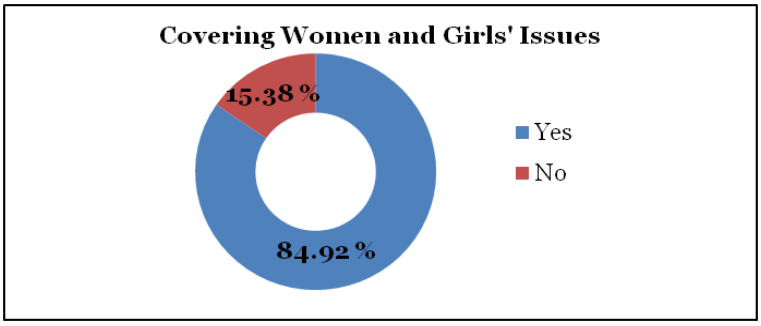


Fig. 3. Proportion of covering women and girls or gender issues

Table 5. Types of Women and Girls or Gender Issues*

Types	Respondents' Frequencies (N = 26)	Percentage %
Physical violence against women (e.g. Killing, Beating etc.)	17	65.38
Mental torture on women	7	26.92
Women empowerment (e.g. politics, society, administration)	12	46.15
Women entrepreneurship	14	53.85
Sexual Harassment (e.g. Rape, Teasing etc.)	18	69.23
Awareness of women rights	7	26.92
Gender equality for basic human rights	11	42.31
Girls Education	13	50
Participation in decision making	3	11.54
Society and Gender (e.g. dowry system, social attitudes etc.)	8	30.77
Religious Matter and women	3	11.54
Women Healthcare	9	34.62
Others	1	3.85

Note: Researchers own field survey. *Multiple answers were given.

Table 5 indicates the journalists in Chittagong cover or focus sexual harassment (69.23 %), physical violence against women (65.38 %), women entrepreneurship (53.85 %), women empowerment (46.15 %), gender equality (42.31 %), women healthcare (34.62 %), society and gender (30.77 %), mental torture on women (26.92 %), etc.

Journalists' Understanding of Gender Issues Coverage

While answering questions about their awareness and understanding level of gender issues, respondent journalists expressed affirmative views. Majority of journalists (46.2 %) answered that they have good knowledge of women and girls' rights (M=3.62, SD=0.94), whereas, most (46.2 %) journalists indicated that they have good knowledge of laws and policies regarding women and girls (M=3.12, SD=0.95).

The study found that 38.5 % journalists have very good understanding of their responsibilities to promote gender equality (M=3.73, SD=1.0), 50 % expressed they have good understanding of Govt. and NGOs' responsibilities and actions to combat gender discrimination (M=3.28, SD=0.74). The most respondents also ranked that they have good (38.5 %) knowledge of professional ethics to portray women (M=3.50, SD=0.99). Most (42.3 %) journalists have good knowledge of code of conducts to cover women and girls on news (M=3.56, SD=1.0) (Table 6).

Table 6. Journalists' Understanding of Gender Issues Coverage Professional ethics and editorial policy

Statements	Excellent (5)	Very Good (4)	Good (3)	Poor (2)	Very poor (1)		Mean	S.D.
	%	%	%	%	%			
Knowledge of women and girls rights	19.2	30.8	46.2	0	3.8	26	3.62	0.94
Knowledge of laws and policies regarding women and girls or gender	7.7	23.1	46.2	19.2	3.8	26	3.12	0.95
Understanding of journalistic responsibilities to promote gender equality	23.1	38.5	30.8	3.8	3.8	26	3.73	1.00
Understanding of Govt. and NGOs' responsibilities and actions to combat gender discrimination	3.8	30.8	50.0	11.5	0	25	3.28	0.74

Knowledge of professional ethics to portray women and girls related news	15.4	34.6	38.5	7.7	3.8	26	3.50	0.99
Knowledge of code of conducts to cover women and girls on news	23.1	19.2	42.3	11.5	0	25	3.56	1.00

Note: Researchers own field survey.

Professional ethics and editorial policy

One of the important aspects of the study is the importance of maintaining professional ethics and organizational policies to the journalists in Chittagong. The study found that maintaining media organization editorial and commercial policies regarding gender issues (M=3.63, SD=0.96) is very important to the most (57.7 %) of the journalists, whereas, it is not important to only 3.8 % journalists. Maintaining professional ethics in covering gender issues (M=4.19, SD=0.63) is also very important to most of the respondents (Table 7). The lowest standard deviation indicates the consistency of journalists' actions to maintain professional ethics in gender coverage.

Table 7. Maintaining Professional Ethics and Editorial Policy

Statements	Extremely important (5)	Very important (4)	Somewhat important (3)	Little important (2)	Not important (1)		Mean	S.D.
	%	%	%	%	%			
Maintaining of your media organization editorial and commercial policies regarding gender	11.5	57.7	15.4	7.7	3.8	25	3.68	0.96
Maintaining of professional ethics in covering gender	30.8	57.7	11.5	0	0	26	4.19	0.63

Note: Researchers own field survey.

Challenges for journalists in covering women and girls' Issues

This study reports that socio-cultural aspects of a society have considerable linkages to individuals' barriers and challenges. The quantitative description expresses that journalists of Chittagong, based on their personal experiences through day-to-day work, feel that some socio-economic and socio-cultural norms, attitudes, customs practiced by the society and media houses' and government's policies challenge them in covering news on women and girls issues. While answering the questions on the challenges what they face, journalists explored the reasons of the challenges and also showed that they encounter these at individual, interpersonal, organization, community and policy levels of social ecology.

This study finds at individual level most of the respondent journalists believe their ethnic cultural tradition (34.6 %), religious norms and beliefs (34.6 %), professional ethics (30.8 %) and freedom of expressing gender sensitive matters (53.8 %) are very challenging in covering gender issues, whereas, most journalists feel that their personal values and beliefs (30.8 %) and limited salary (58.5 %) are somewhat challenging and extremely challenging respectively. At interpersonal level, most (57.7 %) of the respondents showed that taking interview from women and girls is somewhat challenging (M=3.04, SD=0.95) (Table 8).

Table 8. Dimensions of the Challenges for Journalists

Level and Statements	Extremely Challenging (5)	Very Challenging (4)	Somewhat Challenging (3)	Little Challenging (2)	Not Challe-nging (1)	N	Mean	S.D.
	%	%	%	%	%			
Individual Level								
Ethnic cultural tradition of journalists	15.4	34.6	23.1	11.5	15.4	26	3.23	1.30
Religious norms and beliefs of journalists	19.2	34.6	23.1	7.7	15.4	26	3.35	1.32
Journalistic professional ethics	19.2	30.8	19.2	15.4	11.5	25	3.32	1.31
Expressing gender sensitive matters in news	11.5	53.8	7.7	11.5	11.5	25	3.44	1.22
Personal values and beliefs	23.1	3.8	30.8	3.8	34.6	25	2.76	1.58
Limited salary for profession	38.5	30.8	15.4	3.8	7.7	25	3.92	1.22
Interpersonal Level								
Taking Interview from women and girls	7.7	15.4	57.7	11.5	7.7	26	3.04	0.95
Organizational Level								
Media house editorial policy	11.5	26.9	34.6	19.2	7.7	26	3.15	1.12
Commercial policy of your media	7.7	26.9	38.5	19.2	3.8	25	3.16	0.98
Owners of media	15.4	23.1	26.9	11.5	19.2	25	3.04	1.36
Lack of training/education on Gender Reporting	19.2	26.9	30.8	15.4	3.8	25	3.44	1.12
TV or Newspaper Time/Space limit	3.8	30.8	30.8	15.4	19.2	26	2.85	1.19
Audience demand for sensationalizing women issues	7.7	42.3	23.1	11.5	11.5	25	3.24	1.16
Community Level								
Patriarchal social attitudes and values towards women	19.2	46.2	26.9	0	7.7	26	3.69	1.05
Socio-cultural customs and practice	19.2	46.2	26.9	0	7.7	26	3.69	1.05
Social demand for stereotyping the women	7.7	23.1	46.2	11.5	7.7	25	3.12	1.01
Pressures from socio-political groups	11.5	19.2	38.5	23.1	3.8	25	3.12	1.05
Pressures from civic activists	0	19.2	50.0	11.5	7.7	23	2.91	0.84
Mental and physical violence against journalists	30.8	30.8	26.9	3.8	3.8	25	3.84	1.06
Policy Level								
Media laws and regulations	15.4	34.6	30.8	11.5	7.7	26	3.38	1.13

formulated by policy makers								
Difficulties in accessing state-held or official information	19.2	30.8	30.8	3.8	3.8	23	3.65	1.02
Pressures from law enforcing agencies	3.8	26.9	30.8	23.1	7.7	24	2.96	1.04

Note: Researchers own field survey.

The study demonstrates that many challenges remain in organizational level. The most respondents ranked that editorial policy (34.5 %), commercial policy (38.5 %), owners (26.9 %) and lack of training (30.8 %) are somewhat challenging in gender issue coverage. On the other hand, TV or newspaper time/space limit (30.8 %) and audience demand for sensationalizing women issues (42.3 %) are very challenging for the respondents (Table 8).

In community/societal level, most respondents feel that patriarchal social attitudes (46.2 %) and socio-cultural customs (46.2 %) are very challenging in covering women's issues. Whereas, social demand for stereotyping (46.2 %), pressures from socio-political groups (38.5 %), pressures from civic activists (50.0 %) and violence against journalists (30.8 %) are considered somewhat challenging (Table 8).

Journalists in Chittagong also face challenges in policy level. The study found most journalists find media laws and regulations (34.6 %) and accessing state-held or official information (30.8 %) are very challenging. By contrast, most respondents think law enforcing agency (30.8 %) is somewhat challenging in gender reporting (Table 8).

Qualitative interpretation

The major focus throughout the study has been on the job practices and the considerable challenges in different strata of journalists' social ecology in term of women and girls issue coverage. Several dimensions of this study have been interpreted in this section with qualitative evidences.

This study found that respondent journalists belong to a conservative socio-cultural setting where their professional activities are mostly influenced by rigid social norms, ethnic tradition, religious beliefs and cultural values. According to F. Hanusch, culture and cultural values play role in shaping journalists' professional views and practices (Hanusch, 2015). In such context, women issues are covered or portrayed by a journalist in such rigid socio culture driven ways. Qualitative in-depth interview evident that traditional perception of gender roles in a society is also responsible for the underrepresentation of gender issues on media by journalists. While sharing experiences on journalists' social practices and coverage of women issues as news, Mrs. A. Parveen, a law teacher of a university and a gender analyst, in an in-depth interview, opined (Interview 3): "Some journalists present women and girls on media in stereotyped forms where women are represented by their gender centric manner than being focused by their activities or contributions to the society. There have also several evidences where it is found that affected women are often completely invisible in media reports."

Why such practices are being happened in media? Commenting on the question, Ms. Nasrin Sultana, a media professional, said (Interview 7): "Rigid cultural values in a social setting influence the way of how a journalist thinks about gender roles and depicts women on news media."

One of the interviewees of in-depth interviews wants a society where culture may ensure equality for all. Confirming society is now more equal for women, the interviewee Mr. R. Chowdhury, a senior journalist, said (Interview 5): "Educated women are more aware of their rights and they express more things to journalists without hesitation." Mr. Rashed, however, disappointingly expressed: "Remote society women yet influenced by social norms and traditions. So, they feel hesitate to pass information to media professionals. Sometimes it is challenging for journalists in portraying women properly on media (Interview 5)."

Asserting journalists' role in ensuring proper and speedy judgment of any victimized women's case, Mr. Kadir, a media and gender analyst, said (Interview 6), they should represent women's issues in a positive and balanced way. If they undertake the role to promote women positively and to focus on women's activities than stereotyping them as women or girls on media, they might overcome the socio-cultural challenges in gender issue coverage.

In Hierarchical Influences Model, Shoemaker and Reese identified five levels of influence on media content from the macro to micro levels (Shoemaker, Reese, 2013). The macro level

represents the influences from social systems as a whole. This macro systems level focuses on how ideological forces influence and shape media contents. This study also found that journalists' professional ethical ideology, media policy, personal values all are considerable challenges for journalists who cover women and girls issues for news. As a result, the journalists cannot project women issues properly as much as other more important topics. D. Akter, a journalism teacher and media analyst, commented (Interview 4): "Media, in their contents, often exaggerate presentation of women and girls' matters for increasing circulation/viewers numbers. Sometimes, this kind of policy (whether commercial or editorial) challenges the journalists."

For overcoming this challenge, Mr. Riton, a media practitioner, suggested the respective media policymakers to take necessary steps to bring all the media on a platform so that they follow positive policies such as stopping sensationalized news presentation on women and girls and portraying their issues in fair and balanced manner (Interview 2).

Importantly, religious beliefs of media professionals and women create challenges for journalists as some conservative religious beliefs do not support presentation of women and girls' matters on media. Mr. A. Sayem, a journalist of a daily newspaper, mentioned that sometimes, women do not want to express their views to journalists for religious customs (Interview 9).

Confirming most of the journalists in Chittagong do not have training on gender issue covering, Mr. Hamid, a women rights' activist, advised for arranging some in-house trainings so that journalists can know how to take interview from women respecting their religious belief (Interview 8).

Defining news frame as "central organizing principle that holds together a diverse array of symbols and idea elements", W.A. Gamson focused on the influences of news frames on the audience conception of a given issue or topic's importance (Gamson 2001: 56-74). R. Entman highlighted that news frame selection by journalists gives viewers, readers, and listeners a selective explanation about a topic (Entman, 1993). This study found demand of selective framing of gender sensitive matters in news language as a challenge for journalists.

Focusing on the media languages, one of the interviewees Mr. M.C. Das, a university teacher and gender analyst, said (Interview 1): "There are some gender biased words (e.g. businessman, chairman) used in media contents' frame which sponsor patriarchal tradition. As part of the society and not having proper knowledge, journalists often use these words consciously or subconsciously." Urging for appropriate uses of words in media, Mr. Madhab suggested for arranging workshops for journalists on the proper usage of media language to overcome the challenge (Interview 1).

In summary, from the interpretation of quantitative survey data and qualitative in-depth interviews on the dimensions of journalists' challenges in women and girls' issue coverage in Bangladesh, this paper found three core themes: 1) Conservative socio-cultural setting creates challenges for journalists, 2) There are professional ethical ideology and media policy centric challenges, and 3) Challenges in terming or framing gender sensitive matters in news contents. These three themes help to get insights of Bangladeshi journalists' challenges in women and girls' issue coverage.

Limitations of the Study

The present study is subject to the following limitations:

– The study is relevant to a particular time period. Due to the fast changing socio-cultural system of the study area, the findings may not be valid for a longer period of time.

– Researchers had to complete the study within very short time. So, the study was restricted to a limited number of samples. 26 respondents might not be enough to generalize the findings.

– As the research was based on convenience sampling, so findings could be biased by researchers.

– The study was confined to one small city area. Thus, the findings are applicable only to similar kind of situation analysis.

– The result drawn from the study could have regional biasness.

5. Conclusion

The study has been concluded after finding and analyzing the various dimensions of challenges for journalists in Chittagong. The findings show that journalists being part of the society and media organizations encounter some socio-cultural and policy-centric challenges when they cover women and girls or gender issues for news. Most of the journalists, under this study, feel that

these challenges are ranged from very challenging to somewhat challenging at their individual, interpersonal, organizational, community and policy level. For promoting a fair and accurate portrayal of women against poor representation and stereotyping on the media, journalists should overcome these challenges at all levels.

In this regard, the study suggests arranging some effective training, seminars, workshops for journalists so that they can be tactful and careful in covering women and girls issues as gender sensitive matters. Furthermore, the policy makers of media organizations and government and non-government organizations should rethink the existing policies and guidelines to adopt proper codes of conduct for journalists. Besides, the positive attitude of society is very essential to bring the change in the status of women and girls. Journalists can accelerate this way of change by playing crucial role through news making. So, this study emphasizes the need for developing time befitting policy for upholding journalists' responsibilities as per the declaration of 4th World Conference on Women.

6. Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all the journalists and interviewees who were so cooperative and participated in this study with their time. Moreover, an earlier version of this paper was presented at the South Asia Communication Conference on Media Portrayal of the Marginalized Communities held on 21-22 December 2018, in Bhubaneswar, India.

References

Al-Hasani, 2008 – *Al-Hasani, A.* (2008). Influences on media content: levels of analysis in developed and developing countries. *Bodhi: an International Interdisciplinary Journal.* 2(1): 148-175.

Baden et al., 1994 – *Baden, S., Green, C., Goetz, A., Guhathakurta, M.* (1994). Background report on gender issues in Bangladesh. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

BBS, 2017 – *BBS.* (2017). Bangladesh statistics. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Dhaka: Ministry of Planning.

Begum, 2005 – *Begum, H.A.* (2005). Empowerment of women in Bangladesh: TMSS experience. Bangladesh: TMSS.

Elder et al., 2007 – *Elder, J. P., Lytle, L., Sallis, J., Young, D., Steckler, A., Simons-Morton, D., ... Ribisl, K.* (2007). A description of the social-ecological framework used in the trial of activity for adolescent girls (TAAG). *Health Education Research*. 22(2): 155-165.

Entman, 1993 – *Entman, R.* (1993). Framing toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*. 43(4): 51-58.

Fardosh, 2013 – *Fardosh, J.* (2013). Domestic violence against women in Bangladesh: discovering two sides of a coin. Institute of Governance Studies, Dhaka: BRAC University.

Gamson, 2001 – *Gamson, W.A.* (2001). Promoting political engagement. In: Bennett, W.L., Entman R.M. (eds.). *Mediated politics: Communication in the future of democracy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 56-74.

Garcia, 2015 – *Garcia, K.M.* (2015). The internal and external influences on individual journalists. [Electronic resource]. URL: https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/joursp/99/

Haland-Solheim, 2017 – *Haland-Solheim, M.* (2017). Journalistic values and challenges in Colombia, Bangladesh, Tunisia and Norway. In: Frey, E., Rhaman, M., Bour, H.El. (eds.). *Negotiating Journalism: Core Values and Cultural Diversities*. Goteborg: Nordicom: 77-90.

Hanusch, 2015 – *Hanusch, F.* (2015). Cultural forces in journalism. *Journalism Studies*. 16(2): 191-206.

IPDC, 2012 – IPDC (2012). Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media. [Electronic resource]. URL: http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/multimedia/hq/ci/ci/pdf/ipdc/ipdc28_gsmi_paper_rev.pdf

Jamal, Awaisi, 2012 – *Jamal. A., Awaisi, R.* (2012). The challenges to journalistic professionalism: between independence and difficult work conditions. Nazareth: Media Center for Arab Palestinians in Israel.

Kabeer, 2000 – *Kabeer, N.* (2000). The power to choose: Bangladeshi women and labour market decisions in London and Dhaka. London, UK: Verso.

Kumari, Joshi, 2015 – *Kumari, A., Joshi, H.* (2015). Gender stereotyped portrayal of women in the media: perception and impact on adolescent. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*. 20(4): 44-52.

Lourenco, 2016 – *Lourenco, M.E.* (2016). Gender equality in media content and operations: articulating academic studies and policy – a presentation. *Studies in Higher Education*. 41(5): 927-931.

MAHR, 1996 – MAHR (1996). Summary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. [Electronic resource]. URL: http://www.genced.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/declaration.pdf

Maluleke, 2012 – *Maluleke, M.J.* (2012). Culture, tradition, custom, law and gender equality. *PER/PEL Journal*. 15(1): 1-22.

MCEDSV, 2004 – MCEDSV (2004). Reporting sexual assault: a guide for journalists. Okemos: Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence.

Mujkic, 2016 – *Mujkic, E.J.* (2016). Research on media reporting on gender-based violence against women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. [Electronic resource]. URL: https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/12/research-on-media-reporting-on-gender-based-violence-against-women-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina

Nagindrappa, Radhika, 2013 – *Nagindrappa, M., Radhika M.K.* (2013). Women exploitation in indian modern society. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*. 3(2): 1-11.

Safa, Akter, 2015 – *Safa, M.N., Akter, T.* (2015). Challenges of female journalists in Bangladesh. *Humanities and Social Sciences*. 3(5): 207-214.

Schudson, 1989 – *Schudson, M.* (1989). The sociology of news production. *Media, Culture & Society*. 11(3): 263-282.

Sharma, 2017 – *Sharma, S.* (2017). Relationship between Culture and Gender Inequality in India. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*. 22(10): 30-35.

Shoemaker, Reese, 2013 – *Shoemaker, P.J., Reese, S.D.* (2013). Mediating the message in the 21st century: a media sociology perspective. New York, NY: Routledge.

Sultana, 2010 – *Sultana, A.* (2010). Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis. *The Arts Faculty Journal*. 4: 1-18.

Ullah, Akhter, 2016 – *Ullah, M.S., Akhter, R.* (2016). Journalists in Bangladesh. Worlds of Journalism Study: Bangladesh Country Report.

UN, 1995 – UN (1995). Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. [Electronic resource]. URL: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf

UN, 2017 – UN (2017). The sustainable development goals report. New York: United Nations.

UNFPA, 2006 – UNFPA (2006). The human rights of women. [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.unfpa.org/resources/human-rights-women

Wood, 1994 – *Wood, J.T.* (1994). Gendered media: the influence of media on views of gender. [Electronic resource]. URL: https://pages.nyu.edu/jackson/causes.of.gender.inequality/Readings/Wood%20-%20Gendered%20Media%20-%2094.pdf

Zhu et al., 1997 – *Zhu, J., Weaver, D., Lo, V., Chen, C., Wu, W.* (1997). Individual, organizational, and societal influences on media role perceptions: a comparative study of journalists in China, Taiwan, and the United States. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*. 74.