

Re-Conceptualizing Journalistic Safety in Bangladesh: Analysing Multidimensional Threats and Adaptive Strategies

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Abstract

Its three aims reflect the complexity and seriousness of the threats journalists face. The first is to identify and classify the main political, digital, and socio-cultural threats that Bangladeshi journalists encounter regularly. The research aims to provide a disaggregated portrait of these threats by type, frequency, and severity through a quantitative survey of journalists based on geography and news organizations. Second, it examines how such threats combine with different kinds of organizational support and policy barriers to influence journalists' safety perceptions. Understanding this interaction between the demands placed on journalists by the institutions they work for and journalists' responses to those demands is critical to developing a comprehensive view of how institutions can bolster the resilience of journalism. Lastly, the research seeks to create an updated conceptual model of journalistic safety that includes individual-level adaptation and institutional action, serving as guideposts for a more effective policy and professional approach.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Some of the scariest areas of the world are experiencing an increasing trend of journalist safety dives [2]. However, the specifics of the situation in Bangladesh, the country's political history, socio-cultural realities, and the ever-changing nature of the digital landscape in Bangladesh come together to make the story something that needs closer examination. The press in Bangladesh has historically been a significant pillar of public opinion and a check on authorities; in terms of freedom of expression, Journalists increasingly face threats repeatedly, whether prosecution attacks on their lives. Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), a Bangladeshi legal aid and human rights organization, stated that some 56 journalists were tortured, harassed, sued, intimidated, and obstructed from research and reporting in the first three months from January to March of the year 2023 [1].

Freedom indices of media have been distorting the picture of the context of Bangladesh from time to time and still take a lopsided position of the country, putting it much weaker than many of the South Asian countries. Amnesty International has also publicly observed a troubling trend in which the authorities have misused sections 25 (publication of false or offensive information), 29 (Publication of defamatory details), and 31 (Offence and punishment for deteriorating law and order) of the Act to criminalize dissent, including criticism expressed by journalists, activists, and human rights defenders [1].

A convergence of politics, culture, and technology has created a toxic landscape in which journalists face

significant threats of not only traditional suppression—direct censorship and physical violence—but also less overt avenues of aggression, such as digital harassment and online trolling [29]. Today, as the internet becomes more of a place for proper discussion and organized assaults, journalists have also moved online. As a result, journalist security needs to be redefined to align with these changing environments and include physical threats and the entire spectrum of daily challenges journalists encounter [2].

This issue has remained so pressing that it has remained unchanged despite international and local calls to protect press freedom. While some state and non-state organizations, like the Bangladesh Press Council example, have pushed for more robust policy frameworks or further studies on the issue, things have not changed much since [32]. Though laws exist, their enforcement is patchy and undermined by political and bureaucratic pressure. Moreover, socio-cultural factors from conservative communities more to religious sensitivities – also compound the ability of reporters to investigate and report freely. Journalists cope with self-censorship, peer networks, and selective reporting [29]. Such adaptive measures may save lives, but they corrode aspects of journalism that are impossible yet essential to replace in the long run.

Problem Statement

The political pressure, socio-cultural constraints, and digital harassment have escalated, making journalists in Bangladesh more insecure than before [5]. Physical threats are always lurking about to hear of cases of attacks on reporters and correspondents whose stories revolve around sensitive topics such as local governance issues, greed, and violations of human rights [6]. Politicians who want to keep their appearances clean may resort to legal or extra-legal means to prevent stinging reporting [5]. At the same time, the digital domain opens further options for bullying — through hacking, phishing attacks to uncover confidential sources, or smear campaigns on social media against specific journalists [6].

At the same time, the general public's perception of press freedom and its role in a functioning democracy seems to be on the decline, allowing more anti-media measures to be taken in the system [9]. Because there are no substantial ways to prosecute online crime, harassment and other online inflammatory talk are often free to flourish, be it derogatory comments or even direct threats of violent action. Thus, the issue goes further than the immediate threat to journalists themselves; it threatens the viability of the democratic processes in which journalists play a crucial role in some way or another. These multidimensional threats could dissuade foolproof reporting, which would sap the press of the vital element of good governance and public accountability [11].

Research Objectives

Its three aims reflect the complexity and seriousness of the threats journalists face. The first is to identify and classify the main political, digital, and socio-cultural threats that Bangladeshi journalists encounter regularly. The research aims to provide a disaggregated portrait of these threats by type, frequency, and severity through a quantitative survey of journalists based on geography and news organizations. Second, it examines how such threats combine with different kinds of organizational support and policy barriers to influence journalists' safety perceptions. Understanding this interaction between the demands placed on journalists by the institutions they work for and journalists' responses to those demands is critical to developing a comprehensive view of how institutions can bolster the resilience of journalism [30]. Lastly, the research seeks to create an updated conceptual model of journalistic safety that includes individual-level adaptation and institutional action, serving as guideposts for a more effective policy and professional approach.

Significance of the Study

This research is perhaps most important for non-academic audiences. The study complements a fledgling

literature on journalist well-being and freedom of the press in developing contexts by analyzing the dual-layered threats journalists face and their coping mechanisms. At a policy level, prioritizing the most significant threats and how they are countered or neutralized by institutional and organizational resources and policies can usefully inform national and international bodies that wish to foster a free press. In addition, media houses, journalist unions, and advocacy groups in Bangladesh or other similarly vulnerable environments could leverage the findings to strengthen their training, responsive policies, and tailored support systems, including legal assistance, psychological helpline, or digital security training [14].

The other key contribution of this study is methodological. A cross-sectional survey design and structural equation modeling (SEM) provide a strong, quantitative evaluation of the intersection of threats, coping, and policy as they correlate. There is a lack of this kind of rigor in journalists' safety discussions, which are often steered by anecdotes or qualitative descriptions, which are impactful but not firm in numbers. Although these stories are essential for emphasizing lived experiences, they are best suited alongside quantitative results, which can provide more detailed recommendations and evidence-based interventions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Journalistic Safety

Over the years, threats to journalists have changed and diversified in form, intensity, and the concept of journalistic safety [2]. Previous research highlighted journalists' physical risks in war situations, concentrating on war reporters and journalists covering organized crime [14, 15]. Journalistic safety includes a broader range of psychological, legal, and socio-cultural risks than physical harm that undermines a journalist's ability to exercise their profession freely. Current frameworks emphasize the need for a comprehensive perspective, recognizing that dangers come from state — and non-state — actors, private powerholders, and hostile online communities that even target various forms of coverage. The conceptual frameworks are abstract and need to relate to the socio-political realities of the region, South Asia in general, and Bangladesh in particular. Analysts have pointed out that journalists may have high risks from the state's interventions and partisan groups in countries where political ups and downs are seen. Such contexts frequently amalgamate traditional modes of threat (e.g., forms of overt hassle and violence) with more contemporary ones (e.g., cyber surveillance and digital disinformation campaigns). This means defining journalistic safety in more holistic and integrative terms that are not entirely disconnected from its physical, legal, cultural, and digital dimensions that inform the daily lives of journalists [19].

Political and Socio-Cultural Constraints

Political constraints like legal intimidation, harassment through defamation suits, and political meddling in editorial decisions are typical in Bangladesh [1]. According to the Free Press Unlimited, journalists who report on serious corruption or offer dissenting views are often subject to punitive actions by political actors [6]. Along with the political considerations, sociocultural constraints also come into play through the local community pressuring journalists to avoid specific reports or investigations, perceiving them to be damaging to religious or cultural values. Data collected from a sample of 1,210 self-selecting international survey respondents by the International Center for Journalists [13] found that:

- Nearly three in four women respondents (73%) said they had experienced online violence. Threats of physical (25%) and sexual violence (18%) plagued the women journalists surveyed.

- One in five women respondents (20%) said they had been attacked or abused offline in incidents seeded online. Almost half (48%) of the women reported being harassed with unwanted private messages.
- Only 25% of respondents reported incidents of online violence to their employers. The top responses they received were no response (10%) and advice like ‘grow a thicker skin’ or ‘toughen up’ (9%). Two percent said they were asked what they did to provoke the attack.
- Online violence significantly impacts the employment and productivity of the women respondents, as 11% reported missing work, 38% retreated from visibility (e.g., by asking to be taken off air and retreating behind pseudonyms online), 4% quit their jobs, and 2% even abandoned journalism altogether.

Reporters avoid these issues entirely, choosing to cover safer, less sensitive topics to avoid any retaliation against them [1]. This impacts the diversity and quality of news coverage, ultimately contributing to an overall less informed public debate. In addition, socio-cultural traditions at times hinder female journalists more than their male counterparts, as women may be more harassed for breaking traditional gender roles in media.

For instance, the Center for International Media Assistance has indicated that women reporters are less inclined to do investigative journalism work on sensitive subjects, owing to a higher likelihood of facing stigma and harassment, demonstrating the need to analyze threats from an intersectional approach in Bangladesh [5].

Digital Threats and Online Harassment

Outside of traditional threats, a growing number of abuses is virtual harassment [13]. International Center for Journalists’ survey found that the women journalists surveyed most frequently indicated (30%) that they respond to the online violence they experience by self-censoring on social media; twenty percent described how they withdrew from all online interaction, and 18% specifically avoided audience engagement. The spread of social media has provided avenues for real public engagement or orchestration of coordinated online hate campaigns. Cyberbullying continues to be the most frequent digital risk reported by those surveyed among journalists, affecting over half of them. Doxing and phishing are less common but have dire consequences, especially when personal information or professional sources are made public [19]. Academics contend that digital violence is not always limited to the online realm; the situation can quickly become one that directly threatens physical well-being if doxing information is employed for violence, and the psychological trauma caused by online abuse can lead to offline consequences like self-censorship [10]. So, such digital threats are more related to the socio-political conditions of a country than the technological capability of that country.

Resource Access and Organizational Support

The extent to which organizational and institutional support can mitigate the risks associated with these multilayer threats has been a recurrent theme in academic research. Organizations with access to more substantial financial and administrative means often align their resources towards offering their employees legal protection, digital security training, or mental health services. For example, elite media organizations in Bangladesh have begun a suite of installation cybersecurity workshops, encryption tools for safe communications, and a commitment to 24/7 legal assistance for threatened reporters. However, smaller media houses or freelancers are usually exposed as there is no backing from institutions. According to a research paper by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS), at least 451 journalists have been sued under the Digital Security Act (DSA) since its enactment; among those, the number of journalists were

sued for their journalistic reports was 255 [26].

Additionally, organizational support is not simply about resources but also a by-product of editorial independence. However, when media owners and editors prioritize business or political interests over the tenets of journalism, they may deter reporters from reporting on controversial issues, taking a risk-averse position that might compromise the gatekeeping function of the profession [28]. In the Bangladeshi media landscape, this tension between editorial independence and economic viability increases the threats to journalists. When institutional support is weak or absent in a high-risk environment, journalists turn to personal networks to share information, psychological support, and legal advice; informal coping mechanisms become critical for survival [25].

Adaptive Strategies: The Coping Framework

Individual journalists coping with these challenges develop their survival toolkit [25]. A study discusses the proactive and reactive approaches, from being careful about which story topics to pursue to building rapport with sources for shared protection to using digital anonymity tools to escape scrutiny [30]. Others seek collective action and choose to create or join professional unions that push for improved working conditions and protections. Some may self-censor, intentionally steering clear of areas of speech that may trigger undesirable attention or reprisal. Self-censorship may be an understandable way to survive, but it blurs the lines between professional ethics and the public's right to information [21].

The other resource that comes into play regarding coping frameworks is peer support. Informal peer networks are turned to for emotional and practical assistance when journalists encounter acute harassment. Such networks could direct digital defenses, authenticate threats, and even marshal public campaigns for compromised staff. More generally, such adaptive strategies are a testament to the resilience of the journalistic community but also an indictment of institutional and policy-level failures. It indicates a dependence on improvisation or individual-level work around coping mechanisms — and underscores the areas where media organizations and regulatory bodies still need to step up to create a safer work environment.

Gaps in the Existing Literature

Many studies focus on the alarming conditions journalists have to operate under, but there are still gaps. To begin with, although it is now clear that there is a need to worry about digital threats, there are still not enough empirical studies to establish how far and to what extent these threats interact with other types of pressure, such as political or sociocultural constraints. Second, the literature primarily consists of high-level accounts of press freedom or personal accounts from journalists with little construct to understand the interplay of the institutional and legal with the individual to inform safety. Third, an adequate quantitative study with high statistical sophistication (using structural equation modeling and other sophisticated methods) is scarce. Most draw on qualitative interviews or descriptive surveys [20], which may simplify away the multiplicity of interacting factors.

In Bangladesh, this gap is further pronounced as the environment is rapidly evolving, driven by increased penetration of the internet, political realignments, and cultural shifts. Few comprehensive models incorporate interactions across perceived threats, coping strategies, organizational resources, and policy constraints. Even more rare is work that engages in policy-appropriate recommendations based on empirical findings. Effective targeting of interventions to reduce reporters' many risks requires a data-driven roadmap for policymakers, journalists, and civil society organizations [23].

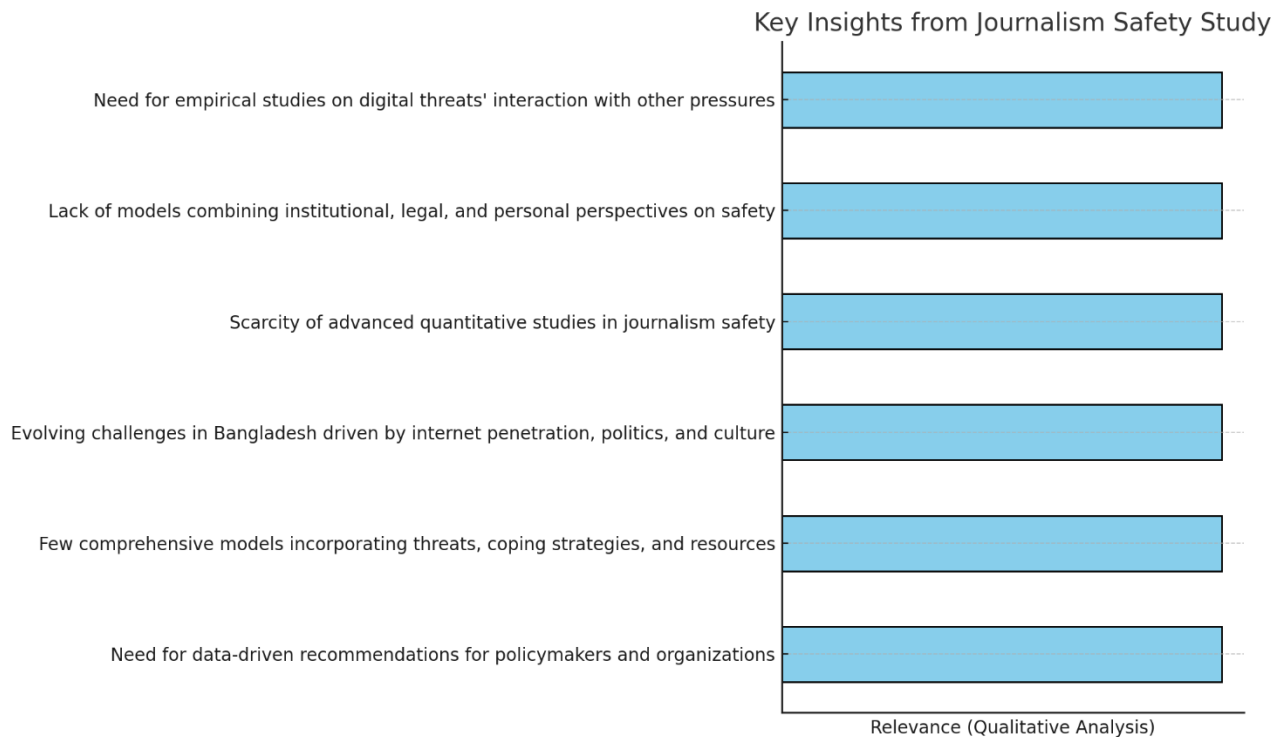


Figure 1: Expected insights from journalism safety study.

In answering these gaps, this study of journalists aims to use a cross-sectional design, utilizing structural equation modeling to examine the interactions between perceived threats, organizational support, resource access, and the coping strategies they use. Housing the knowledge of political, sociological, and communication studies, the research seeks to develop an improved conceptual model of reality. In sum, this method aims to provide more than just a discourse on threatening situations experienced by Bangladeshi journalists towards solutions to alleviate the threats and, hence, contribute both through theory and practice to the discussion on journalistic safety.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The varying layers of danger in journalistic safety in Bangladesh need a broader theoretical perspective that can unite breathing political pressures, cyberbullying, and socio-cultural constraints within one model. Until now, traditional approaches to describing journalist vulnerability have focused on discrete factors—physical assaults or censorship—without adequately accommodating the unprecedented cross-cutting nature of contemporary risks. In order to bridge this gap, the current study uses an integrative framework that recognizes these threats as interconnected events, indirectly and directly, influenced by organizational-, policy-, and individual-level variables. The following theoretical framework attempts to integrate macro-level institutional dynamics with micro-level coping strategies to explain how journalists develop perceptions of safety and how resilience can be enhanced.

Perceived Threats

Perceived threats were the evaluations of the severity and the probability of threats happening to the journalists carrying out their professional duties [3]. However, research on risk perception indicates that threats are not just objective features of the environment—they are mediated through cognitive filters based on personal experience and cultural norms. In Bangladesh, these so-called threats or challenges to freedom of expression come from political, digital, and socio-cultural domains. Political threats include a

possible legal assault that is exerted against me, harassment by the state, or violence by partisans. Social media networks can be particularly damaging in the context of digital violence, where cyberbullying, phishing, and doxing may represent specific types of digital threats. Socio-cultural threats reveal conservative community standards that may restrict the courageous reporting of sensitive issues, including the political rights of women, the appropriateness of religious bodies, and communal peace. Together, these threats can create an atmosphere of fear and anxiety, causing journalists to change their behavior, usually in ways that limit the breadth and depth of their reporting [21, 23].

Coping Strategies

The second important key concept is coping strategies, which can be described as the personal, psychological, and professional resources journalists use to cope with or reduce an actual or perceived threat. Western and non-Western empirical studies highlight coping as an essential mediator between external pressure and internal quality of life [22, 23]. Journalists may use self-censorship, peer network reliance, or digital security know-how. Coping strategies such as self-censorship significantly reduce threats in the immediate term but ultimately at the expense of journalistic principles [21]. On a more intelligent note, building personal resilience via accredited professional training, advocacy partnerships, and mental health interventions would be good strategies. Coping strategies can be placed on a continuum from avoidance strategies to strategies that actively fortify resilience.

Organizational and Policy Support

Organizational and policy support is essential in addressing threats [3]. Scholars suggest that macro-level variables — such as the presence (and enforcement) of media-friendly legislation, financial resources, and institutional support for journalistic protection — create the conditions under which individual journalists are more or less likely to feel threatened and, when they do, how they are most likely to react [9]. Protective measures in some Bangladeshi media houses include legal aid, emergency hotlines, and staff tracking journalists' safety.

Organizational support includes editorial policies that protect independence and discourage self-censorship, formal training programs for digital security, investigative reporting, and mental health literacy. Policy environments are likewise moderating: flexible policies supporting press freedom can either subdue or amplify the effects of perceived threats [21]. Where coercive laws are selectively implemented, journalists may see more significant threats and turn to individual coping strategies.

Safety Outcomes

Safety outcomes are individual-level perceptions of journalists concerning feeling comfortable and secure in their professional sphere [9]. It is not easy to measure safety quantitatively. However, indirect signs — like stress levels, job satisfaction, or work continuity in investigative journalism—indicate whether a journalist feels adequately safe. A positive safety outcome suggests that the nexus of coping strategies, institutional support system, and enabling policy context has successfully conceptualized resilience even in a high-risk environment. In contrast, detrimental safety outcomes—recognized by increased stress, a lack of conversation about the issues at hand, or people leaving their jobs—indicate that the external threat has blown past the support systems in place [3].

Conceptual Model

Based on these constructs, this study presents a conceptual model, the core of which is that perceived threat drives journalists to implement coping strategies, resulting in (un) desirable safety outcomes. It is argued that organizational and policy support moderate and mediate these effects (Figure 2).

In particular, strong organizational support is expected to assuage the adverse effects associated with per-

ceived threats. At the same time, solid policy infrastructures can shield journalists from capricious outcomes of legal action or extra-legal consequences. In response, the coping strategies develop specific reaction patterns that mediate the mechanism through which external threats are transformed into internal states of safety or distress. Figure 2 outlines the model's main components and hypothesized relationships:

1. **Perceived Threats → Safety Outcomes:** High perceived political, digital, or socio-cultural threats negatively affect journalists' perceived safety.
2. **Coping Strategies (Mediator):** Journalists who actively employ coping mechanisms (e.g., digital security training, social support networks) may experience lessened adverse effects of threats on their sense of safety.
3. **Organizational Support (Moderator):** Adequate resources, editorial independence, and legal protections can weaken the direct impact of perceived threats on journalists' safety outcomes.
4. **Policy Environment (Moderator):** Flexible media policies that uphold press freedom further moderate the link between perceived threats and safety.



Figure 2: Proposed conceptual model.

The conceptual model depicts the relationships between perceived threats, coping strategies, organizational support, policy environment, and journalists' safety outcomes. All of these are interlinked through various cycles, and each has its role to play. The model originates from perceived threats — political, digital, or socio-cultural risks that directly affect journalists' safety. Perceived threats induce decreasing safety, the main driver-coupling. In the model, coping strategies act as a mediator. Perceived threats to safety can either harm or help journalists — but when journalists utilize digital security training, build social support networks, or adopt practices that reduce stress, they weaken the negative impact of perceived threats on their safety. Such a mediating role emphasizes the need for prevention efforts to protect psychological and physical health.

Threats are often damaging, but positive and protective contexts with sufficient resources, perception of editorial autonomy, and strong legal protections can mitigate some of the harm [21]. Providing this

support, therefore, is a way for organizations to increase journalists' resilience. The larger policy environment also serves as a moderator. The relationship between perceived safety and policy is complex, but it weakens with press freedom protections and legal protection of journalists. Therefore, policy flexibility and support assist journalists in coping with challenging situations.

The interaction of coping strategies, organizational support, and policy environment depicted in Figure 2 affects safety outcomes and perceived threats. The framework emphasizes the mediating and moderating factors involved and that safety should be conceptualized as a multifactorial construct in response to threats. It underlines that harm reduction must be done by individuals, organizations, and at a systemic level.

Hypothesis Development

From the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses guide the empirical analysis:

- **H₁:** Perceived threats (political, digital, socio-cultural) negatively affect journalists' safety outcomes.
- **H₂:** Coping strategies mediate the relationship between perceived threats and safety outcomes, such that the negative impact of threats is reduced when coping strategies are robust.
- **H₃:** Organizational support moderates the effect of perceived threats on safety outcomes, with more substantial support reducing the impact of threats.
- **H₄:** Resource availability positively correlates with more active and effective coping strategies.
- **H₅:** Flexible policy environments further moderate the relationship between perceived threats and safety, mitigating the intensity of the threat-safety link.

These hypotheses represent the interactions of individual, organizational, and policy influences in a deductively testable framework. Based on the structural equation modeling, this study rigorously tests these relationships and recommends protecting journalistic practice in Bangladesh.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The objective is to assess how Bangladeshi journalists understand and react to multidimensional threats and how the organizational context, supportive policy environments, and self-protective mechanisms affect their perception of safety. To this end, a cross-sectional survey design was used, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was used for data analysis [7].

A cross-sectional survey was selected as the optimal data collection method, as this approach allows for collecting data from a large sample of journalists at a single time point, thus providing a snapshot of beliefs, experiences, and coping strategies. This method is especially relevant when investigating associations among latent variables (e.g., perceived threats and coping strategies) in naturalistic interactions between those constructs [18]. This also makes it possible to quantitatively analyze multifaceted phenomena, which allows the use of SEM to test the theoretical model [17].

Population and Sampling

This research includes professional journalists on Bangladesh's national and regional media in the output population. It covers print, broadcast, and online outlets, freelancers, and media houses of different sizes. Editorial orientations are included to ensure the capture of a representative sample using stratified random sampling covering geographic diversity and media type [16].

The sampling frame, based on publicly available directories of registered journalists, was divided into categories: print, television, and online news portals [27]; a random selection of journalists was made

from each category in proportion to the number of journalists in the category, reaching 400 total respondents [16].

Sample Profile

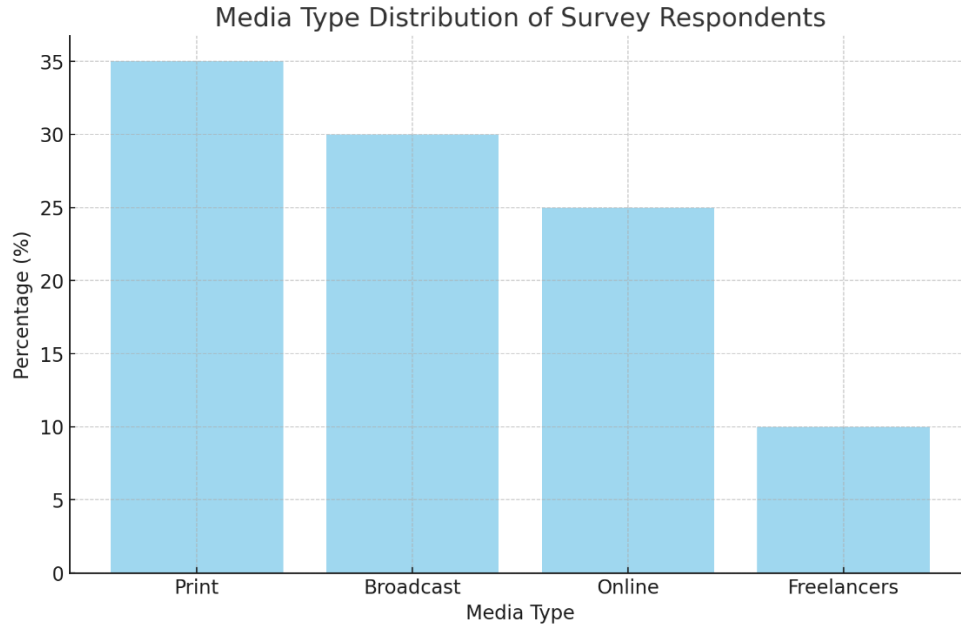


Figure 3: Media type distribution.

400 journalists completed the survey, guaranteeing good diversity across the Bangladeshi media landscape. The respondents were comprised of print (35%), broadcast (30%), online media outlets (25%) and freelancers (10%).

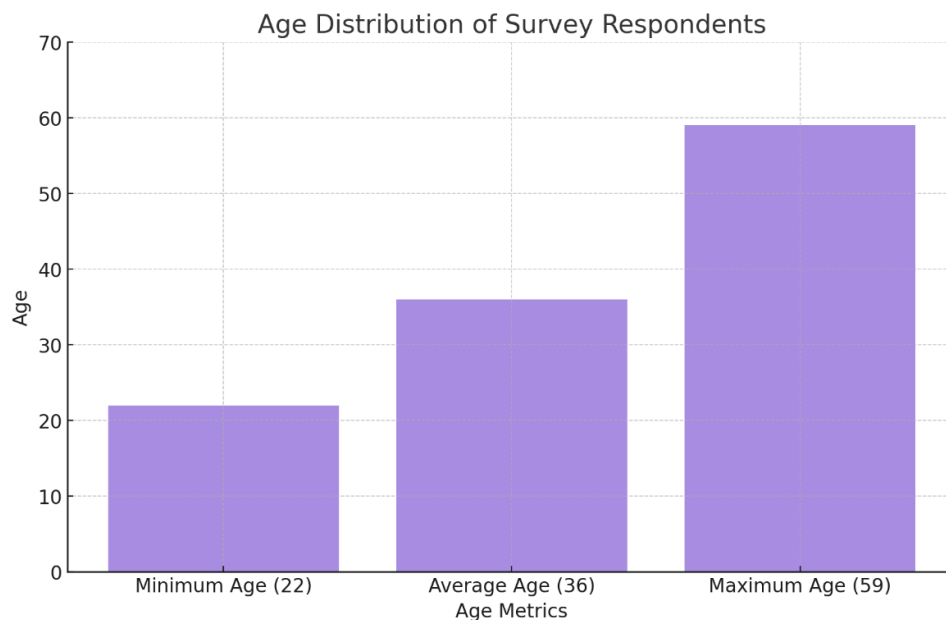


Figure 4: Age distribution of survey respondents

The participants' average age was 36, ranging from 22 to 59.

Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents

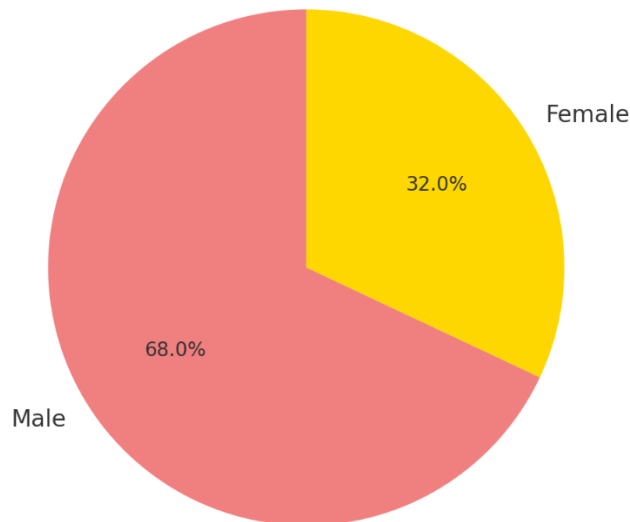


Figure 5: Gender diversity.

There is a significant gender imbalance, with 68% male and 32% female respondents. However, women's participation in the media sector is increasing.

Regional Diversity of Survey Respondents

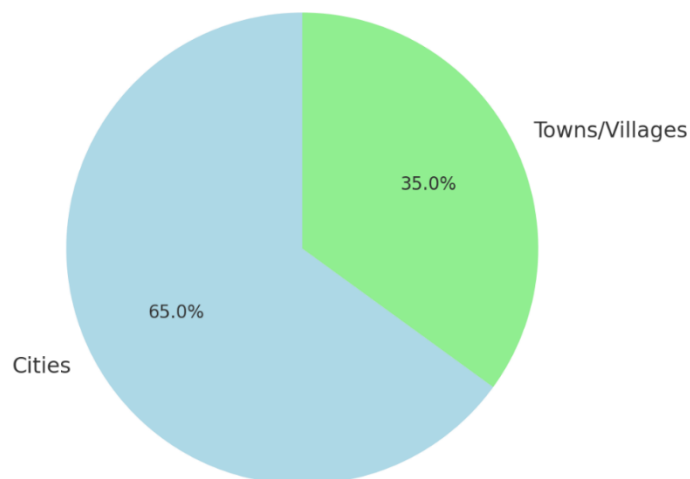


Figure 6: Regional diversity.

Most respondents (65%) are based in Dhaka or other major cities, while 35% work in towns or villages, highlighting the role of local journalism. These numbers show that local journalism is vital to life, even if most primary news operations are in metropolitan areas.

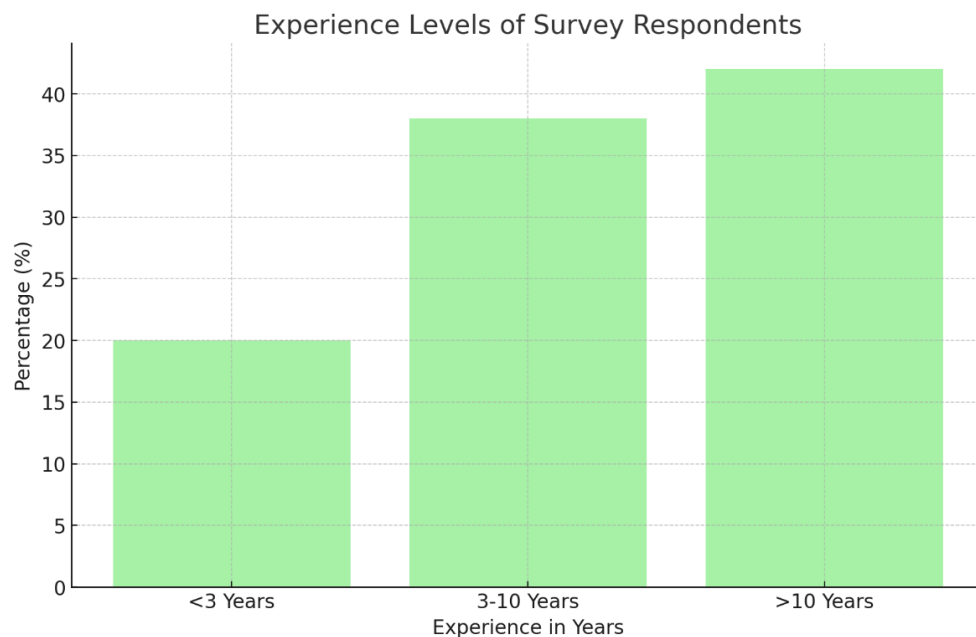


Figure 7: Experience levels

About 20% of respondents are new practitioners with less than 3 years of experience, while 42% have over 10 years of experience. This shows a well-distributed experience range within the field.

Education Levels of Survey Respondents

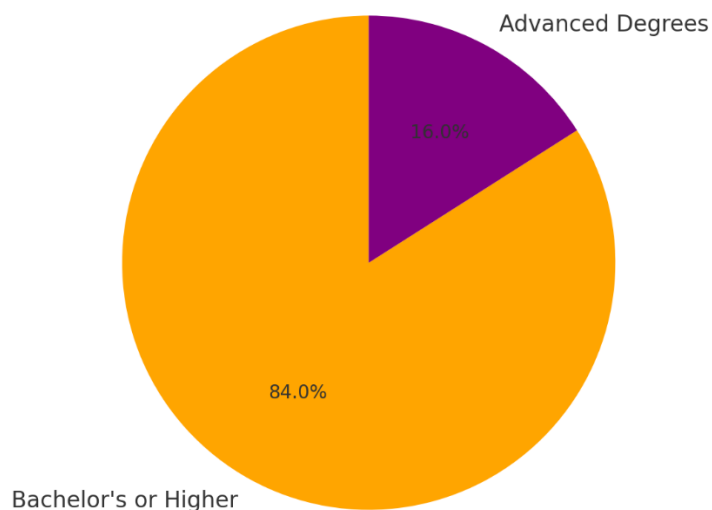


Figure 8: Education levels.

Most respondents (84%) have at least a bachelor's degree, with 16% holding advanced degrees, often in journalism, mass communication, or a closely related field.

Below is a table summarizing the respondents' key demographic and professional characteristics (Table 1). Percentages are based on the total sample (N = 400).

Table 1: Key demographic and professional characteristics of the respondents

Respondent Profile	Category	Percentage	Approx. Number (N)
Total Respondents	—	100%	400
Media Type	Print	35%	140
	Broadcast	30%	120
	Online	25%	100
	Freelance	10%	40
Age (in years)	Mean = 36, Range = 22–59		
Gender	Male	68%	272
	Female	32%	128
Location	Major Urban Centers (e.g., Dhaka)	65%	260
	Smaller Towns and Rural Areas	35%	140
Years of Experience	< 3 Years	20%	80
	≥ 10 Years	42%	168
Educational Attainment	Bachelor's Degree	84%	336
	Advanced Degree (Master's or above)	16%	64

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection period covered two months to accommodate different work schedules and geographic constraints. The data collection tool used was an online questionnaire sent out through email and social media. Those journalists who work in areas where the Internet had less delivered printed questionnaires via regional press clubs. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent, who also received detailed information regarding the research mission and various confidentiality aspects [20]. To get a higher response rate, follow-up reminders were provided, leading to the completion of 400 surveys (equaling the target sample size).

Ethical Considerations

An appropriate institutional review board provided ethics approval. All participants were notified that they could withdraw from the study without consequences. All data were stored on password-protected devices, and all participants were assigned a pseudonymous identifier to ensure confidentiality. Data were kept anonymous except where essential for statistical analyses, and respondents were explicitly informed about the data usage purposes.

Data Analysis Strategy

Responses were coded, and missing cases and values were cleaned using SPSS software after the data collection [24]. The statistics of the sample background were then generated for a preliminary view of the sample characteristics, and normality was tested for each construct [18]. Afterward, structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed using dedicated software for statistical analysis [7]. The analysis proceeded in two stages:

1. **Measurement Model:** A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to validate the measurement model, ensuring each latent construct was accurately represented by its observed indicators [4]. Goodness-of-fit indices—including the comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis's

index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)—were used to assess model fit [4].

2. **Structural Model:** The hypothesized paths among perceived threats, coping strategies, organizational support, policy constraints, and safety outcomes were then estimated. Mediation analyses tested whether coping strategies significantly mediated the relationship between perceived threats and safety outcomes [8]. Moderation analyses examined how organizational and policy support altered the strength or direction of the relationship between threats and perceived safety [8]. Paths were deemed statistically significant if their p-values were below the conventional threshold ($p < 0.05$).

Also, multi-group analyses were planned to investigate possible differences by gender, type of media outlet, or years of experience. This could be extended with subgroup analyses to understand better whether specific kinds of journalists are more exposed to risk or depend more on specific coping strategies.

Using this combination of analytical approaches, this study seeks to provide a rigorous empirical analysis of the extent to which different forms of threats intersect and how journalists in Bangladesh bargain with them regarding individual-level resilience and institutional-level protection mechanisms. The results, presented in the following chapters, are meant to guide stakeholders, from policymakers to media houses, on possible entry points for improving journalist safety in a complex context. Thus, this integrated methodological approach confirms that each theoretical construct is grounded in quantitative data, which aligns with our broader goal of providing actionable recommendations based on empirical data to protect press freedom [24].

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

Instrumentation

The survey instrument was developed based on established scales in media sociology, organizational behavior, and stress-coping literature, adapted to the Bangladeshi context through expert consultation. Table 2 outlines the constructs measured, the number of items, and the reliability indices.

Table 2: The constructs measured, the number of items, and the reliability indices

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived Threats	12	0.84
Coping Strategies	10	0.81
Organizational Support	8	0.86
Policy Constraints	6	0.79
Safety Outcomes	5	0.85

Some of these fit into perceived threats, such as political, digital, or socio-cultural (*e.g.*, *'I fear state interference if I report on sensitive topics'*). Coping strategies involved self-censorship, digital security tools, peer support, and psychological counseling. Organizational support assessed aspects such as editorial freedom, access to legal support, and workplace mental health services. Policy constraints surveyed journalists about legislative and regulatory frameworks impacting press freedom and gaps in enforcement. Safety outcomes track the extent and sense of security journalists feel to be able to perform their work, from stress levels to a willingness to cover hazardous stories.

The questionnaire was pilot-tested on 30 working journalists in Dhaka before full deployment. Some wording in items was slightly changed to better clarify the intention of the item and make it culturally relevant. Consequently, the final instrument embodied theoretical as well as practical relevance to Bangladeshi audiences.

Descriptive Statistics

Before delving into the structural analyses, descriptive statistics were computed to gauge perceived threats, organizational support, policy constraints, coping strategies, and safety outcomes. Table 3 shows the means (M), standard deviations (SD), and reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for each latent construct.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics

Construct	Items	Mean (M)	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived Threats	12	3.52	0.78	0.84
Organizational Support	8	3.09	0.81	0.86
Policy Constraints	6	3.24	0.75	0.79
Coping Strategies	10	3.46	0.72	0.81
Safety Outcomes	5	3.01	0.84	0.85

All constructs exhibit mean values slightly above the midpoint (3.0) on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), suggesting moderate levels of threats, moderate to slightly low perceptions of organizational support, and moderate coping strategies. The mean for safety outcomes (M = 3.01) indicates respondents felt only marginally safe in their professional roles. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) ranged between 0.79 and 0.86, confirming internal consistency in each scale.

Further breakdowns revealed that digital threats were more frequently reported than expected, with a substantial proportion of respondents noting exposure to online harassment. Political interference was also often cited through subtle editorial pressure and explicit threats. Socio-cultural threats, while somewhat less universally reported, remained significant for those covering sensitive issues, such as gender-based violence or religious extremism.

Measurement Model Validation

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to validate the underlying measurement model. The initial analysis yielded strong factor loadings for most items, with standardized loadings generally above 0.60. Items that did not load sufficiently on their respective constructs were scrutinized; however, no items were eliminated because each met the acceptable threshold of 0.50 and contributed to the conceptual breadth of its construct.

Fit indices for the measurement model were examined to ascertain whether the hypothesized structure adequately captured the observed data. The final model achieved a satisfactory fit, with a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.92, a Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) of 0.90, and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.056. These statistics align with recommended thresholds (CFI and TLI > 0.90; RMSEA < 0.08), indicating good model fit. Composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) were also calculated for each construct, with composite reliability values exceeding 0.70 and AVE values surpassing 0.50, suggesting both reliability and convergent validity.

Structural Model Results

After validating the measurement model, the next step involved testing the hypothesized structural relationships among perceived threats, coping strategies, organizational support, policy constraints, and safety outcomes. The structural model maintained an acceptable level of fit (CFI = 0.90, TLI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.061), closely aligning with the measurement model's performance. Table 4 displays the standardized path coefficients (β), standard errors (SE), and significance levels (p-values) for the primary relationships tested.

Table 4: The standardized path coefficients (β), standard errors (SE), and significance levels (p-values)

Path	β	SE	p-value
Perceived Threats → Safety Outcomes	-0.43	0.07	< 0.001
Perceived Threats → Coping Strategies	-0.24	0.09	0.012
Coping Strategies → Safety Outcomes	0.37	0.05	< 0.001
Organizational Support → Safety Outcomes	0.40	0.06	< 0.001
Policy Constraints → Safety Outcomes	-0.18	0.08	0.039
Organizational Support → Coping Strategies	0.31	0.07	< 0.001
Resource Availability → Coping Strategies	0.25	0.08	0.015

In line with H1, higher levels of perceived threats were significantly associated with lower safety outcomes ($\beta=-0.43$, $p<0.001$). Interestingly, perceived threats also negatively influenced coping strategies ($\beta=-0.24$, $p=0.012$), suggesting that journalists who feel overwhelmed by multiple threats may have difficulty mobilizing effective coping mechanisms. Conversely, coping strategies positively correlated with safety outcomes ($\beta=0.37$, $p<0.001$), indicating partial mediation.

Organizational support played a pivotal role, both directly enhancing journalists' sense of safety ($\beta=0.40$, $p<0.001$) and indirectly fostering stronger coping strategies ($\beta=0.31$, $p<0.001$). As measured by perceptions of legal and regulatory limitations, policy constraints were negatively associated with safety outcomes ($\beta=-0.18$, $p=0.039$), reinforcing the notion that restrictive or inconsistently enforced media policies can heighten professional risks. Lastly, resource availability—a specific dimension of organizational capacity—demonstrated a positive relationship with coping strategies ($\beta=0.25$, $p=0.015$), lending support to H4.

Moderation and Mediation Analyses

A bootstrapping procedure (5,000 resamples) was used to test whether coping strategies mediated the influence of perceived threats on safety outcomes. The indirect effect of perceived threats on safety outcomes via coping strategies was significant (indirect $\beta=-0.09$, $p=0.014$). Although the direct impact remained substantial, the partial mediation supports H2: coping strategies can reduce perceived threats' detrimental implications.

Moderation analyses were conducted to examine H3 and H5. High versus low levels of organizational support were computed, and interaction terms were introduced into the model. The study revealed that organizational support significantly moderated the relationship between perceived threats and safety outcomes ($\beta=0.19$, $p=0.022$), suggesting that journalists in organizations with robust support systems experienced a reduced negative impact of threats on their safety perceptions. Likewise, flexible policy

environments were found to buffer the effect of perceived threats on safety outcomes ($\beta=0.17$, $p=0.036$), albeit to a lesser extent than organizational support.

In particular, journalists operating in policy environments that respect press freedom and restrict punitive actions against journalists felt less vulnerable when facing threats of different types. These findings substantiate that institutional structures and policy contexts can influence how journalists experience risk. These findings illustrate the nuanced relationships between perceived threats at the individual and organizational levels, support and coping, and policy barriers.

Political, digital, and socio-cultural pressures undermine journalists' feelings of security [28]. However, the negative impact is significantly reduced if individuals have suitable coping mechanisms and organizations provide high support. Another essential consideration is policy constraints; when press laws are either overly restrictive or enforced on a whimsically large scale, they may exacerbate threats, while flexible, pro-press policies can create a protective environment. The results point to multiple avenues to improve safety for journalists, including improvement to individual resilience, the reinforcement of institutional or organizational support systems and calls for more transparent and supportive legislation.

Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Structural Equation Model (SEM)

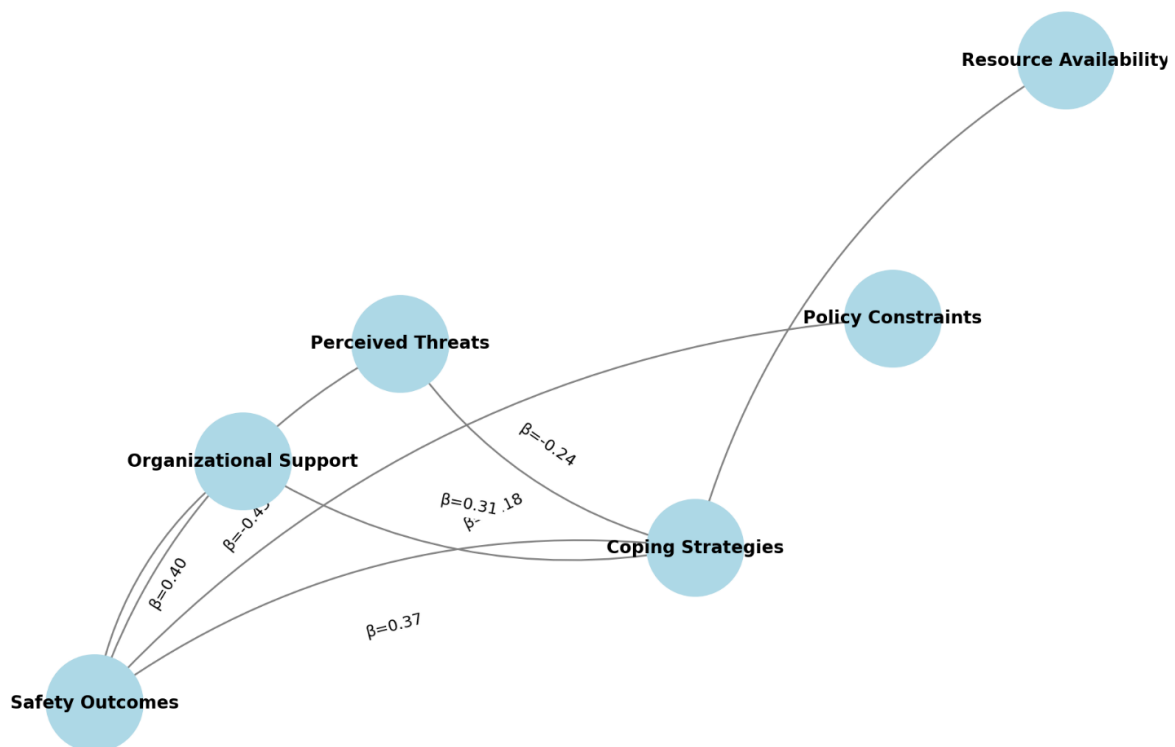


Figure 9: Interplay of threat perception, coping mechanisms, and organizational dynamics on safety outcomes.

The SEM depicted above shows how many latent constructs interact and ultimately relate to safety outcomes. It offers a unified conceptual framework for understanding how perceived threat, coping, supportive organization, access to resources, and policy constraints collectively affect a system's safety outcomes.

The model identifies perceived threats as a critical factor negatively influencing both safety outcomes ($\beta=-0.43$, $p<0.001$) and coping strategies ($\beta=-0.24$, $p=0.012$). This indicates that increased perceived threats lead to poorer safety outcomes and a diminished ability to employ effective coping strategies. These findings underscore the detrimental effect of perceived threats on individual and system-level safety, potentially stemming from heightened stress, reduced decision-making capacity, or increased vulnerability within the environment.

Coping strategies directly affect safety outcomes ($\beta=0.37$, $p<0.001$), emphasizing their mediating role in mitigating the adverse effects of perceived threats. Adopting effective coping mechanisms enhances overall safety, showcasing the importance of targeted interventions that promote resilience and adaptive strategies in challenging scenarios.

Organizational Support plays a dual role in this framework, significantly influencing both Safety Outcomes ($\beta=0.40$, $p<0.001$) and Coping Strategies ($\beta=0.31$, $p<0.001$). This dual impact highlights the pivotal role of supportive structures in fostering a safer environment. Organizational support directly enhances safety outcomes and equips individuals with the tools and resources to implement effective coping mechanisms. This finding suggests that fostering a supportive culture within organizations can cascade positive effects on safety and resilience.

Policy constraints are negatively associated with safety outcomes ($\beta=-0.18$, $p=0.039$), suggesting that restrictive or poorly implemented policies can hinder safety. This underscores the importance of evaluating and revising policies to ensure they facilitate rather than obstruct safety objectives.

Resource availability positively influences coping strategies ($\beta=0.25$, $p=0.015$), demonstrating the critical role of resources in enabling adaptive responses to challenges. Adequate resources empower individuals to manage perceived threats more effectively and indirectly enhance overall safety outcomes.

SEM uncovers the interplay among these variables and generates insights that can be acted on. The perceived threat has a chain of adverse effects on coping strategies and safety outcomes, counterbalanced by organizational support and availability of resources as protective factors. While the perceived threat and perceived organizational support are important logic in determining safety outcomes, coping strategies are a vital mediator between the two. Policymaking has a detrimental effect on the safety of a hospital, but aligning policy with the goals of an organization will improve safety. Altogether, the model draws attention to the need for organizational support, access to resources, and mitigation of perceived threats and policy couplings as determinants of safety success. This framework can direct decision-makers to shape interventions that can build resilience, reduce risks, increase safety, and offer a balance between organization and society.

Validity and Reliability

Construct validity was assessed with expert reviews and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Items were screened for content relevance by media law, sociology, and communications experts. The CFA results suggested an acceptable model fit, and most of the items' factor loadings were more extensive than 0.60. Cronbach's alpha values, generally above the 0.70 threshold, indicated good internal consistency of the scales. To assess discriminant validity, we compared the AVE with inter-construct correlations. The AVE for each construct was more significant than 0.50, which ensured that the constructs provided adequate estimates and were different enough from one another.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Findings

The findings indicated that perceived or actual threats – in the political, digital, and socio-cultural domains – harm journalists' feelings of safety. This is consistent with broader international evidence that increased risk environments tend to deter investigative or critical journalism from taking place. Nevertheless, this study is revealing in that it helps understand the many adaptive strategies Bangladeshi journalists use to cope in a dangerous environment, from digital security strategies to robust networks of peers. These avoidant and approach coping mechanisms act as partial mediators of the relationship between perceived threats and safety, indicating that if journalists have the right skills, some risks can be mitigated.

It highlights the importance of organizational support. The haven of media organizations that provide legal advice, editorial autonomy, and deep pockets to reporters can be a lifeline against these threats. These theories are congruent with institutional resilience theories that suggest that well-designed organizations can buffer themselves against external forces and develop a risk-positive culture. The significant direct effect of organizational support on safety outcomes and positive moderation indicates the importance of robust organizational support in reinforcing individuals' resilience and safety performance.

Comparison with Prior Research

The results echo previous research done in other high-risk areas, including some Latin American and African countries, where journalists face a combination of political pressure and criminal threats [28]. Different cultural dimensions emerge in the Bangladeshi context. As one example of this, socio-cultural threats are often implicated in issues around religious sensitivities or traditional gender roles. A previous literature review determined that female journalists in conservative contexts experience a greater volume and severity of violence offline and online. The findings of this study support such observations as the women journalists who were surveyed talked more about personal attacks and social stigma. However, the primary analysis of the quantitative scope did not segregate this demographic. However, the broad category of threats is the same in other environments: political figures, unofficial middlemen, and online bullies come together in an assault against the independence of the press [29].

The results of partial mediation by coping strategies support the theoretical framework of occupational psychology, where individuals who utilize problem-based and social support coping strategies display greater resilience. However, other coping strategies — self-censorship, for example — may harm journalistic standards, pointing to a fine line between self-preservation and professional integrity. It concludes resilience is not the same: journalists with their firm support, more excellent education, or more substantial editorial backing will probably cope better than those in smaller, poorly resourced outlets.

Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings reinforce the need for a holistic model of journalistic safety that spans individual, organizational, and policy spheres. Past research often isolated these spheres, focusing on personal behaviors or structural contexts. This study's integrated framework, tested via structural equation modeling, reveals that none of these elements thoroughly explains safety outcomes. Instead, the interplay—particularly the mediation by coping strategies and the moderation by organizational and policy factors—captures the complexity of how journalists navigate risk.

This expanded model can inform future iterations of press freedom indices or risk assessment tools, which often rely on broad macro-level indicators. By incorporating the nuances of individual agency and

organizational culture, such an index could better understand conditions in countries like Bangladesh. Scholars working on media sociology and political communication may also find inspiration in the idea that policy environments can exert a moderating influence, hinting that legislative clarity and even-handed enforcement can mitigate the burden of threats for working journalists.

Practical Implications

The data, on a practical level, highlights multiple levers for enhancing the safety of journalists. To start, media organizations can build their support system by providing legal protection, mental health resources, and training on digital security. In the context of scarce resources, especially in small outlets, partnerships with national press clubs or international NGOs can offer an opportunity to overcome gaps in human capital [10]. Instead, journalists' unions and advocacy groups could improve coping skills, whether covering cybersecurity or community workshops on dealing with harassment. These approaches would lend weight to the public resilience of the journalistic community.

Additionally, results indicate the importance of consistently reforming policies and enforcing the law. Explicit rather than vague defamation, sedition, and cyber laws can help limit misuse against media persons, and increased institutional checks can ensure that any arrest or litigation is not arbitrary. Free media also depends on a regulatory environment that governments can create. The findings illustrate the value of continued, focused support that meets targeted skills development, organizational strengthening, and policy-level reform needs for funders and international actors investing in press freedom in Bangladesh.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Summary of Contributions

The current research explores the perceptions of threats by journalists in Bangladesh and their strategies to mitigate political, digital, and socio-cultural threats. The study employed a cross-sectional design and structural equation modeling to explore pathways linking perceived threats, coping strategies, organizational support, policy constraints, and safety outcomes. The findings showed that perceptions of threat deter journalists from feeling secure and safe; however, if journalists possess high emotional coping skills and good organizational support, those perceptions have decreased significantly. Finally, policy constraints appeared as an essential driver in moderating the effect of external pressures on the perceived vulnerabilities.

The study adds to the empirical ground through a contextualized theoretical model of individual, organizational, and policy factors associated with journalist well-being. These results highlight the interaction between individual-level resilience and structural protective factors, suggesting that risk is not mitigated by either component alone. This view adds to the current literature by offering original, empirical accounts from countries where journalists are under significant pressure. The research fills a gap in the literature, where studies of press freedom and safety often rely on anecdotal or entirely qualitative findings – by providing complex data and analysis.

Limitations of the Study

The study provides important clues, but it also has limitations. Its cross-sectional design takes respondents' perceptions and behaviors at a single moment in time, so it cannot detect causal pathways. The robust associations between constructs imply the direction of influence. However, longitudinal or experimental designs would be more appropriate to show how policy changes, organizational structures, or journalists' experiences impact their safety over time [12].

The second point, perhaps less significant, is that while 400 journalists is a solid sample size, many aspects of Bangladesh's vast and diverse media environment are undoubtedly highlighted in this study, especially the experiences of community and freelance journalists from rural areas. Future work may use oversampling of these groups or different approaches, such as ethnographic fieldwork or interviews, that provide more contextual detail [30]. Third, because measured constructs (i.e., perceived threats, organizational support, policy constraints, coping strategies, and safety outcomes) relied on self-reports, results may have been subject to social desirability bias or recall biases.

Finally, the structural equation model represents a sound statistical beginning; however, the variables included are inherently limited. Other elements—for example, press media props associated with inhabitants of specific ideological groups or worldwide media unions—likewise give off an impression of being fundamental determinants of journalist security [10]. Recognizing and integrating these features could provide an even richer understanding of the dynamic interplay within media risk landscapes.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Based on the findings, multiple recommendations emerge. For policymakers:

1. **Legal Reforms:** Streamline and clarify existing defamation, sedition, and cyber laws to ensure they are not exploited to silence journalists. A consistent and transparent legal framework would reduce uncertainty and the chilling effect on media professionals.
2. **Enforcement Mechanisms:** Develop independent commissions or oversight bodies to investigate attacks or harassment against journalists. Swift legal action against perpetrators of threats or violence could deter future acts of intimidation.

For media organizations:

1. **Invest in Training:** Provide regular workshops on digital security, investigative journalism, and trauma-informed reporting [11]. Enhanced skills boost individual resilience and strengthen the collective capacity to handle risky assignments.
2. **Legal and Psychological Support:** Establish dedicated legal counsel and mental health services. Quick, reliable access to such resources can alleviate some of the stress of high-threat reporting.
3. **Editorial Independence:** Foster an internal culture that respects editorial autonomy and discourages undue influence from political or commercial interests.

For journalist associations and civil society:

1. **Advocacy Campaigns:** Collaborate with national and international organizations to pressure policymakers for media reforms. Public awareness campaigns around the importance of a free press can bolster public support.
2. **Networking Platforms:** Establish forums where journalists can share experiences, distribute safety alerts, and collectively develop guidelines for reporting on sensitive issues [11].

Directions for Future Research

This study leads us in several directions. It proposes longitudinal studies to follow journalists over time, mainly through elections, regime changes, or social unrest [31]. These designs would permit researchers to investigate whether coping strategies change and whether policy reforms work to reduce the perceived threat or not. Scoping and qualitative research would also be highly valuable, such as qualitative interviews or focus groups with journalists, particularly so for journalists from minority or rural communities, to investigate their lived experiences.

Broad comparative research in socio-politically similar, regionally contextual environments might elucidate different influences on organizational support and personal coping. Moreover, analyses of gender

inequalities in threat assessment and strategies could provide key explanations about the challenges of digital forms of harassment and other socio-cultural barriers faced explicitly by female journalists. By examining these research directions, scholars and practitioners might refine the theoretical model proposed above, contributing to a more global understanding of journalistic safety. Media freedoms are under pressure in many areas of the globe, and studies that identify structural and functional support are needed more than ever [10]. Together, these investigations will improve policies, better equip media organizations, and strengthen journalists to withstand more significant threats to free expression [11].

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