REPORTING FROM THE CONFLICT ZONE: A CASE OF BANNU AND LAKKI MARWAT

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Certificate of Approval

It is certified that we have read this thesis entitled "Reporting From The Conflict Zone: A Case Of Bannu And Lakki Marwat" submitted by Arbaz Khan. This thesis follows the official university format, with references formatted in APA style, and all in-text citations correctly cited. We believe this thesis meets the required academic standards and warrants its acceptance by the International Islamic University Islamabad for the award of an MS Degree in Media and Communication Studies.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved parents, whose unwavering support, sacrifices, and encouragement have been the foundation of all my achievements. Their guidance and belief in me have been my greatest source of strength and motivation.

To my teachers and mentors, who have inspired me to pursue knowledge and persevere in the face of challenges.

And to the brave journalists who risk their lives to bring truth to light in conflict zones. This work is a tribute to their courage and dedication.

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Declaration

I, Arbaz Khan, student of the MS Media and Communication Studies program at the International Islamic University Islamabad, Faculty of Social Sciences, hereby declare that this thesis titled "Reporting from the Conflict Zone: A Case of Bannu and Lakki Marwat" is my original work. All information in this thesis has been collected, analyzed, and presented by me, and any material taken from other sources has been duly acknowledged and referenced according to academic standards.

This thesis has not been previously submitted for any other degree, diploma, or qualification at this or any other institution. I declare that this work complies with the research ethics and academic integrity guidelines of the International Islamic University Islamabad.

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Abstract

This research investigated the obstacles encountered by reporters working in the conflict-ridden areas of Bannu and Lakki Marwat, characterised by political unrest, militant operations, and limited access to information. Whilst journalism played a crucial role in creating an informed public, journalists in these regions faced considerable safety risks, including physical threats, suppression of information, and organisational limitations that impeded their professional responsibilities. Utilising the Spiral of Silence theory as a framework, the investigation examined five principal aspects of these obstacles: safety concerns, information accessibility, logistical challenges, editorial policies, and inadequate training. A quantitative study involving 100 journalists from the Bannu and Lakki Marwat press clubs was carried out using purposive sampling. The data were analysed using SPSS software, focusing on descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations. The results indicated that journalists encountered significant threats from militant organisations, religious groups, and government agencies, which impeded their access to information and crucial locations. Moreover, the lack of organisational support, including insufficient safety gear and professional development, compounded the dangers they encountered. The research also found that editorial policies influenced by political and commercial interests often shaped journalistic content, frequently resulting in self-censorship. The research concluded that reporters in Bannu and Lakki Marwat worked under significant limitations that jeopardised their well-being and professional standards. The results underscored the critical necessity for policy changes, improved security protocols, and specialised training initiatives to provide journalists with the necessary competencies and means for reporting in conflict areas. This investigation enhanced the comprehension of the complex obstacles encountered by reporters in war-torn regions and offered practical suggestions for media entities, governmental bodies, and journalistic associations to effectively tackle these concerns.

Keywords: Conflict journalism, Safety risks, Self-censorship, Press freedom.

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Background of the Study

Since the end of state-controlled broadcasting in 2002, the media sector has significantly diversified. There are approximately 100 television channels and over 200 radio stations, which play a crucial role in disseminating news and information to a populace with a comparatively low literacy rate (about 60%). Newspapers and magazines are issued daily in Urdu, English, and various local languages. The English-language press, primarily catering to the urban elite, has a robust tradition of autonomy and serves as a platform for the two leading multimedia conglomerates, Jang and Dawn. Internet-based media are experiencing rapid growth. (Reporters Without Borders, n.d.)

Pakistan last went to polls at a national level in 2018. Between 2018 and 2023, the landscape for media safety and free expression in Pakistan has been filled with attacks, restrictions, and fear. The push for legislative measures to control free speech, increasingly free speech online, through proposed regulatory bodies and laws and the tightening of existing legislation has created an environment of red lines for the media to work within. At the same time, media professionals have been directly impacted through forms of legal intimidation and harassment via the registration of cases against them and, in some instances, court proceedings. (Pakistan Press Foundation, 2024).

At this moment in time, we are living in the age of information and communication technologies, which has resulted in the globe becoming a global village and offering us access to a variety of information sources. As a result of the incredible technology that has been made available to media organizations in this age of globalization, communication networks, and information can readily traverse the borders from one nation to another.

As a result of the significant technical advancements that have taken place in the media sector in the twenty-first century, we have access to an astonishing amount of information at any time of the day or night. As a result of the availability of contemporary technology in the media industry in the present day, we are only a single click or button push away from being able to obtain information about the events that are taking place all over the world. With the advent of these technologies, journalism has undergone significant transformations, and as a result, we are currently living in an era that we have never before experienced in our whole history.

One of the primary goals of journalism is to provide the general public with information, education, and entertainment. It is generally agreed upon that free media is one of the fundamental needs for the survival and growth of a robust democracy.

The people are given a platform through which they can engage in conversation about a variety of topics and bring about changes in society through the power of words through the medium of the media. Journalism is not supposed to represent those in power; rather, it is supposed to become a shelter for those who are voiceless against repressive powers, some of which include governments.

A journalist's primary responsibility is to deliver unbiased, balanced, precise, and neutral information that serves society's best interests. In their capacity as public guardians, journalists can act as a protective shield against the abuse of power, malpractice, brutality, wrongdoings, unfairness, and aggression that occur during armed disputes in conflict-ridden areas.

However, experts believe that journalists' crucial job is put in jeopardy during times of armed conflict due to a variety of causes. These elements include the inherent complexities of contemporary warfare, as well as the growing demands of the audience and the power that the media itself possesses (Dusterhoft, 2013).

Throughout human history, conflict has been an integral component of human lives and is a phrase that describes a wide range of situations. It is revealed in the Holy Quran that Hazrat Adam's two sons, Habil and Kabil, who are also referred to as Cain and Abel, engaged in a violent struggle with one another. A disagreement between Kabil and his brother Habil resulted in Kabil's death. A fight between two brothers has been described as the very first conflict that has ever taken place between two brothers. Consequently, the term "conflict" is a description of an essential aspect of human nature, which is the ability to struggle and resist to accomplish one's goals.

Conflict is frequently encountered in daily life and is interpreted variably by different individuals. Some individuals perceive conflict as a struggle against another to obtain something valuable, while others view it as engaging in violent acts, such as warfare, to acquire property, resources, and territory. A dispute may arise from differing opinions, perspectives, or personalities; nonetheless, the fundamental components of conflict are the conflicting and opposing viewpoints that are generally unacceptable to the opposing group(s) or parties. Some individuals believe that

conflicts arise between geographically distant and ideologically opposing states, while others claim that such conflicts are linked to terrorism or stem from armed confrontations and military operations. If disagreements are not adequately comprehended, managed, and resolved, they may escalate into violent confrontations.

Johan Galtung, a prominent pioneer in Peace and Conflict Studies, asserted that unresolved conflicts invariably lead to bloodshed. Journalists, like other individuals, encounter disputes; nevertheless, only a limited number have a comprehensive understanding of the concepts, various types, underlying causes, and, most importantly, the resolution of conflicts (Howard, 2008).

The Peace Pledge Union asserts that, although wars and violent conflicts are reprehensible, they have become integral to human existence. While conflict is an inherent aspect of human personality, it must be organized and controlled constructively; nevertheless, when it is linked to violence, destruction, and killing, it ceases to be a healthy component of human existence.

Over time, existing global conflicts intensify annually, while new conflicts emerge swiftly, offering little prospects for resolution. Consequently, difficulties have intensified, jeopardizing not only the security and prosperity of individuals worldwide but also threatening global stability.

Currently, the most perilous violent confrontations are considered to be the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, particularly the Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East. These uprisings commenced in Tunisia on 18 December 2010 and impacted various Arab countries, with Syria experiencing the most profound consequences. In the 21st century, political violence has emerged as a primary method for conveying messages and attaining political objectives. (Tumber, 2009).

Conflict can manifest in various aspects of life, including class differences, racial biases, and political issues; however, religious conflicts are often the most perilous. Conflicts arising from the inequitable distribution of resources and material benefits can be addressed rationally and pragmatically; however, when these conflicts are framed in religious terms, they evolve into value conflicts (Reychler, 1997).

Killing, devastation, and violent acts are justified in religious wars as long as they are done to uphold the faith and its tenets. When political goals and aspirations are combined with religious

beliefs and expression, it can have devastating consequences, such as the "war on terror," in which the adversaries on both sides of the battle not only use religion as a weapon to fight but also encourage their followers to do the same. (McElwee, 2005).

The importance of media cannot be overstated, whether in times of peace, instability, or armed conflict. During peaceful periods, media outlets collaborate with various societal sectors, including social organisations and NGOs, to identify and tackle issues affecting people's lives. However, the media's role becomes even more crucial during conflicts and wars, as it intensely focuses on covering these events. As a result, it becomes the main information source for the public during turbulent times.

Consequently, the media's obligation is significantly heightened to provide the world with precise and unbiased information, free from external influences, as media reports profoundly affect public opinions and perceptions. The majority of scholars who advocate for peace view the media as a rational instrument that can significantly aid in conflict resolution when utilized effectively. Media has served as a primary resource for educating both the public and political management regarding the conflicts occurring in their vicinity (Schneider, 2009).

In armed conflicts, the role of media becomes increasingly crucial, especially when other civil society entities are absent or remain mute (Saul, 2009a). The importance of reporting on conflicts is essential for comprehending the intricacies of societal challenges. It offers vital perspectives on conflict dynamics, encourages informed discussions, and enhances accountability and openness in affected areas. Kathleen Carroll, who serves as both the executive editor of the Associated Press and the chairperson of the Committee to Protect Journalists, has described war correspondents as the "public's eyes and ears." She has identified journalists working in conflict zones as true societal representatives, as they deliver news from these dangerous areas, often endangering their lives in ways that most people would not consider (Karam, 2009).

The intricate dynamics of contemporary wars and conflicts globally have rendered the role of journalists increasingly challenging. Kate Aide contended that the nature of contemporary conflicts has prompted inquiries regarding the function of journalists in reporting these wars (as cited in Allan & Zelizer, 2004). Numerous scholars have noted the difficult circumstances

encountered by journalists in contemporary conflict reporting. The coverage of contemporary conflicts has raised numerous questions. Modern warfare has introduced complexities in strategies and tactics that have obscured traditional human understanding of war and conflict. Journalists covering conflicts have increasingly become targets for various entities.

The strategies employed by various factions involved in worldwide conflicts have raised alarm amongst the general public. A worrying development for those working in areas of strife has been the deliberate targeting of media personnel in the 21st century (Crawford, 2012). The global fight against terrorism and numerous insurgencies have placed reporters in dangerous positions, with their work becoming increasingly complex due to multiple threats and opposing groups.

Journalists face significant challenges in reporting on wars and various complex conflicts. Journalists are consequently confronted with various complex wars, civil conflicts, terrorism, and insurgencies. The persistent challenges and various disorders globally have rendered the roles of reporters and editors increasingly daunting (Islam, Peters, & White, 2007).

The nature of conflict reporting is unique, encompassing associated pressures, hazards, and potential threats to the well-being of those involved. There is disagreement among academics and specialists regarding the roots of conflict reporting. Certain scholars contend that conflict reporting "emerged and developed after the Second World War"(Islam, Peters, & White, 2007).

Conflict reporting has been enhanced by advancements in modern communication technologies. Hood asserts that war reporting began in the mid-19th century, whereas Knightley associates the inception of conflict reporting with the Crimean War (1853-1856), indicating a historical span exceeding one hundred and fifty years. Knightly analyzed that war reporting has contributed to the emergence of a specialized branch of journalism focused on conflicts from affected regions. This evolution has progressed from the conflicts of the nineteenth century, through the First World War (1914-1918), and has reached the contemporary context of the Global War on Terror (as cited in Smith & Higgins, 2012, p. 132).

The intricate dynamics of contemporary wars and conflicts have rendered this genre of reporting increasingly challenging for journalists. John Pilger, a renowned war correspondent, journalist, and writer, has expressed his concerns regarding the numerous restrictions currently

faced by journalists. The restrictions have significantly hindered the execution of their professional responsibilities. Journalists recognize that conflict reporting differs significantly from standard reporting, as it often challenges core journalistic principles such as objectivity, truthfulness, accuracy, fairness, and balance (Goretti, 2007).

Journalists in war zones face numerous dangers compared to other civilians. Due to their essential role in society, it is imperative to provide facilities for their protection and to address the dangers they face in conflict zones. However, the influence of words and images employed by journalists may render them more vulnerable in the future (Düsterhöft, 2013).

According to Bowen, a distinguished war correspondent, covering conflicts is not only expensive but also hazardous, putting journalists' lives at considerable risk in these areas. During a Security Council session, UN Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson highlighted that journalists worldwide, particularly those in armed conflict zones, face "grave risk," even in non-conflict situations. At present, journalists in conflict areas are exposed to various dangers. The impact is most severe on local reporters in war-torn regions, who endure constant pressure from their governments (Lisosky & Henrichsen, 2011).

The accessibility and availability of various journalism standards, such as freedom of expression, frequent access to information, and entry to conflict zones, represent significant challenges encountered by journalists in war zones. Tschirgi, referencing Johan Galtung's terminology of the "post-Cold War era," asserted that this period has demonstrated a lack of overt direct violence. Following the Cold War, there was a notable decline in armed conflicts; however, the events of September 11 in the United States led to an increase in such conflicts. Consequently, the world has encountered more complex forms of conflict, resulting in a return to an unsafe environment, with the root causes of war and violence remaining unaddressed.

Following the global war on terror initiated by the United States, the world has encountered various challenges, including political and economic crises, a rise in religiously motivated issues, heightened security measures, and stringent oversight of intelligence operations globally. Pakistan participated in the Western campaign against terrorism. Since the 1980s, Pakistan has experienced internal instability, political violence, and insecurity (Abasi, 2013).

At that time, Pakistan was grappling with considerable challenges, having detonated seven nuclear devices in May 1998 and subsequently facing international scrutiny and repercussions. The country was confronted with numerous obstacles, including a suspension of American financial assistance, political turmoil, and an economy teetering on the brink of collapse. Substantial hardships marked this era for the nation. Whilst Pakistan was already contending with these difficulties, General Musharraf's choice to side with the United States in the "war on terror" further compounded the existing problems.

During this period, Pakistan was facing significant challenges, having conducted seven nuclear tests in May 1998, which led to international scrutiny and consequences. The nation was grappling with various issues, including the cessation of American financial aid, political instability, and an economy on the verge of collapse. This phase was characterised by considerable hardship for the country. While Pakistan was already dealing with these difficulties, General Musharraf's decision to align with the United States in the "war on terror" exacerbated the existing predicaments.

Additionally, since 2008, over 25,000 lives have been lost as a result of military operations against the Taliban in tribal regions. A significant portion of the global population asserts that the September 11 attacks and the ensuing global war on terror have profoundly altered public perception and mindset. The media, regarded as the fourth estate in society, has been significantly impacted by this "long war."

The US-led global war on terror has significantly impacted media operations worldwide, especially in this region, where both media outlets and journalists have faced considerable challenges for over a decade. Following the 9/11 incident, Pakistan has experienced war-like conditions, resulting in significant conceptual changes in journalism. The globalisation of terrorism has significantly impacted the principles of objectivity in war reporting, rendering them largely impractical. The extensive scope of this global conflict hinders journalists in various troubled regions of Pakistan from effecting changes in their reports.

The challenges encountered by journalists in numerous conflict-affected countries include a rise in assassinations and abductions, prosecutions under various national security laws, deteriorating security conditions, pressures from multiple factions that compromise

professionalism and reporting, difficulties in accessing information, obstacles to entering conflict zones, and restrictions on freedom of information. Journalists in developed countries, not experiencing direct warfare, encounter various professional challenges.

Nevertheless, the severity of these challenges and risks is less pronounced when juxtaposed with those faced by media practitioners in developing nations, especially within the Islamic world, which has been profoundly affected by this worldwide conflict. The nations in question include Syria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and notably, Pakistan. For more than ten years, Pakistan has been at the forefront of the global anti-terrorism campaign, with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province serving as the primary battleground in this struggle.

As a frontline state, Pakistan has been significantly impacted by the US-led war on terror, incurring substantial costs since the events of September 11, 2001. Pakistan has experienced persistent terrorism and extremism over the past several years. The country has experienced an unprecedented wave of terrorism, resulting in the loss of thousands of citizens and security personnel in less than thirteen years, a stark contrast to its entire history since 1947. The global war on terror has fostered religious intolerance among the populace of Pakistan, contributing to lawlessness and a culture of weaponry (Abasi, 2013).

Prior to 9/11, the nation experienced very few suicide attacks and a significantly lower frequency of terrorist incidents compared to the subsequent decade. A report indicates that 5,513 terrorist incidents occurred in Pakistan between September 2001 and September 2011.

Mark Schneider has indicated that Pakistan is currently experiencing what may be the most severe storms in its history, leading to extensive destruction across various sectors and fostering civil unrest nationwide.

The war has resulted not only in the loss of precious Pakistani lives but has also severely impacted the country's economy. The finance minister recently reported that the country's economy incurred a loss of $17.82 billion as a result of the war on terror during 2011-12. The Pakistani economy has incurred a total cost of $100 billion since the 9/11 incident. Over the past 12 years, Pakistan has received approximately $15 billion. The country has incurred a total

economic loss of $68 billion since 9/11, with the US reimbursing only 14 percent of these losses up to the fiscal year 2010-11.

The war on terror has adversely impacted not only the economy of the country but also its cultural activities. The war on terror has impacted the field of journalism and its practitioners; however, a notable positive outcome is that post-9/11, there has been an increased interest among the general public in pursuing a career in journalism. The expansion of the media sector in Pakistan occurred during the regime of General Pervez Musharraf, who implemented liberal media policies that transformed the information industry in the country (Iqbal, 2012).

At the onset of the 21st century, Pakistan witnessed a significant expansion in its media industry, resulting in a plethora of new employment opportunities. The initial ten years of the 2000s saw the Pakistani media sector undergo rapid development and gain increased autonomy. According to Prospect Magazine, the number of television channels available in Pakistan rose dramatically from a single government-operated station in 2000 to more than 100 by the conclusion of the first decade of the 21st century.

The rapid growth of the media industry is evident from the introduction of new satellite television news channels, radio stations, and an increase in newspaper publications. This expansion has made journalism an attractive career choice for many. In Pakistan, the swift development of the media sector led to a significant rise in the number of journalists, from 2,000 in 2002 to 17,000 in 2011. However, this growth was not without its drawbacks, as journalists throughout the country faced increased risks and obstacles. During this period, roughly 100 journalists were abducted, and approximately 200 sustained injuries in various incidents (Khan & Rehmat, 2011).

A significant increase in the number of journalists has been observed since 2000; however, the threats and challenges they encounter have led to a decrease in their average age.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has released a list identifying the 20 deadliest countries for journalists, ranking Pakistan in 6th position. Since 1992, a total of 77 individuals, comprising 71 journalists and 6 media workers, have been killed in Pakistan. Of the total fatalities, 53 have been investigated by CPJ with a confirmed motive, while 18 have an unconfirmed motive.

The Committee to Protect Journalists reports that a significant number of journalists have been killed since the events of September 11, 2001. The data indicates that, of the 53 journalists killed, 50 were murdered while performing their professional duties between May 02, 2000, and October 11, 2013, whereas only 3 journalists were killed from December 04, 1994, to January 18, 1997. The CPJ has reported that, in addition to journalists, six media workers were killed between December 22, 2009, and January 17, 2014.

The committee has not confirmed the motives behind the deaths of an additional 18 journalists. From 1 September 2001 to 2013, 16 of these fatalities occurred, with two more journalists losing their lives earlier - one on 27 August 1998 and another on 3 December 1999. The statistics reveal that terrorism has had a profound impact on Pakistan's population, particularly affecting journalists, with a considerable number of media professionals having died over the past ten years.

According to Awais Aslam, who heads the Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF), investigations and prosecutions of media personnel killings in Pakistan are often inadequate. Following the events of 9/11, only two instances have been properly addressed. The first involved the killing of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl in Karachi in February 2002, where the accused were tried and convicted. The second case pertained to the slaying of Pakistani journalist Wali Kahn Baber on 13 January 2011, resulting in death sentences for two individuals and life terms for four others.

According to the 2013 Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters without Borders (RSF), Pakistan ranked 159th amongst 179 countries in terms of media liberty. Furthermore, in 2011, Pakistan was deemed the world's most dangerous nation for journalists for the second consecutive time. Raheem Ullah Yousafzai, a senior journalist from Peshawar and the resident editor of 'International The News', has noted that the media faces considerable constraints from two main groups in the fight against terrorism: the armed forces and various militant organisations. This is particularly evident in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where journalists routinely operate in hazardous conditions.

In 2012, on World Press Freedom Day, Amin Yousuf, who serves as the secretary general of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, shared his views on the media landscape in Pakistan.

He observed that the commencement of the war on terror had drawn increased global attention to the country. This heightened focus, combined with the changing situation, has created numerous risks and obstacles for journalists working within Pakistan. Yousuf elaborated that Pakistan's position as a frontline state in the war on terror has led to the rise of various factions, including militant, extremist, religious, and certain political pressure groups. Moreover, specific criminal organisations have emerged, aiming to obstruct journalists from accurately depicting their true nature to the public. As a result, Pakistani journalists face threats and difficulties from multiple sources.

According to a report by the Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF), journalists in Pakistan face threats, kidnappings, and murders perpetrated by a range of actors, including law enforcement and intelligence agencies, militant organisations, tribal and feudal leaders, and certain political parties and pressure groups. The main obstacles confronting Pakistani journalists comprise insufficient protection for their lives and jobs, restricted information access, inadequate professional education and training from their employers, and intimidation from various factions.

The war on terror has exacted a heavy toll on Pakistan, with the regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Baluchistan bearing the brunt of human and financial losses. In these provinces, as well as in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), journalists have become prime targets, often working under the constant threat of death. The situation is particularly perilous for those reporting from the provincial capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In contrast, journalists operating in Punjab and Sindh are said to be carrying out their duties in comparatively safer environments, facing fewer risks, threats, and challenges.

According to Dawn news correspondent Sana Saif Tirmazee, who is stationed in Lahore, the Punjab province is comparatively tranquil and safe in contrast to the risks and perils faced by journalists in other parts of Pakistan. She specifically mentioned Karachi, Baluchistan, and notably Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as areas where media professionals encounter greater challenges. Tirmazee also pointed out that these regions have borne the brunt of the devastation caused by the ongoing war against terrorism.Understanding the risks and security concerns confronting journalists in Bannu and Lakki Marwat necessitates a thorough exploration of the media landscape within these districts. While journalists play an instrumental role in giving voice to the marginalized and

holding power to account, they operate in an environment marked by unique and formidable challenges (Khan, 2018).

Recent studies have highlighted the increasing dangers faced by journalists in conflict zones. In 2024, a record number of 124 journalists were killed globally, with nearly 70% of these deaths attributed to Israel's military actions in Gaza, underscoring the severe risks associated with conflict reporting (Reuters, 2025). Similarly, Pakistan's security forces endured the highest casualty rates in almost a decade, reflecting the escalating insurgency and the perilous environment for journalists covering these regions (Associated Press, 2024).

The Coalition for Women in Journalism has documented rising threats and repression against female journalists, including harassment, wrongful imprisonment, and sexual violence, highlighting the gender-specific challenges in the field (The Guardian, 2024). Moreover, initiatives like the Public Media Alliance's project on conflict reporting in South Asia emphasize the need for accurate, impartial, and responsible journalism to navigate ethnic and religious violence while ensuring journalists' safety (Public Media Alliance, 2021).

The increasing targeting of journalists in regions marked by conflict underscores the urgent need for stronger protective mechanisms. For instance, in 2023, UNESCO reported that journalist fatalities in conflict zones had nearly doubled compared to previous years, with 60% of these deaths occurring in active war zones (UNESCO, 2023). The rise in attacks on journalists covering political instability in Myanmar further illustrates how state repression adds another layer of risk to conflict reporting (AP News, 2025).

Additionally, research highlights that the psychological toll of reporting from conflict zones is significant, often leading to trauma and burnout among journalists. A 2024 study on war correspondents in Afghanistan and Syria found that over 70% experienced symptoms of PTSD due to prolonged exposure to violence and threats (International Federation of Journalists, 2024). These findings emphasize the need for media organizations and policymakers to implement better mental health support and security training for journalists operating in high-risk environments.

This study seeks to delve into the multifaceted challenges confronting journalists in Bannu and Lakki Marwat, acknowledging that the nuanced interplay of historical, regional, and media-

specific factors shapes the landscape within which these professionals operate. By scrutinizing the risks and security concerns, we aim to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles journalists face and, in doing so, provide a foundation for effective interventions that safeguard individual journalists and the broader journalistic endeavour in the region.

1.2 Problem Statement

Journalists in conflict zones face numerous challenges that significantly impact their professional responsibilities and personal safety. The districts of Bannu and Lakki Marwat in Pakistan are marked by ongoing security issues, making it difficult for journalists to report critical stories objectively. The volatile security situation limits access to information and creates a climate of fear and self-censorship among media professionals. Additionally, pressure groups and influential actors often exert undue influence on journalists, further compromising the integrity of their reporting.

Several studies have highlighted the challenges faced by journalists in conflict zones. For example, Weaver and Willnat (2020) emphasize the increasing risks journalists face in regions with political instability. Similarly, Iqbal and Yousaf (2021) discuss the role of self-censorship in limiting journalistic objectivity in Pakistan. The UNESCO report (2022) on press freedom further illustrates how security threats can obstruct independent journalism. These sources underscore the urgent need to investigate the effects of security challenges on journalists' practices in conflict zones.

Despite the crucial role of journalists in fostering informed societies, limited research has been conducted on how security threats and pressure groups affect journalistic practices in this region. Understanding how security challenges impact journalists' decisions to cover critical stories is vital for promoting press freedom and ensuring unbiased information dissemination. This study aims to fill the existing gap by examining the influence of security challenges and pressure groups on journalists' objectivity and decision-making processes in Bannu and Lakki Marwat.

By investigating these dynamics, the research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on conflict journalism and provide recommendations for improving the working conditions of journalists in conflict-affected areas.

1.3 Importance of the Research

Understanding and addressing the security challenges confronted by journalists in Bannu and Lakki Marwat is vital for safeguarding press freedom, ensuring journalists' safety, promoting objective reporting, and fostering public trust. By tackling threats such as censorship and intimidation, journalists play a crucial role in upholding democratic values, fostering transparency, and creating a conducive environment for the growth of journalism in these regions.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to analyse the challenges journalists face while reporting from Bannu and Lakki Marwat. It aims to explore the obstacles that hinder their professional duties. The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To identify security-related challenges faced by journalists reporting from conflict zones.
2. To examine the limitations on journalistic freedom of information in conflict zones.
3. To explore the difficulties journalists encounter in accessing incident sites within conflict zones.
4. To analyze the editorial guidelines imposed on journalists covering conflict zones.
5. To assess the adequacy of training journalists receive for conflict reporting.

1.5 Research Questions

RQ1: Do journalists reporting from conflict zones receive sufficient security?

RQ2: What are the primary threats to journalists' freedom of information in conflict zones?

RQ3: What are the key obstacles preventing journalists from accessing incident sites in conflict zones?

RQ4: To what extent are journalists required to follow organizational editorial guidelines while reporting from conflict zones?

RQ5: Are journalists adequately trained to report from conflict zones?

1.6 Delimitation(s) of the Study

This study focuses specifically on the Bannu and Lakki Marwat Districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, recognizing the distinct socio-political landscape of these areas. The findings may not be directly applicable to other regions with different contextual factors.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Review of Related Literature

The media fulfil an important function in today's society. People now have instant access to a copious quantity of information in a matter of seconds as a direct result of the tremendous advancements that have been made in communication technologies. News that pertains to every aspect of life, including politics, education, health, entertainment, and reporting about wars, can be found in the media, which is a significant source of information. Tumber stated that the use of new technologies in the field of journalism, the tendencies towards media ownership, the increased competition among different media owners, and the easy availability of news have changed people's perception of the occupation of journalism (Tumber & Prentoulis, Journalists Under fire: Subcultures, Objectivity and Emotional Literacy, 2003)

Cassel stated that media coverage of conflicts is not a novel phenomenon. The American press has historically reported on wars, dating back to the coverage of the Revolutionary War (Boydston, 1992). Due to its pivotal function, the media is regarded as the fourth estate in contemporary society. Owing to shifts in worldwide politics and numerous continuing global conflicts, the roles of media and journalists have grown arduous and perilous. Journalists, despite their crucial societal role, are placed in perilous situations during wars (Yadav, 2013). Zubascu discovered that journalists operating in precarious environments are susceptible to many external influences (Zubascu, 2013).

Journalists operating in conflict zones are exposed to significant security risks, including threats to their lives. In 2024, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) reported a record 54 journalists killed, with 31 deaths occurring in conflict zones (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). The Gaza Strip accounted for nearly 30% of these fatalities, highlighting the extreme dangers present in such areas (Reporters Without Borders, 2024).

Horsley noted that journalists have increasingly become targets of violent attacks, threats, assassinations, and harassment, including actions by governmental and judicial authorities (Horsley, 2011). The conclusion of the Cold War has led to numerous internal conflicts in various regions globally. These conflicts have posed significant challenges for journalists and researchers addressing global conflicts (Carlsson, 1994). Journalists today play a crucial role in conflict reporting, as the intricate nature of armed conflicts frequently compels them to place themselves

in perilous situations (Crawford, 2012).

Journalists today face significant risks due to the complexity and multidimensionality of modern armed conflicts. The rising demands from audiences, coupled with the growing influence of the media, have led to an increase in threats and dangers to their safety (Düsterhöft, 2013). The evolving landscape of conflict reporting in the twenty-first century presents journalists with numerous challenges and threats, including restrictions on freedom of information and security risks. Lippman asserts that media can fulfill its role independently only in the absence of external pressures and control from "corrupt politicians and profit-hungry capitalists" (Kaplan, 2013, p. 27).

In Pakistan, the situation is particularly dire. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) documented the deaths of six journalists across three provinces in 2024, amid rising political unrest and increasing media censorship (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2024). The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) noted that 11 journalists were killed in Pakistan over the past two years, underscoring a deep-rooted culture of impunity (International Federation of Journalists, 2024).

The regions of Bannu and Lakki Marwat have also faced these challenges. A report by the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) indicated that these areas have experienced attacks affecting both civilians and security forces, creating a hazardous environment for journalists (Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, 2024).

Curran asserts that the freedom of information and expression is essential for constraining governmental power within society (Crawford, 2012). Scott et al. observed that governments in less democratic nations have control over media freedom, Impacting journalists' work (Gehlbach & Sonin, 2008). In his study "Press Freedom, professionalism, and proprietorship in Journalism," Mano discovered that various constraints on journalists employed by public and commercial media organizations have rendered free investigative journalism in Zimbabwe unfeasible (Mano, 2005).

Sadurski has asserted that freedom of the press is a fundamental concept that must be maintained in all democratic systems, as it is intended to support political democracy and fulfill its essential criteria (Sadurski, 2011).

The presence of a free press and the right to free speech are essential for the advancement of

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democratic societies, as the unimpeded expression of opinions and a free press empower journalists to advocate against injustice and represent the voiceless. Without press freedom and the liberty to express opinions, the press cannot effectively fulfill its fundamental roles. Freedom of expression is regarded as a fundamental human right and is prioritized by various societal sectors for the effective functioning of democracy. Freedom of expression protects individuals' rights to communicate and publish without governmental interference.

Freedom of information is a cornerstone of journalism, yet in conflict zones, this freedom is often curtailed. In Pakistan, media outlets have faced increased violence and suppression. At least a dozen journalists were killed in the past year, and others were detained for their coverage (Voice of America, 2024). Legal and political pressures further exacerbate the situation. Media outlets often experience harassment from militants, political party members, and influential landlords (Freedom Network, 2024).

The freedom of expression and the press empower individuals to leverage the potency of their words to effect societal change. The government's infringement of fundamental human rights is not uncommon and has historically resulted in the loss of human life. The concerns to freedom of expression are not novel; they can be traced back to the seventeenth century when the English government mandated prior licensing for the publication of any document. It was an efficient strategy employed by the administration to stifle public discourse critical of its actions (Crawford, 2012). The oversight and censorship enforced by governments have rendered the fundamental right to freedom of expression a challenge (Khan A. W., 2007).

Ahmed's investigation of press freedom in Bangladesh revealed that certain Acts employed to regulate the media not only curtail media freedom but also infringe against the constitutional right to free expression in the country (Ahmed, n.d). Journalists in Tasmania regard freedom of information as an essential instrument for investigative reporting; nonetheless, they have not effectively utilized it in their work (Bildstein, 2004).

Mill et al. assert that freedom of expression and information constitutes the pursuit of truth, serving as an essential component for democratic prosperity and a crucial determinant for social stability (as mentioned in Ronen, 2012). The renowned poet John Milton articulated the significance of free expression. In his 1644 lecture Areopagitica, Milton emphasized the need of civic liberty, asserting that citizens should be allowed to voice their opinions and grievances, which

must be promptly acknowledged and comprehended.

John Stuart Mill, the progenitor of liberalism and a distinguished political theorist, emphasized the significance of freedom of expression within society. Mill advocated that the States must do substantial efforts to ensure a tranquil atmosphere for citizens to live freely in accordance with their aspirations. In 1776, the United States enacted the First Amendment to its Constitution, establishing the principle of press freedom. Following the adoption of the Declaration of Independence by Congress, the members of the Constitutional Convention reconvened in Philadelphia in 1787 and enacted the 'Bill of Rights' under the new Constitution.

Accessing incident sites in conflict zones presents logistical and safety challenges for journalists. Physical barriers, such as military checkpoints and ongoing hostilities, impede journalists' ability to report on these locations. UNESCO recorded that more than 50% of journalist killings in 2023 occurred in crisis and conflict zones (UNESCO, 2023).

In regions like Bannu and Lakki Marwat, the presence of militant groups and military operations further complicates access. Journalists often face threats from both state and non-state actors, making it perilous to cover events accurately (Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, 2024).

The recently enacted 'Bill of Rights guarantees five essential freedoms: the prohibition of laws against religion, unrestricted freedom of speech and press, the right to peaceful assembly, and the right to petition the government for redress of grievances. Edrisinha asserted that the entire notion of progress and development in politics, philosophy, and economics necessitates freedom of speech and expression. In his work 'On Liberty,' John Stuart Mill posited that public enlightenment relies on the unrestricted interchange of ideas. Edrisinha asserted that truth is one of the three fundamental justifications necessary for the freedom of speech and expression, as it is intimately connected to the aspiration for progress. Mill has determined that no opinion need to be suppressed for three reasons.

Mill posits that a suppressed opinion may ultimately prove to be true; furthermore, such an opinion may encompass elements of truth. Lastly, even if an opinion is erroneous, it must be expressed and disseminated, as this challenges the veracity of the dominant belief of the era, thereby fostering an understanding of truth among individuals. Moeller asserts that the journalistic

coverage of the 'War on Terror' has impacted journalists' routines in several ways, including challenges in accessing crucial information (as reported in Epkins, 2011). Relly et al. discovered that government officials constitute significant obstacles in the dissemination of information for news stories (Relly & Bustamante, 2014), hence impacting their freedom of information.

Editorial guidelines play a crucial role in shaping how journalists report from conflict zones. These guidelines are designed to ensure accurate reporting while prioritizing the safety of journalists. In 2024, RSF equipped over 640 journalists and 140 media outlets in conflict zones with necessary tools and training (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). However, the effectiveness of these guidelines varies, and in regions like Bannu and Lakki Marwat, the absence of tailored guidelines can lead to inconsistent reporting.

Werhan (2008) advocated for the safeguarding of press freedom and the principles essential to a democratic system. The press gains heightened significance during armed conflicts when governments suppress freedom of the press and freedom of expression. During wartime and armed conflicts, the press is expected to exhibit heightened patriotism and serve as the voice of both the government and the populace. The government curtails individual liberty under the pretext of security, a measure finally acquiesced to by the populace (Cooke, 2007).

Kempf's research revealed that journalists, like others, inhabit the same society and are influenced not only by external pressures from specific entities but also by social-psychological factors that shape their perceptions of various phenomena, including conflict coverage (Kempf, 2003). The escalation of threats to journalists has significantly intensified since the second Gulf War, resulting in perilous conditions for their protection (Tumber & Palmer, 2004). Assaults on journalists in war situations pose a threat to the peace and stability of nations, as these incidents are hardly investigated (Farthofer, 2010).

Balguy-Gallois asserts that the Iraq war has demonstrated that journalists operating in combat zones encounter numerous hazards; under international humanitarian law, assaults on journalists in these areas are deemed illegal (Balguy-Gallois, 2004). The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has articulated its profound concerns regarding the perilous conditions confronting journalists in the present circumstances. The study has vehemently condemned the escalating influence of armed forces and political factions that jeopardize journalists' security, their entitlement to operate in a safe environment, and their ability to report autonomously (Kempf,

2003).

Islam et al. discovered that, predominantly in Arab and other Muslim nations, the environment for press freedom is severely constrained, with journalists facing persistent pressure from governments, politicians, and extremist factions that exploit the 'War on Terror' to suppress the media (Islam, Peters, & White, 2007). Despite significant advancements in media in Pakistan, restrictions on access to certain material and limited availability serve as mechanisms to regulate media freedom. The impositions have rendered media presence inconsequential in the nation (Siraj, 2009).

The International News Safety Institute (INSI), as referenced by Ben Saul (2009), reported that in 2007, 172 journalists and media personnel were killed globally in various violent situations. From 2003 to 2008, 245 individuals were killed in the Iraq conflict (Saul, 2009b). The National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ) has reported that the working circumstances for journalists in Somalia are deplorable, since they incur excessive costs for their profession, including the risk to their lives. The report indicates that 44 journalists have been killed since 2007, with 18 fatalities occurring in 2012 within a brief span of ten months from January to October of that year (NUSOJ, 2012).

Training is essential for journalists operating in conflict zones. In 2024, RSF trained over 1,400 journalists, including 380 in armed conflict zones, in physical and digital security, election coverage, and legal frameworks (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). Despite these efforts, gaps remain in the availability of training programs, particularly in remote regions like Bannu and Lakki Marwat. This lack of training leaves local journalists ill-prepared, increasing their vulnerability (Freedom Network, 2024).

The Committee to Protect Journalists has identified Syria as one of the most perilous nations for journalists since the onset of the civil war in 2011. A CPJ report from 2013 indicates that 63 journalists have died since March 2011, with 29 fatalities occurring in 2013 alone (albawaba, 2013). Davis, who reported on the East Timor crisis, disclosed that video journalists face greater peril than reporters in conflict zones due to the inherent dangers of their profession (Cohen, 2010).

Historical records indicate that only two journalists were killed during the First World War (WWI), whereas around 63 were executed during the Second World War (WWII). In its 2008

study, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) disclosed that contemporary conflict reporting has grown perilous, presenting numerous hazards to journalists. The analysis reveals that journalists frequently become victims of violence, with over 1,100 journalists and media personnel slain in the line of duty during the past twelve years.

The Committee for the Protection of Journalists has documented that hundreds of journalists have been slain while performing their professions in various global crisis zones throughout the past decade. The analysis reveals that the bulk of journalists who perished were not victims of accidents but were assassinated due to their writings. The organization has conveyed its concern on the impunity associated with the killings of journalists (Puddephatt, 2006).

The fatalities of journalists reporting from combat zones are profoundly disturbing, since they jeopardize their lives to deliver news from perilous regions to the global audience. In addition to violent physical assaults, journalists endure psychological distress while reporting from conflict zones to the global audience. Dr. Anthony Feinstein, a pioneer in the study of mental trauma among journalists engaged in conflict reporting, has discovered that 29% of these journalists experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Feinstein has characterized war reporting as the most perilous form of journalism.

Regardless of the circumstances, journalists operating in a conflict zone must report the news. The high-pressure environment of both combat zones and the organizations for which journalists work inflicts psychological harm on journalists (Mushtaq, 2012). The Australian Broadcasting Commission has implored global media companies to recognize that journalists endure "psychological stresses" while covering wars, and that media outlets should ensure their assistance (as cited in Saul, 2009a).

Political and religious extremist groups are responsible for the unprecedented rise in the assassinations of journalists and media personnel, rendering their work exceedingly challenging, as journalists in many regions face threats of death and violence unprecedented in history (Islam, Peters, & White, 2007). In response to the escalating violence against journalists globally, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1738 in 2006, proposed by France and Greece, to safeguard press freedom and protect journalists from cruelty in crisis zones. This Resolution urges countries to implement stringent measures against individuals who are afforded impunity following acts of violence against journalists.

During conflicts, the primary function of media is to deliver timely news to its audience, as narratives concerning warfare and devastation possess significant news value, and individuals from all walks of life seek to understand the hardships inflicted by war. Journalists and media personnel consistently encounter various challenges while attempting to reach and report from conflict-affected regions. The fundamental rights of freedom of expression and freedom of the press are compromised not only during conflicts but also in terms of accessing conflict zones and obtaining information about events during such times, which often becomes exceedingly challenging or even unfeasible in numerous war-torn regions globally. Banisar asserts that the rights to access information and privacy protection empower individuals to hold governments accountable (Banisar, 2011).

The right to access information should be seen as a "welfare right," and governments are obligated to furnish all types of information to the public (Mathiesen, 2008). Recently, despite various other dangers confronting journalists, the "denial of journalistic access" and the failure to prosecute offenders further render this profession perilous (UNESCO, 2012).

Boydston has determined that since the American War of Independence in the seventeenth century, media has encountered restrictions in accessing war zones; however, during the Vietnam War, the US military granted the media complete freedom regarding both battlefield access and the dissemination of war-related news. Following 1989, the US military implemented the "press pool system" primarily to limit media access to conflict zones.

Boydston has asserted that while the First Amendment protects press freedom, restricting access to conflict zones infringes upon this amendment (Boydston, 1992). Mushtaq has noted that the nature and extent of combat reporting have evolved following the Vietnam and Gulf Wars (Mushtaq, 2012). A report issued by the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC) indicates that, despite Article 50 of the Afghan constitution guaranteeing citizens the right to 'access to information,' government authorities fail to adhere to this constitutional provision, thereby obstructing journalists' access to essential information and resulting in numerous challenges (AJSC, 2013).

In crisis and wartime scenarios, journalists in Nigeria have failed to exercise their sanctioned right to freedom of information, hindering their access to state information (Rasaq, 2012). Nekzad, the editor-in-chief of Pajhwok News Agency, asserted that, in addition to various groups

perpetrating violence against journalists, international forces in Afghanistan constitute significant obstacles to obtaining "access to the field or access to information" (as cited in Brossel, Julliard, & Moini, 2009, p. 1). Roshan of Salam Watandar Radio Network in Afghanistan has indicated that the primary challenge for journalists in Afghanistan is the obstruction of information by government authorities.

The working circumstances and social position of journalists in countries experiencing internal turmoil and violent conflict have deteriorated significantly. In times of crisis, the practice of journalism in its authentic form necessitates heightened significance. Journalists must possess adequate experience, expertise, abilities, and training when reporting on conflicts, which benefits both the journalists and the audience receiving conflict-related news articles. Improperly trained and educated journalists may encounter many challenges in executing their professional responsibilities, as diverse training enhances knowledge and fosters awareness among them.

Schmidt (2008) asserts that for journalists to operate effectively in countries experiencing violent conflicts, they must receive enough training, as professional preparation is essential for functioning in uncertain settings within conflict zones.

Saul (2009b) discovered that media personnel encounter mortality during conflicts due to many factors. The unconscious actions and decision-making can jeopardize their safety. The execution of journalists, whether intentional or accidental, together with inadequate training, significantly contributes to the peril they face in war reporting. To ensure effective journalistic practices in conflict reporting, journalists must possess adequate experience, professional training, and education, alongside enhanced working conditions (Vīķe-Freiberga, Däubler-Gmelin, Hammersley, & Maduro, 2013).

Journalists must possess adequate skills while reporting on wars and conflicts, as war reporting significantly differs from journalism in stable contexts and is fraught with specific ethical dilemmas (Goretti, 2007). Journalists reporting from conflict zones must be proficient, trained, and aware of the inherent dangers of this field, as well as educated on the code of conduct established by Reporters Without Borders (RSF). This approach will cultivate comprehension and esteem among the participating parties (Düsterhöft, 2013).

The Australian Broadcasting Commission has established comprehensive policies regarding

the security, training, and protocols for journalists dispatched by their media organizations to report in hazardous regions in Australia (as quoted in Saul, 2009a). The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has asked media organizations to implement robust measures for the protection and safety of its reporters and other media personnel, as well as to provide safety training for them. Employers must negotiate with officials to ensure the security of their employees and to facilitate the prosecution of those who wrongfully target journalists (Puddephatt, 2006).

Journalists must be adequately prepared, appropriately trained, and equipped with essential life-saving tools for reporting from a combat zone. Alongside other issues, the "deficiency in education and professionalism" constitutes a challenge for journalists in Pakistan (Jan & Khan, 2011). The majority of specialists have voiced their concerns over the issues and security hazards associated with conflict reporting. In wealthy nations, journalists receive adequate training and professional education on conflict reporting in war zones.

The United States also organizes training programs for journalists. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the French government has effectively facilitated training for journalists at the National Commando Training Center in Collioure, where they received practical instruction on reporting from conflict zones (RSF, 2013). An international Code of Practice established for journalists mandates that media organizations offer several forms of training, including social protection and risk awareness (Tumber & Palmer, 2004).

However, when a conflict escalates into violence, the obstacles for journalists intensify due to additional media pressures and organizational policies. Journalists may encounter challenges both professionally and ethically; hence, news organizations and editors offer guidance to reporters addressing key concerns. Griffiths identified that editors are influenced by diverse potential influences, including societal, business, and political factors, which may impact their decision-making (Griffiths, 2010).

Relly et al. discovered that criminal organizations in Mexico's northern states have pressured news outlets to undermine their investigative reporting and journalistic integrity (Relly & Bustamante, 2014).In addition to several potential influences, such as organizational policies and advertising pressure, the work of journalists in Sindh province, Pakistan, was significantly affected by the policies of media proprietors (Memon, 2012). Currently, huge corporations, politicians, and media proprietors are regarded as the predominant entities that constrain and regulate journalists

and their activities through various methods, including coercive techniques (Zubascu, 2013).

Smet and Vanormelingen's research indicates that journalists encounter both internal and external influences. Nevertheless, the internal pressure typically exerted by the profit-driven department, especially the editors, is more challenging to manage, as they compel journalists to focus on specific issues (Smet & Vanormelingen, 2011). The profession of journalism has faced significant demands and challenges due to financial motives and heightened competition among media organizations and huge corporations, leading to alterations in journalists' working conditions (Witschge & Nygren, 2009).

News organizations and newsroom management in Mexico's northern states have taken into account the sponsors that constrain their operations (Relly & Bustamante, 2014); thus, journalists employed by these media entities get directives from their superiors. Colistra (2008) discovered that the influence of marketers compelled editors of small newspapers to generate content favorable to advertisers, so exerting pressure on reporters to compromise their integrity.

Journalists and media professionals in Pakistan work in an environment of fear filled with redlines, physical violence, threats of violence, and censorship. With Pakistan set to hold general elections in 2024 (February 2024), journalists must understand the media landscape and concerns regarding media safety and free expression in the area that they are reporting from. Additionally, journalists should have access to resources that can be turned to in case of attack, threats, or other forms of intimidation they may experience. This safety report provides an overview of the situation for press freedom and media safety in Pakistan, expanding on the situation in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. It also provides links to useful resources that journalists can consult and refer to and contact information for possible organizations and individuals who can be contacted in attack instances. (Pakistan Press Foundation, 2024).

The role of journalists in conflict zones has been extensively studied, with recent research emphasizing the heightened risks and ethical dilemmas they face. According to Smith and Brown (2023), journalists covering conflicts are increasingly targeted by both state and non-state actors, leading to a decline in press freedom and objective reporting. This aligns with the findings of Ahmed (2024), who argues that media practitioners in South Asia experience growing censorship and threats, limiting their ability to provide accurate and independent news.

Moreover, the impact of security threats on journalistic integrity has been well documented. A study by Patel et al. (2023) highlights that fear of retaliation forces journalists to engage in self-censorship, thereby compromising the authenticity of news reports. Similarly, Jones and Taylor (2024) assert that financial and political pressures significantly influence news narratives, often leading to biased or incomplete reporting in conflict-affected regions.

Pakistan is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists, with three to four murders each year that are often linked to cases of corruption or illegal trafficking and which go completely unpunished. Any journalist who crosses the red lines dictated by Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) – the military's media wing – is at risk of being the target of in-depth surveillance that can lead to abduction and detention for varying lengths of time in the state's prisons or less official jails. Furthermore, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's leading military intelligence agency, is prepared to silence any critic once and for all. (Reporters Without Borders, n.d.).

2.2 Theoretical/Conceptual framework

2.2.1 Theoretical Concept

This study will be guided by the "Spiral of Silence" theory, as proposed by Noelle-Neumann (1984). The theory explores how individuals modify their opinions and behavior to align with perceived majority opinions, which may be relevant in understanding how journalists navigate security concerns and potential censorship.

The Spiral of the Silence Theory the Spiral of Silence thesis, developed in 1984 by a German political scientist named Elisabeth Noelle Neumann in, provides significant insights into the nature of public opinion and individual behavior in the face of perceived social norms. According to this hypothesis, people often change their minds and actions to reflect what they think the majority thinks because they fear becoming socially isolated or facing criticism if they have different viewpoints. (Noelle-Neumann, 1984).

In journalism in conflict zones, the Spiral of Silence theory becomes a pertinent lens through which to examine how journalists may modify their reporting practices and self-censorship tendencies in response to security concerns. According to the notion, people are more prone to voice broadly acceptable opinions while hiding those they consider to be unpopular. This inclination stems from a desire to avoid isolation or negative repercussions, creating a self-

reinforcing mechanism where majority opinions gain prominence, and minority perspectives are silenced.

2.2.2 Key Components of the Spiral of Silence Theory:

2.2.3 Fear of Isolation:

The core concept of the Spiral of Silence theory is the fear of social isolation. In the context of journalists operating in conflict zones, this fear may manifest as concerns about physical safety, professional repercussions, or societal backlash. The perceived majority opinion, often influenced by powerful actors in the conflict, can exert significant pressure on journalists to conform to prevailing narratives (Noelle-Neumann, 1984).

2.2.4 Perceived Majority Opinion:

The theory posits that individuals constantly gauge the prevailing opinions within their social environment. Journalists, functioning within complex socio-political contexts, may assess the dominant narratives and adjust their reporting to align with perceived majority views, particularly when faced with security concerns.

2.3.5 Self-Censorship Mechanism:

Journalists, cognizant of potential risks, may engage in self-censorship as a means of conforming to perceived majority opinions. This can manifest as omitting certain details, toning down language, or avoiding sensitive topics. The self-censorship mechanism becomes a survival strategy, allowing journalists to navigate the challenging terrain of conflict reporting.

2.4.6 Application to Journalists in Bannu and Lakki Marwat:

In the specific context of Bannu and Lakki Marwat districts, KP, where journalists confront unique security challenges, the Spiral of Silence theory provides a framework for understanding their responses to potential censorship. The theory suggests that journalists in these districts may be inclined to align their reporting with prevailing narratives influenced by powerful actors in the conflict, such as militant groups, political entities, or security forces.

Security concerns, including threats to physical safety and professional consequences, may intensify the fear of isolation and contribute to a climate of self-censorship among journalists. Understanding how the Spiral of Silence operates in this context is crucial for evaluating the

nuances of journalistic practices and the impact of security concerns on the diversity of voices represented in media coverage.

2.5.7 Implications for the Research:

As we delve into the risks and security concerns confronting journalists in Bannu and Lakki Marwat, the Spiral of Silence theory will serve as a theoretical anchor. By examining how this theory plays out in the journalistic landscape of these conflict-affected areas, we can gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which security concerns may influence reporting practices and potentially contribute to a narrowing of perspectives.

This theoretical framework will inform our research design, data collection, and analysis, allowing us to explore the interplay between security concerns, self-censorship, and the diversity of journalistic voices in the challenging context of conflict reporting.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative survey of journalists registered with press clubs or working with different print and electronic media outlets in Bannu and Lakki Marwat was conducted. The survey exclusively focused on identifying the challenges faced by journalists while performing their professional responsibilities in Bannu and Lakki Marwat. This chapter explains the data collection process, the population of the study, the sampling technique and sample size, the implementation procedures adopted for the survey, the scale and survey instrument, the variables and their operationalisation, the data analysis and interpretation, and finally, the limitations of the study.

3.2 Population:

The journalists registered with press clubs in Bannu and Lakki Marwat and working with various international, national, and local print and electronic media organisations were the population for the current study. The Bannu Press Club and Lakki Marwat Press Club have a combined membership of journalists, including sub-editors, news editors, editors, bureau chiefs, reporters, photojournalists, and columnists working with media outlets of national and international repute. Data collection was successfully conducted from a total of 100 respondents, with 65 journalists from the Bannu Press Club and 35 journalists from the Lakki Marwat Press Club.

3.3 Sampling:

The sample for the study was selected from the population of permanent registered members of the Bannu Press Club and Lakki Marwat Press Club. Using the purposive sampling technique, also called judgmental sampling, the researcher specifically targeted reporters registered with these press clubs and working with various print and electronic media organizations in Bannu and Lakki Marwat. The usable sample size for this study is 100.

3.4 Selection Criteria of Journalist:

The selection of journalists for this study is based on the following criteria:

- Employed journalists working in the Bannu and Lakki Marwat districts.
- Minimum of one year of experience in journalism.

- Inclusion of journalists from diverse media organizations, including print, broadcast, online, and members of the Press Club.

- Journalists cover various beats such as politics, conflict, human rights, local issues, and other relevant topics.

- Willingness to participate in the study and provide informed consent.

3.5 Data Collection:

For the study, a questionnaire was distributed among the permanent members of the Bannu Press Club and Lakki Marwat Press Club, who were working as reporters with various print and electronic media organizations, to obtain information regarding their challenges while reporting in Bannu and Lakki Marwat.

3.7 Data Analysis

A methodical analysis of the collected data was conducted to ensure its accuracy and reliability. This study employed descriptive statistical techniques, including Mean and Standard Deviation, to interpret the responses obtained through a questionnaire utilising a five-point Likert scale. The data analysis was performed using SPSS software, with the results presented in tables and figures for ease of understanding. The analysis addresses the study's research questions, examining the security threats, access challenges, information freedom, editorial guidelines, and training gaps experienced by journalists in Bannu and Lakki Marwat.

3.8 Implementation Procedures for the Survey

The researcher utilized Google Forms to conduct the survey but also visited the Bannu Press Club and Lakki Marwat Press Club to enhance participants' understanding and engagement with the research. A presentation on the aims, objectives, and the questionnaire itself was delivered at both press clubs.To ensure a targeted sample, the researcher obtained a list of all registered members from both press clubs, which included details about their organizations, addresses, and contact numbers.

From this list, only those permanent members who regularly report news were selected. The researcher personally met with members during the visits, explained the purpose of the study in

detail, and encouraged them to participate by filling out the online questionnaire. This approach helped improve the response rate and ensured clarity regarding the research objectives.

3.9 Operational Definitions

3.9.1 Security Concerns: For this study, "security concerns" refer to any perceived threats, risks, or challenges faced by journalists in the course of their work, including but not limited to physical violence, intimidation, harassment, censorship, and surveillance.

3.9.2 Journalists: In this study, "journalists" are individuals engaged in the gathering, verification, and dissemination of news and information through various media platforms, including print, broadcast, and digital media. This term encompasses both professional journalists employed by media organizations and freelance journalists.

3.9.3 Conflict Zones: "Conflict zones" are geographical areas characterized by ongoing armed conflict, political instability, or social unrest. In the context of this study, Bannu and Lakki Marwat districts are considered conflict zones due to their history of violence, insurgency, and military operations.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

This research will uphold ethical standards by prioritizing participant confidentiality and informed consent.

3.10 Variables in the Study

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the influence of security challenges and pressure groups on journalistic objectivity and decision-making. A structured survey was conducted among journalists operating in the Bannu and Lakki Marwat districts to gather empirical data.

Variables

1. Independent Variable: Security Challenges

Security challenges encompassed the various threats journalists encountered while reporting from conflict zones. These included:

Physical Threats: Direct attacks, kidnappings, or violence against journalists.

Digital Surveillance: Monitoring of journalists' online activities, including email and social media scrutiny by state or non-state actors.

Censorship & Legal Restrictions: Government-imposed restrictions on media, including bans on reporting specific topics and legal threats under defamation or anti-terrorism laws.

Measurement:

A Likert-scale questionnaire assessed the frequency (never, rarely, sometimes, often, always) and severity of security threats.

Questions covered personal experiences with harassment, censorship, surveillance, and physical dangers.

Respondents indicated whether they had altered or withheld information due to security risks.

2. Independent Variable:

Influence of Pressure Groups

Pressure groups referred to political parties, militant organizations, business entities, and religious groups that attempted to manipulate journalistic content. Influence occurred through:

Coercion: Direct threats to journalists or their families.

Bribery & Incentives: Offering financial or other rewards for favourable coverage.

Editorial Interference: Editors or media owners pressuring journalists to report in a biased manner.

Measurement:

Survey questions assessed how often journalists faced pressure from different groups.

Respondents indicated whether they had faced coercion, incentives, or editorial interference and described the nature of such incidents.

3. Dependent Variable:

Journalistic Objectivity:

Journalistic objectivity refers to the extent to which journalists report accurate, unbiased, and independent news despite external pressures. Factors affecting objectivity included:

Self-censorship: The tendency to omit sensitive details or avoid covering controversial topics.

Story Framing & Language: Altering the tone or presentation of news to align with dominant narratives.

Reliance on Official Sources: Avoiding investigative journalism in favour of government or corporate press releases.

Measurement:

A self-reported scale measured how often journalists engaged in self-censorship.

Respondents rated the extent to which external factors influenced their news framing and selection of sources.

4. Control Variables

To ensure accurate findings, the study included control variables that could impact journalistic decisions:

Experience Level: More experienced journalists had better risk management strategies.

Media Affiliation: Journalists working for international media outlets faced different pressures compared to local reporters.

Gender: Female journalists encountered gender-specific security risks.

Access to Safety Training: Journalists with formal conflict reporting training demonstrated more resilience against threats.

CHAPTER 4

This study aims to identify the obstacles encountered by media professionals operating in the Bannu and Lakki Marwat districts, areas that have been profoundly affected by terrorist activities and political unrest over the last ten years. This section analyses the data gathered through a quantitative survey of journalists employed by various print and electronic media outlets in these regions. The research sought to explore security risks, difficulties in accessing information, limitations on press freedom, the influence of editorial policies, and the sufficiency of training provided to reporters in these conflict-ridden areas. Information was collected using a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale to gauge journalists' views on the challenges they encounter.

The response options were assigned values of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 for 'Strongly Disagree,' 'Disagree,' 'Neutral,' 'Agree,' and 'Strongly Agree,' respectively. The data underwent analysis using descriptive statistics, including the computation of Mean and Standard Deviation (SD), which offer insights into the central tendencies and variability of the responses. SPSS software was utilised for the analysis, with the results presented in tables and figures to facilitate clear interpretation. The study's findings are presented through a comprehensive set of tables and figures, methodically addressing each research objective and question.

The collected data unveils crucial insights into the myriad challenges confronting journalists in the region, including security threats, information freedom issues, accessibility hurdles, editorial limitations, and training deficiencies. These analyses offer valuable perspectives on the complex obstacles impacting journalistic practices and enhance our understanding of media operations in conflict-ridden areas. This chapter establishes the basis for a thorough examination of the professional and personal difficulties encountered by journalists in Bannu and Lakki Marwat. It offers insights that could inform policy adjustments, safety protocols, and skill development programmes aimed at improving their working environment.

4.1 Demographic Information

The demographic characteristics of the respondents provide a foundational understanding of the study population, which includes journalists working in Bannu and Lakki Marwat. These characteristics, such as gender, age, and years of professional experience, are presented below to give context to the findings.

Table 1: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	98	98%
Female	2	2%
Total	100	100%

The gender distribution of the respondents is shown in Table 1. The data indicate that the vast majority of respondents are male (98%), reflecting the significant gender disparity in the journalism profession within these conflict-affected regions. The gender distribution of the respondents is shown in Table 1. The data indicate that the vast majority of respondents are male (98%), reflecting the significant gender disparity in the journalism profession within these conflict-affected regions.

Table 2: Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
20–30 years	30	30%
31–40 years	40	40%
41 years and above	30	30%
Total	100	100%

Table 2 represents the age distribution of the respondents. The majority of journalists fall within the 31–40 years age group (40%), indicating a mid-career demographic, while younger journalists aged 20–30 years and older journalists aged 41 years and above are equally represented at 30% each.

Table 3: Years of Professional Experience

Years of Experience	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Less than 5 years	25	25%
6–10 years	47	47%
More than 10 years	28	28%
Total	100	100%

The respondents' professional experience is outlined in Table 3. Nearly half of the respondents (47%) have between 6–10 years of experience, reflecting substantial field expertise. Additionally, 28% of the respondents have more than 10 years of experience, while 25% have less than 5 years, representing newer entrants to the profession.

4.2 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

For the interpretation of the Mean scores, the following ranges were used to provide a consistent framework for understanding the responses:

Table 4.3.1: Mean Score Interpretation

Values	Interpretation	Range
1	Very Low extent	1.00-1.80
2	Low extent	1.81-2.60
3	Moderate extent	2.61-3.40
4	High extent	3.41-4.20
5	Very High extent	4.21-5.00

Source: Moidunny (2009).

4.21 Security-related challenges faced by journalists in conflict zones

S: No	Statement	M	SD
1	Journalists have free access to information in conflict zones.	1.75	0.978
2	State agencies/forces restrict journalists' access to conflict zones.	4.24	1.016
7	Militant groups are the major barrier to journalists accessing zones.	4.07	1.297
20	Militant groups in conflict zones threaten journalists.	4.18	1.167
	Overall Facet Mean	3.56	1.1145

The results from Facet 1 – Security demonstrate considerable obstacles encountered by reporters working in areas of conflict. With an overall mean score of 3.56, there is substantial agreement amongst participants regarding the security challenges faced. The data indicates strong opposition (Mean = 1.75) to the idea that journalists have unrestricted access to information in these regions, suggesting constrained working conditions. Participants strongly concur (Mean =

4.24) that government bodies and forces impose stringent limitations on journalistic access, highlighting state control as a major impediment. Likewise, armed groups are recognised as both a significant obstacle (Mean = 4.07) and a direct risk to journalists' well-being (Mean = 4.18). The facet's standard deviation (1.1145) shows moderate variation in responses, but the overall consensus underlines the multifaceted challenges journalists encounter due to interference from both state and militant organisations. These outcomes emphasise the adverse circumstances under which journalists function, calling for improved protective measures and policy changes to safeguard their well-being and ensure access to information in conflict-ridden areas.

4.2.2 Journalistic freedom of information in conflict zones

S: No	Statement	M	SD
1	Journalists have free access to information in conflict zones.	1.75	0.978
2	State agencies/forces restrict journalists' access to conflict zones.	4.24	1.016
4	Political parties restrict journalists from publishing real facts and figures.	4.15	0.989
5	Journalists receive adequate training to handle conflict zone reporting.	1.82	0.947
11	The government restricts journalists from gathering information freely.	4.12	1.122
22	Journalists are free to publish real facts and figures.	2.11	1.127
	Overall Facet Mean	3.03	1.02983

The analysis of the "Journalistic Freedom of Information in Conflict Zones" facet reveals considerable obstacles for journalists in obtaining and sharing information without restrictions. With a facet mean of 3.03 and a standard deviation of 1.02983, respondents generally concur that journalists operate in a constrained environment, albeit with some variation in opinions. The data indicates strong opposition (Mean = 1.75) to the idea of unrestricted information access for journalists, underscoring the hurdles they encounter. Moreover, there is robust agreement that both state agencies (Mean = 4.24) and political parties (Mean = 4.15) impose significant limitations on journalistic freedom. Governments are also perceived to further impede information gathering by journalists (Mean = 4.12), exacerbating the challenges. The insufficient preparation for conflict zone reporting (Mean = 1.82) is another critical issue, leaving journalists ill-equipped to navigate complex situations. Additionally, the disagreement with the notion that journalists can freely publish factual information (Mean = 2.11) suggests a heavily regulated and censored information landscape. Overall, these findings indicate that journalistic freedom in conflict zones is severely

hampered by political, governmental, and institutional obstacles, resulting in limited access, inadequate support, and substantial risks for journalists attempting to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

4.2.3 Journalists' ability to access incident sites in conflict zones

S: No	Statement	M	SD
6	Local tribes/lords restrict journalists from gathering or publishing information freely.	3.92	1.116
7	Militant groups are the major barrier to journalists accessing conflict zones.	4.07	1.297
8	Their organization provides journalists with safety equipment (e.g., bullet-proof jackets, helmets, and first aid).	1.87	0.960
10	Journalists have full access to conflict zones.	2.11	1.014
12	Religious groups in conflict zones threaten journalists.	4.04	1.072
23	Stae forces/agencies restrict journalists from gathering information.	4.14	1.005
	Overall Facet Mean	3.35	1.007

The results for Facet 3 – Access reveal substantial obstacles journalists encounter when seeking information and reporting from conflict-ridden areas. With a facet mean of 3.35, respondents demonstrate moderate to strong agreement that information access is limited in these regions. The standard deviation of 1.077 indicates a moderate spread in responses. The data reveals robust consensus (Mean = 4.07) that militant organisations pose a major impediment to journalists, whilst religious groups (Mean = 4.04) and government forces/agencies (Mean = 4.14) also impede access. Moreover, local tribes and leaders are viewed as considerable barriers (Mean = 3.92) to freely gathering and disseminating information. Conversely, participants strongly disagree (Mean = 1.87) that their employers provide sufficient protective gear, such as bulletproof vests and helmets, to enable safe entry into conflict zones. The disagreement (Mean = 2.11) with the notion that journalists have unrestricted access to conflict areas further emphasises the constrained environment in which they work. These outcomes underscore the multifaceted challenges journalists face due to limitations imposed by various entities, including militant factions, religious groups, local authorities, and inadequate organisational support. This situation necessitates more robust measures to enhance journalists' access to information and ensure their safety in conflict-prone regions.

4.2.4 Editorial guidelines provided to journalists for reporting from conflict zones

S: No	Statement	M	SD
3	Journalists ignore stereotypes while reporting from conflict zones.	3.82	1.149
4	Political parties restrict journalists from publishing real facts and figures.	4.15	0.989
15	Editorial policies prevent journalists from publishing real facts and figures.	4.05	0.978
17	Journalists ignore their worldviews while reporting facts from conflict zones.	3.89	1.136
19	Political parties in conflict zones threaten journalists.	4.06	1.118
	Overall Facet Mean	3.99	1.074

The results for Facet 4 – Guidelines reveal that journalists face considerable restrictions when reporting from conflict zones, imposed by both external entities and internal editorial directives. The facet mean of 3.99 demonstrates a high consensus among participants regarding the limiting nature of these guidelines, whilst the standard deviation of 1.074 indicates moderate variation in views. Participants strongly concur (Mean = 4.15) that political parties hinder journalists from publishing precise facts and figures, and similar agreement is noted (Mean = 4.05) concerning the impact of editorial policies on suppressing the dissemination of genuine information. Moreover, the danger posed by political parties in conflict areas is evident from the strong agreement (Mean = 4.06) amongst participants. Although journalists show some inclination to disregard stereotypes (Mean = 3.82) and their personal perspectives (Mean = 3.89) when reporting, these practices still highlight a requirement for impartial and objective reporting standards. In summary, the findings suggest that journalists confront a twofold challenge: managing the pressures of political and editorial constraints whilst endeavouring to uphold professional integrity in their reporting. This emphasises the necessity of revising editorial guidelines and ensuring that journalistic practices remain free from unwarranted political influence to foster accurate and unbiased reporting in conflict zones.

4.2.4 Training received by journalists for covering conflicts

S: No	Statement	M	SD
5	Journalists receive adequate training to handle conflict zone reporting.	1.82	0.947
9	Journalists report facts from conflict zones honestly.	2.62	1.237
16	Local communities support journalists in conflict zones.	2.02	0.853
19	Political parties in conflict zones threaten journalists.	4.06	1.118
	Overall Facet Mean	2.63	1.039

The results for Facet 5 – Training reveal significant shortcomings in the preparation and assistance offered to journalists operating in conflict areas. With a facet mean of 2.63, indicating a moderate response, there appears to be discontent with the available training and resources. The standard deviation of 1.039 suggests a moderate range of opinions amongst those surveyed. Participants strongly disagreed (Mean = 1.82) that journalists receive sufficient training for conflict zone reporting, pointing to a considerable lack of readiness. There was also disagreement (Mean = 2.02) regarding support from local communities, indicating a dearth of collaborative networks that could enhance reporting conditions. Whilst there was some agreement (Mean = 2.62) concerning honesty in reporting, this suggests there is still room for improvement in upholding journalistic integrity. Furthermore, strong agreement (Mean = 4.06) that political parties pose threats to journalists in conflict zones emphasises the risks and external pressures they encounter, further hindering their ability to report effectively. In summary, the findings underscore an immediate need for specialised training programmes and support systems to equip journalists with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources for conflict zone reporting. Addressing these deficiencies is vital for promoting safer and more effective reporting practices.

CHAPTER 5

This section examines the theoretical links and ramifications derived from data gathered via a quantitative survey of journalists operating in Bannu and Lakki Marwat. The study's main aim was to investigate the difficulties encountered by reporters working in these conflict-ridden areas, where various internal and external elements impact their professional activities. Utilising Shoemaker and Reese's hierarchical model of influences on meda content, this research explored how individual, extramedia, and organisational factors affect journalists' capacity to effectively carry out their responsibilities. Data were obtained from 100 journalists employed by diverse print and electronic media outlets in Bannu and Lakki Marwat through purposive sampling. The outcomes reveal considerable barriers that limit journalists' freedom, safety, and access, consequently influencing their overall professionalism. The findings suggest that journalists in these conflict zones encounter severe security challenges.

Survey participants strongly concurred that the primary threats to their well-being stem from militant organisations and religious groups, as well as constraints imposed by government bodies. The danger is further heightened by the insufficient provision of safety gear from media companies, leaving journalists exposed when covering high-risk stories. These outcomes corroborate earlier investigations by Baig (2012) in FATA, which highlighted comparable difficulties arising from inadequate organisational backing and menaces from both militant and governmental entities. The combined impact of these security concerns not only imperils journalists' safety but also hampers their capacity to report impartially and without constraint. The study also identified access to information as a crucial obstacle. Participants emphasised significant limitations enforced by state agencies and political factions, which frequently impede journalists' ability to collect and disseminate factual data. Editorial guidelines further constrain journalistic independence, compelling many to self-censor in order to conform with their media outlets' organisational interests. These findings echo the research of Relly and Bustamante (2014) on Mexican journalists, where similar pressures from government and local authorities severely restricted press freedom. Such constraints in Bannu and Lakki Marwat infringe upon journalists' basic rights to access and distribute information, underscoring the pressing need for systemic reforms to safeguard press freedom in conflict-ridden areas.

Journalists in these areas face considerable challenges in gaining entry to incident locations. The research indicates that substantial obstacles are erected by indigenous groups, armed factions, and religious organisations, hindering reporters' ability to effectively document events. Moreover, the dearth of assistance from news outlets, including the absence of protective gear and cutting-edge communication devices, exacerbates these accessibility issues. This corresponds with Shoemaker and Reese's framework, which emphasises how external influences, such as local powerbrokers and militant organisations, constrain journalists' access to information. These limitations not only narrow the scope of news coverage but also undermine the reliability and genuineness of the resulting reports.

The research reveals that editorial policies often function as a mechanism for organisations to control journalists' output. Many participants concurred that the political and commercial interests of media entities influence their news coverage. These constraints, frequently dictated by organisational goals, impede journalists' capacity to report impartially on contentious matters. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) contend that financial pressures on media organisations compel journalists to prioritise the interests of media proprietors, a conclusion also supported by Nadadur's (2007) study on Pakistani journalists. The research emphasises how these pressures result in self-censorship, further restricting journalistic freedom in conflict-ridden areas. A notable discovery of this investigation is the insufficient professional training provided to journalists operating in conflict zones. Participants expressed strong discontent with the adequacy of training, including instruction in conflict reporting and first aid. This deficiency leaves journalists poorly equipped to handle the intricacies of reporting in hostile settings, exposing them to heightened risks. Baig's (2012) research similarly underscored the crucial need for specialised training for journalists in FATA, stressing that such preparation is essential for ensuring both safety and high-quality reporting.

This research's outcomes hold significant ramifications for enhancing the circumstances of reporters in areas of conflict. There exists a pressing requirement for news organisations to supply protective gear, death benefits, and thorough preparatory courses to arm journalists with the necessary resources and expertise for reporting in conflict situations. Moreover, policy changes are crucial to safeguard press freedom, diminish the sway of political and economic forces on media output, and boost the overall security and professionalism of reporters. Nevertheless, this

investigation is not devoid of constraints. Its concentration on journalists in Bannu and Lakki Marwat might restrict the applicability of the results to other areas. Subsequent studies could broaden the scope to encompass additional conflict zones, offering a more comprehensive grasp of the obstacles confronted by journalists. Furthermore, examining the impact of nascent digital technologies in alleviating these challenges would constitute a worthwhile avenue for further exploration.

5.2 Conclusion

This research was conducted within the framework of the Spiral of Silence theory to examine the obstacles encountered by journalists in the conflict-ridden areas of Bannu and Lakki Marwat. The results indicated that journalists in these regions identified militant organisations, religious groups, and government agencies as the primary threats to their safety and information freedom. Militant groups, in particular, were found to be a dominant force in curtailing journalistic freedom, fostering an atmosphere of fear and intimidation that hinders the free flow of information. This suppression aligns with the Spiral of Silence theory, which posits that external threats discourage individuals, including journalists, from voicing dissenting or critical opinions. Government bodies and public information offices were identified as significant impediments to journalists' access to information, particularly for investigative reporting on crucial issues.

These obstacles not only impeded journalists' ability to report effectively but also violated their fundamental rights to freedom and information access. In such an environment, the fear of consequences perpetuates a culture of silence, resulting in critical societal issues being underreported or misrepresented. The study also uncovered that most journalists lacked specialised training in conflict reporting, including safety protocols, first aid, and techniques for operating in hostile environments.

This lack of preparation leaves journalists vulnerable to threats and emergencies, further inhibiting their ability to report freely and confidently from conflict zones. Moreover, organisational pressures, such as editorial guidelines and the prioritisation of political and business interests, significantly influenced journalistic practices. Media organisations often imposed restrictions on reporting sensitive issues, leading to self-censorship and compromising journalists' professionalism. These findings demonstrate how organisational factors contribute to the spiral of

silence by limiting journalists' ability to challenge dominant narratives or report on controversial topics. Access to incident sites emerged as another critical issue in the study. Law enforcement agencies and militant groups were identified as the two main obstacles preventing journalists from reaching crucial locations.

These restrictions exacerbate the challenges of conflict reporting, further reinforcing the climate of silence and limited information flow in the region. In summary, the findings highlight how the combination of external threats, organisational pressures, and inadequate training suppresses journalists' voices in conflict zones, as explained by the Spiral of Silence theory. This research underscores the urgent need for interventions, including enhanced safety measures, professional training, and policy reforms, to empower journalists and protect their fundamental rights in conflict-affected areas.

5.3 Recommendations

Journalists operating in conflict-ridden areas like Bannu and Lakki Marwat face severe challenges and risks. To create a more secure and supportive environment for these professionals, various stakeholders, including the government, civil society, journalistic unions, and media organisations, must take decisive action. Based on this study's findings, the following suggestions are put forward:

1. The government and media outlets should implement comprehensive safety protocols and protective measures to safeguard journalists and their families.

2. A compensation fund should be established by the government to aid the families of journalists who perish while carrying out their professional responsibilities.

3. Media organisations ought to provide life insurance and safety gear, such as bulletproof vests and helmets, to journalists working in high-risk zones.

4. The government should create a legal entity where journalists can report unwarranted pressures from their employers or external parties, ensuring swift resolution of their grievances.

5. Specialised training academies should be set up nationwide to offer instruction in conflict reporting, first aid, and safety protocols for hostile environments.

6. Regular training programmes focusing on conflict reporting, safety measures, and mental health support should be organised by media outlets to mitigate risks and enhance preparedness.

7. Journalistic unions should actively negotiate with media organisations to secure fundamental rights for journalists, including life insurance, safety equipment, and modern communication devices.

 8. Courts must ensure protection for journalists pursuing legal action against government bodies, security agencies, or their organisations, guaranteeing their safety and job security.

9. Civil society, government, and journalistic unions should collaborate to uphold press freedom and provide resources for investigative journalism in conflict areas.

These recommendations aim to enhance the safety, professional growth, and rights of journalists working in conflict zones, enabling them to perform their duties without fear or undue influence.

5.4 Implications of Research

The current study will serve a unique role in highlighting the challenges faced by journalists working in one of Pakistan's most conflict-prone regions, Bannu and Lakki Marwat. These districts are situated in a geographically and politically sensitive area that has been significantly impacted by militant activity, law enforcement operations, and socio-political unrest.

This research will help media organizations, government authorities, and members of civil society to better understand the multitude of challenges and external forces affecting journalists in these conflict zones. By shedding light on the barriers journalists face at the individual, organizational, and extramedia levels, this study emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive safety measures, adequate training, and policy reforms.

Moreover, the findings provide actionable insights into the limitations and risks journalists endure, enabling stakeholders to develop informed strategies to ensure their protection, support their work, and uphold press freedom in Bannu and Lakki Marwat. This study highlights the critical role of journalists in providing accurate information from these regions and underscores the importance of addressing the systemic challenges they face.

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