

## Occupational Health and Safety awareness in the Indian media industry: An exploratory study

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### Abstract

The purpose of the study is to explore the status of occupational health and safety (OHS) awareness in the Indian media industry. Understanding occupational health and safety awareness is fundamental to understanding the incidences of rising health and safety issues among media professionals in India. The results show a low level of understanding and awareness of the field of occupational health and safety among media professionals. It's been found that media persons either don't have any idea of OHS in media or completely misconstrue it. The findings also indicate the absence of efforts and mechanisms to raise OHS awareness in Indian media outlets. The problem of lack of OHS awareness is not only because of the absence of appropriate action on the part of authorities or the media industry, the problem is there on the demand side also. The study establishes the need for proper and timely action to raise OHS awareness in the media industry in India. This study is an effort in the direction of problematizing low OHS awareness in media and it could be a point of departure for further research.

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### Introduction

According to the world health organization, Occupational health deals with all aspects of health and safety in the workplace and has a strong focus on the primary prevention of hazards. The health of the workers has several determinants, including risk factors at the workplace leading to cancers, accidents, musculoskeletal diseases, respiratory diseases, hearing loss, circulatory diseases, stress-related disorders and communicable diseases, and others (Protecting Workers' Health, 2017).

The Indian Media and Entertainment industry is an ever-growing sector of the Indian economy. The Indian media and entertainment (M&E) industry is expected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14% to touch Rs2.41 trillion by 2021 with advertising revenue expected to grow at

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15.3% during the same period to reach Rs1.07 trillion ("Media for Masses: The Promise Unfolds," 2017.). Going by the current estimates, the M&E industry in India employs approximately 1.2 million people, almost 50% of who are self-employed. This number is only going to increase in near future. And working conditions in this sector are far from good (Mazumdar, 2015). Working conditions and safety environments have a direct bearing on the health of people working for media. Media personnel continuously work on health and safety hazards. Long working hours, irregular shifts, dealing with electrical and other risky equipments and working in brightly lit and noisy environments, and accident-prone areas are some of the sources of occupational health and safety issues. There are additional risks in the news media industry as reporting often involves jeopardizing life in hostile and brute conditions and contexts. (Collins, 2001). These challenges coupled with low wages and ever-present job insecurity make the life of a media personal highly vulnerable to ill occupational health and safety consequences.

Every now and then we hear about premature deaths in the Indian media industry. Cardiac arrests, heart attacks, cases of cancer, incidences of diabetes, hypertension, depression, and even suicides are commonplace in the media industry, particularly news media. On top of that, negligence on the part of the media industry and authorities added fuel to the fire. Lack of awareness among media industry professionals is another issue that exacerbates this trend. There are no media-specific health and safety guidelines or policies to follow. Health and safety aren't yet part of media curricula in India. Lack of awareness and negligence is only going to aggravate the condition. Generally proposed solutions are based on the Curative approach and we stop discussing beyond remedial action and avenues. The curative approach talks of affordable health services, occupational medicine, and financial support. But this approach is insufficient as it overlooks the root causes behind the occupational health and safety issues. The curative approach also doesn't take into account the expenditure requirements and resources required for healthcare. To arrest the rise of health issues arising from occupational factors in media, we need a Preventive approach. It is said, prevention is better than cure as it saves maladies, pain, and expenditure on treatment. For that purpose, awareness and a robust framework of guidelines and policies are required. And it is conspicuously absent in Indian Media. In this context of ignorance, it is pertinent to explore the status of awareness about occupational health and safety in the Indian media industry.

### **Research Method**

This study is based on a survey involving 40 media personnel of different ages, and sex, and from a variety of media organizations who volunteered for the study on social media platforms. This survey is a descriptive online survey that seeks to gather primary data. The survey consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions, supplemented by questions for details. Since this study is exploratory in nature a non-probability, unqualified volunteer sample was taken for the survey. Here, a Convenient sampling of people available through social media was done after due consideration and amidst given conditions for research. Before doing this study, the author of this paper tried to do a study based on probability sampling involving a qualified volunteer sample and for the same, the author sent emails to official mail ids of concerned persons and departments of more than 120 media organizations. The author didn't get even a single response. It's probably symptomatic of their attitude and concerns towards the issue in question. Only after waiting for years author embarked on another study which resulted in this paper. Believing that some research is better than no research and that no research is final, the author did this paper under given conditions. The survey was conducted from May to July 2017.

## **The Study**

Respondents consisted of all levels of functionaries from trainee to senior level, of both the sexes and were working for organizations like Hindustan Media, India Today group, ABP news, Indian express group, News Nation, DentsuWatConsult, Times Internet Limited, PIB, Network18, India news, Lintas, Zee news, Prabhat Khabar and other media and entertainment sector organizations. More than 50% of respondents were holding middle and senior-level positions and had a long experience in the industry. About two-thirds of them were from news media. Occupational health and safety awareness studies only reveal what is otherwise conspicuous.

When asked if they have heard about any occupational health and safety guidelines or policy for media personnel, more than 80% of respondents answered negatively. Only about 17% answered in the affirmative. Most of them who responded in the affirmative couldn't tell more about the guidelines they have heard about when they were asked about details. One respondent even mentioned health insurance policies when asked about occupational health guidelines. It may seem funny but it is sad to know that Indian media professionals are not aware of such guidelines.

When asked if their organization followed any occupational health and safety guidelines, 75% responded negatively. Only 25% of responses were affirmative. Most of them, who responded in affirmative, when asked about details, couldn't tell anything more about the guidelines followed by their organizations. Three of them mentioned insurance policy as an occupational health policy followed by their organization. Two of the respondents mentioned Employee's state insurance corporation benefits as health and safety guidelines or policies. One of the respondents mentioned Yoga sessions conducted by their organization when asked about health and safety guideline followed by their organization.

More than 90% of the responded negatively when asked if their organizations ever conducted any occupational health and safety awareness exercise or training for employees. About 9% claimed that their organization conducted awareness exercises and mentioned Yoga workshops, health check-ups, and Zumba training when asked about details in the next question.

When asked if their organizations encouraged discussions on occupational health, more than 80% of respondents said no. About 19% claimed that their organizations encouraged discussion on occupational health and safety.

On the prevalence of occupational health issues in the industry, there was almost a consensus as 95% of respondents were of the view that there are occupational health issues in the media industry.

More than 29% of respondents said their peers never discussed occupational health issues. 22% said that this issue is often discussed with their peers. More than 40% said that their peers discuss occupational health issues occasionally. 85% of media professionals surveyed feel that their occupation affects their health. About 14% say their profession doesn't affect their health. Those who feel that the profession affects their health when asked a follow-up question on how their profession affects their health mentioned a range of issues. Stress and related issues, spinal pain, sleep deprivation, gastrointestinal problems, anxiety, fatigue, posture, etc. were the common health issues mentioned.

Similar responses were received about media coverage of occupational health and safety issues. More than 73% of respondents said they never read or stumbled upon any occupational health story in the media. About 26%, of those who claimed that they have read something on occupational health, couldn't mention any source when asked about details. Only one of them mentioned that she/he read a story on a website but couldn't name it in the follow-up question.

An overwhelmingly 92% felt a need for enforceable occupational health and safety guidelines for media professionals. 7% didn't feel any need for such guidelines or policies.

When asked about suggestions for improving occupational health conditions, respondents gave a variety of answers and proposed solutions for the same. One respondent suggested 5 day week, and another suggested breaks during office hours. One respondent suggested a cap on working hours per day, and another proposed cooling-off sessions in the workplace. Others gave similar suggestions.

### **Conclusion**

The study reinforces the point that there are occupational health and safety issues in the Indian media industry. Most of the media personnel face some kind of health issues because of their professions and they are aware of it. On the one hand, they are well aware of their health issues but on the other, they have very limited knowledge of occupational health and safety guidelines and preventive mechanisms available for media personnel. The majority of Media organizations aren't fulfilling their responsibilities towards their employees and don't follow any health and safety guidelines generally. No guidelines have been adopted regarding occupational health and safety. And media organizations don't even bother to educate their employees about occupational health issues. Authorities are also not very different when it comes to taking care of occupational health in the media industry. Occupational health in media is yet to become an issue worthy of discussion in India. It can be safely stated that occupational health and safety awareness in Indian media is poor. The industry doesn't seem to be concerned about the grave challenges.

Media personnel are suffering because of a lack of awareness of Occupational health and safety. Conditions and situations under which media personnel in India work, are conditions of sheer exploitation. Guidelines and mechanisms for occupational health and safety for media personnel need to be evolved and enforced as soon as possible, otherwise, we will keep losing the best of our talent and revenue in financing resultant maladies and accidents. Media think tanks, NGOs, and media organizations should take note of the situation and come up with sound suggestions and proposals and authorities should put in place required regulations and directives after consulting all the stakeholders.

### **Limitations of the study**

This is an exploratory study that can't be used for wider generalizations but it can provide a basic point of departure for further debate and discussion. The sample size and sampling method for the survey aren't optimally scientific. The sample size of 40 volunteers could have been increased. In an online survey like the one conducted for this study, one could never be sure of the identity of the respondents. These results should help both academics and policymakers in developing insights into the status of OHS awareness and may provide a point of departure for further discussion and research on the status of occupational health and safety awareness in the Indian context.

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