



Sierra Leone Association of Journalists

1st Floor, 56 Campbell Street, Freetown, Sierra Leone P.M.B. 724,

Website: www.slajsl.org; Email: slaj.salone@gmail.com

President: +232 76 470288 / +232 30 470288, **Secretary-General:** +232 78 445300



PRESS RELEASE

COVID-19's devastating impact on news industry revealed in new national survey

Freetown: 5th May 2021

Covid-19 has had a devastating psychological and financial impact on journalists in Sierra Leone, a new study released today has found.

Impact of Covid-19 on journalism in Sierra Leone was released by **Madam Mamadi Gobeh-Kamara**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, at the headquarters of Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) in Freetown.

The national survey, published by SLAJ and led by researchers at Bournemouth University in the UK, had responses from more than 600 journalists across the country. It reveals that the pandemic affected almost every aspect of news production as well as the individual wellbeing of a majority of journalists.

“This is a serious situation which needs to be addressed through cooperation, collaboration and networking or partnerships. The Government has a role to play as well as SLAJ and the individual media houses to collectively look at the recommendations and work together to address them, because COVID-19 will not be the last disaster to befall us,” said the Deputy Minister.

Among the key findings were:

- Almost 60% of journalists reporting having experienced depression and almost 70% experiencing increased anxiety
- 86% of journalists say they have been impacted financially with 16% (around one in six) saying they had lost their jobs
- Survey respondents reported decreased news production in broadcast, print and online platforms
- Most respondents felt they were ill-prepared and ill-trained to face the pandemic.

Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, President of SLAJ, said the survey was the first study to focus specifically on how the pandemic has affected journalists in Sierra Leone, and that it underlined the importance of strengthening disaster preparedness in the news industry.

“A healthy and thriving news sector must be at the heart of any crisis response,” he said. “We must build the disaster resilience of journalists in this country to protect the vital role they play,” said Nasralla.



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Dr Chindu Sreedharan of Bournemouth University, the lead author of the survey report, said,
“Some of our most worrying findings highlight the extreme psychological impact the pandemic has had on journalists across Sierra Leone.

“With a majority of respondents reporting having suffered from depression and anxiety, the government and news organisations must come together to invest much-needed resources in protecting the emotional and mental health of media personnel in times of crisis.”

The survey forms part of *Tie u Orja*, a capacity-building initiative led by researchers at Bournemouth University in collaboration with SLAJ, Limkokwing University, and Save the Children (Sierra Leone). It is funded by the UK's Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), which supports research to address urgent needs and challenges faced by developing countries.

The survey focused on the impact of Covid-19 on the news media, as well as the future training requirements of journalists. The authors highlight the need for urgent action in four key areas: psychological resilience, financial resilience, health protection and resilience, and building future disaster resilience.

Professor Lee Miles, disaster management expert at Bournemouth University and one of the authors of the survey, said, “In view of the critical role the news media play during public health crises and disasters, Bournemouth University, in close cooperation with SLAJ and other partners, will offer further research-informed activities to build the capacity of journalists and crisis communicators. We hope our work will strengthen future disaster resilience in Sierra Leone.”

Hundreds of journalists, from all four provinces and the Western Area, responded to the survey. This included news personnel working in print, online, broadcast, and radio, as well as news agencies. The full report can be accessed on at this [link- https://slaj.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Sierra-Leone-National-Survey-Report-English-with-APPENDIX.pdf](https://slaj.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Sierra-Leone-National-Survey-Report-English-with-APPENDIX.pdf)

Signed:



Ahmed Sahid Nasralla

President

SLAJ

Mob: +232 76470288 / +232 30470288

Mob: +232 76470288 / +232 30470288

Email: asnasralla@gmail.com / slaj.salone@gmail.com

Dr Chindu Sreedharan

Co-Director, AFTERCAB Project

Bournemouth University

Poole, United Kingdom

Mob: +44 7984467763

Email: csreedharan@bournemouth.ac.uk