

A Sierra Leone Association of Journalists publication

NATIONAL SURVEY REPORT 2021

Impact of Covid-19 on journalism in Sierra Leone



C Sreedharan, E Thorsen,
L Miles, J Matthews,
M Sunderland and
C Baker-Beall

Impact of Covid-19 on journalism in Sierra Leone

This survey is part of Tie u Orja, a research and capacity-building initiative led by
Bournemouth University (UK).

It was undertaken in collaboration with
the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, Limkokwing University, and Save the Children (Sierra Leone).

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Tie u Orja

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Impact of Covid-19 on journalism in Sierra Leone

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**C Sreedharan, E Thorsen,
L Miles, J Matthews,
M Sunderland, and C Baker-Beall**
Bournemouth University, UK

Foreword

In 2021, Sierra Leone continues to face multiple challenges when it comes to disasters and has experienced major events simultaneously, including the Covid-19 pandemic alongside catastrophic fires in Freetown. It is now more important than ever, that cooperation among policymakers, communities and journalists is as good as it can be to ensure effective disaster reporting, and to ensure that the public of Sierra Leone remains well and accurately informed.

Yet, we must also acknowledge that the impact of Covid-19 is also felt by journalists themselves. This should not be discounted. Indeed, it should be factored into future discussions of disaster management and reporting in Sierra Leone as the country continues to grapple with the pandemic and beyond.

This new publication, that presents the main findings from an extensive, country-wide survey of journalists, provides pertinent and highly contemporary insights into the impact of Covid-19 on journalism. It offers new reflections on the impact of Covid-19 on journalism that has notable value for practice across many fields.

In particular, I welcome the attention given in this study to further understand the impact, role, and contributions of female journalists as they continue to have an influential role to play in the development of a modern, forward-looking Sierra Leone now and in the future.

Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr
Mayor of Freetown



Foreword

Sierra Leone has experienced a large number of disasters over time and because of the lack of adequate and effective structures to handle them, every facet of the nation has suffered tremendously.

The huge scales of external intervention during the 2014 Ebola epidemic that struck the nation claiming the lives of over 3,500 people, the mudslide affecting about 6,000 people, the current Covid-19 pandemic, and the recent Susan's Bay fire incident displacing hundreds of citizens all point to the nation's incapacity to quell disasters. This incapability, though not absolute, does not only point to the Government's usual complaints of financial constraints, but could extend to the professional knowledge, resources, and equipment that the relevant sectors (including the media) should provide.

At the heart of mitigating each of these disasters is effective journalism. The state and effect of any disaster cannot be effectively reported if journalism does not take centre stage to present information on the stages of the disaster cycle: "preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation", including "the dissemination of early warning and larger public awareness".

This survey specifically examined Covid-19 and its impact on the media in Sierra Leone. There is no gainsaying the fact that disasters, like pandemics and many others, take us by surprise. For the media to be able to handle them, journalists must first get a firm understanding of the sorts of issues that they (the disasters) present, so that a framework for reporting can be easily developed. It is at this stage that professionalism comes into play, employing the strategy of collaboration with stakeholders, consistency in reporting and the observance of journalistic ethics. All the more reason why this research has highlighted the gaps and offered a number of recommendations on key areas that journalists could work on.

A point to note, one that could be detrimental to society if ignored, is that journalists themselves are members of society and may also be affected by the same disasters that they are obligated to report. This research has been effective to point out the significant personal impacts that Covid-19 has had on journalists and journalism. During this Covid-19 crisis period, some journalists developed mental health issues. Permit me to ask: 'If the people who are to report the news are themselves the news, how effective can the news be?'

At the peak of the crisis, the poor state of the media became worsened by the lack of finance to cope with the Covid-19 recommendations and restrictions. Journalists did not have frequent supply of masks, gloves, hand sanitisers and the right cleaning agents for their equipment (for those

who were even fortunate to have equipment). Broadcast programmes were affected because interviewees were afraid to be at interviews. Newspaper sales dropped because newsreaders were afraid to buy the newspapers and end up contracting the virus from newsprints that had been collated by unknown hands. All these and more, are challenges presented in this research undertaken by Bournemouth University and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ).

Considering the foregoing challenges, the report submits that interventions must be made to put the media on a firm footing to handle further disasters. To add to those salient recommendations, I am making a proposal for financial and moral support to be accorded to SLAJ and its partners, to help them execute extensive and lasting work in the area in focus. The first step to attract any form of support is to have a research like this that clearly outlines the areas to attend to, presenting an evidence-based assessment of the existing situation and proffering solid recommendations to strengthen disaster journalism in Sierra Leone. For clarity, support does not only suggest international financial assistance or training. It could also be one in which media organisations converge to address cross-cutting issues that are contained in the report.

The effort that Bournemouth University, SLAJ, and other institutions have put into this work is commendable. I congratulate all those involved in this survey for a job well done.

Williette James (Ph.D)

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Executive summary

This rapid response report presents findings from a national survey undertaken to ascertain the impact of Covid-19 on Sierra Leone journalists. Sierra Leone was among the nations that took swift action, declaring a 12-month state of national emergency in response to the pandemic. But this came, as an International Growth Centre study¹ shows, at a high economic price. It must also be noted that the pandemic comes at a time when the nation is still grappling with the aftermath of the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak and other, more localised disaster events.

As such, Sierra Leone faces additional economic, cultural, and social pressures because of Covid-19. A year into the global pandemic, this report outlines how national and regional journalists, and news organisations in Sierra Leone responded to Covid-19, and identifies their training and capacity-building requirements to strengthen future disaster resilience.

Method

The survey was distributed online, using Microsoft Forms, and via telephone, from 22nd February to 23rd March 2021. A total of 639 journalists took part in the survey. This included news personnel working in print, online, broadcast, and radio, as well as news agencies. Broken down by gender, 68.2% (n=436) of our respondents were male and 31.8% (n=203) female.

Number of respondents by region

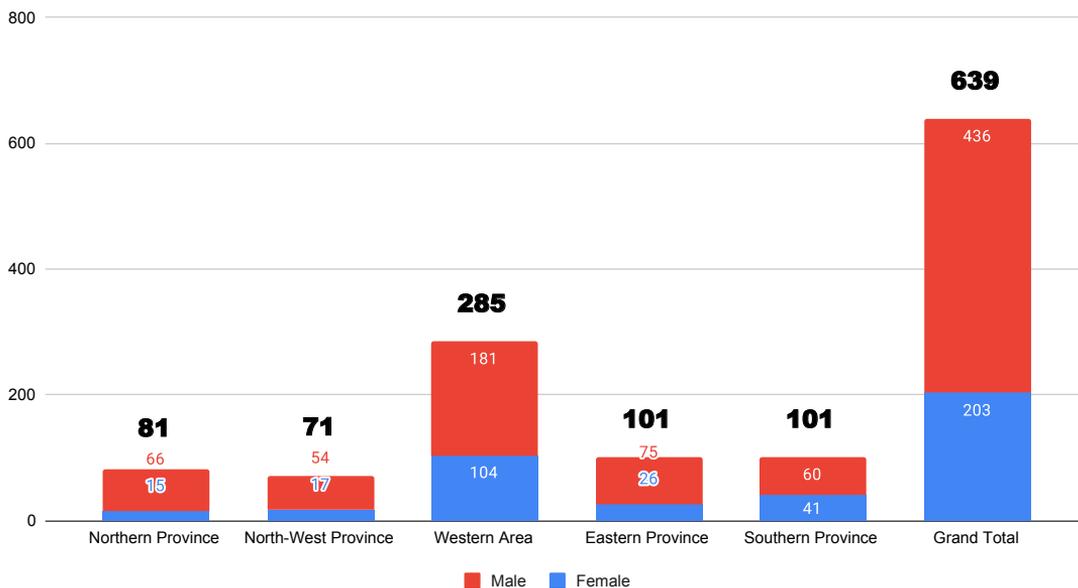


Figure 1

¹ Sierra Leone locked down early to contain COVID-19, but at a high price, <https://www.theigc.org/blog/sierra-leone-locked-down-early-to-contain-covid-19-but-at-a-high-price/>

The survey had responses from all four provinces and Western Area of Sierra Leone (see Figure 1), and included both employed and freelance journalists. For more details on method, please see Appendix.

Key findings

Despite the low morbidity rate among Sierra Leone journalists, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a substantial impact on their working conditions and practices. The vast majority of our respondents, in all administrative divisions, reported significant personal impact as a direct consequence.

- ▶ **Covid-19 affected the mental wellbeing of a majority of journalists** in Sierra Leone: 59.3% reported they experienced depression, while 76.4% reported increased sense of vulnerability, 67.6% increased anxiety, and 51.8% grief.
- ▶ **86% of journalists have been impacted financially**, with 36.3% having to take a pay cut, and 16.1% losing their jobs.
- ▶ **More than 66% reported significant changes to their working hours**: 22.4% were working longer hours, 36.4% fewer, and 7.6% on weekends.
- ▶ **The pandemic affected newscasts and news publishing substantially**. Respondents reported decreased broadcast, video, and audio productions. The print sector saw the reduction of both print frequency and number of pages, and some publications moved to digital-only format.
- ▶ Despite Sierra Leone's known vulnerability to disasters, including health crises, **most respondents were ill-prepared and ill-trained to face the pandemic**. Overall, the respondents scored -48 on the Net Promoter Scale (see Appendix for an explanation of the scale), indicating low disaster preparedness in the news industry; 52.1% of respondents reported *never* receiving disaster resilience training.
- ▶ **Women journalists were less likely to have received disaster resilience training than men**. Just over 60% of female journalists — 12.4% more than male respondents — said that they had *not* received training in this area.
- ▶ **Journalists in Northern Province and Eastern Province were most likely to have received disaster resilience training**. In Western Area, journalists were least likely to have received such training.

- ▶ Respondents identified **physical safety aspects and investigative reporting as top priority areas for training** and capacity-building. Fact-checking and verification, and editorial preparedness and editorial strategies were other key areas.
- ▶ **Most journalists preferred future disaster resilience training to be delivered via physical workshops in their provinces or in Freetown.** They also showed a preference for online website material and online video material.

Personal impact on journalists

We queried journalists whether they had personally contracted Covid-19. 85% (n=544) of our respondents had not, to their knowledge, been infected² by the virus. Just 3.4% (n=22) reported having had the virus, and a further 12.4% (n=79) responded that someone in their family had been infected with it.

86%
of journalists experienced financial difficulties

Financial difficulties

Financial difficulties was the single most-cited category of Covid-19 impact among the respondents, with 86% (n=550) strongly agreeing or agreeing they experienced monetary troubles. It had by far the largest percentage, 45.5%, of those strongly agreeing. The strength of feeling here may reflect

Covid-19 related impact on Sierra Leone journalists

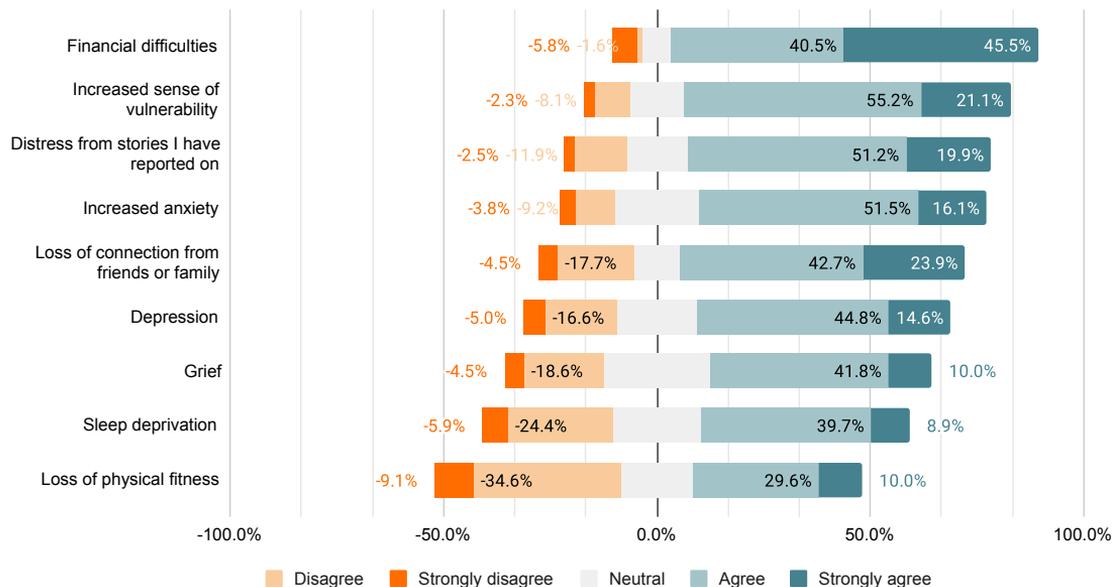


Figure 2

² Covid-19 testing in Sierra Leone is exceptionally low, which could explain this self-reported statistic. Our World in Data has no record of daily testing in Sierra Leone, <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus/country/sierra-leone>.

the timing of the survey as well, being held approximately a year into the pandemic. This means the financial difficulties would reflect sustained economic impact, not just a short term uncertainty.

Psychological

76%
of journalists
experienced an
increased sense
of vulnerability

Despite the reported low morbidity, which could be explained in part by the low levels of testing across the nation, the pandemic had a significant impact on the lives of our respondents in all administrative divisions, across all sectors (see Figure 2). The majority of the respondents reported being affected by it psychologically.

The most striking concern among 76.4% (n=488) of the respondents was an increased sense of vulnerability, with 21.1% strongly agreeing and 52.2% agreeing with that statement. 71% (n=454) reported being distressed by the stories they reported on – 19.3% of them strongly agreeing with the statement.

Respondents also reported Covid-19 impact in terms of increased anxiety (67.6%, n=432), grief (51.8%, n=331), loss of connection from family and friends (66.7%, n=426), and sleep deprivation (48.7%, n=311).

Importantly, 59.3% (n=379) of the journalists said they experienced depression as a consequence of Covid-19.

The high rate of agreement with the factors above, taken together, indicate that the pandemic has impacted the mental wellbeing of journalists in Sierra Leone to a significant degree. As the respondents were surveyed nearly 12 months into the pandemic, they have been under an extended period of duress, which is most likely to have influenced their state of mind. The memory of the 2014 Ebola outbreak and the parallels in morbidity that Covid-19 embodies, similarly, could be a contributing factor. It must also be noted that the news industry in Sierra Leone is evolving, with limited infrastructural and organisational capacity to adequately support journalists during a prolonged pandemic.

Provincial variations: financial

Comparatively, journalists in North-West Province, Eastern Province, and Southern Province appeared to be the most affected by financial difficulties. 91.5% (n=65) respondents from North-West Province, 91.1% (n=92) from Eastern Province, and 90.5% (n=91) from Southern Province said the pandemic put them under financial duress – which is higher than the national average of 86%.

Western Area, which houses many of the larger media houses in the capital city of Freetown, and Northern Province showed lower percentages of journalists financially affected by the pandemic – 82.5% (n=235) and 82.7% (n=67), respectively.

Provincial variations: psychological

Factors indicating significant psychological impact on journalists were noticeable across all provinces, although there were some regional variations. Eastern Province and North-West Province, for instance, had 11-12% more journalists reporting depression (71.3% and 70.4%, respectively) compared to the national average of 59.3%. Respondents from North-West also ranked high in terms of experiencing increased sense of vulnerability (81.7%) and grief (64.8%).

Western Area stood out as the province where journalists experienced less psychological impact, recording lower rankings across several factors, particularly for depression (48%) and grief (43.2%). This trend can perhaps be explained by a combination of factors.

The comparative financial stability among journalists here (see above section), largely owing to their affiliation to major national media houses, is likely to have helped mitigate the psychological stress brought about by the pandemic. The area also offers more avenues for entertainment, pandemic education and awareness, and, importantly, a better-connected journalism community than in the provinces. Further, as the majority of Western Area journalists are self-contained within the urban district, they are less likely to have been affected by the inter-district lockdowns than provincial journalists, who had to navigate travel and curfew restrictions to a larger extent, both in their professional and personal spheres.

Personal impact by gender

The survey gathered responses from 436 male and 203 female journalists (see Appendix). Both genders experienced financial difficulties, with 87.2% (n=380) men and 83.7% (n=170) women strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement.

A higher percentage of female respondents reported experiencing sleep deprivation, depression, loss of connection from friends and family, increased sense vulnerability, and sleep deprivation, compared to males. Specifically, 6.6% more female respondents reported they experienced sleep deprivation (53.2% women, 46.6% men), 6.3% more said they experienced loss of connection (70.9% women, 64.7% men), 4.8% more said they experienced depression (62.6% women, 57.8% men), and 3.5% more said they felt grief (54.2% women, 50.7% men).

The percentage of respondents reporting heightened vulnerability was higher among women, too: 78.3%, against 75.5% of men. A significantly high percentage of respondents from both genders also reported distress from stories they reported on (71.4% women and 70.9% men).

In terms of financial difficulties, the majority of respondents from both genders reported being affected: 87.2% of the male journalists either agreed

Male journalists

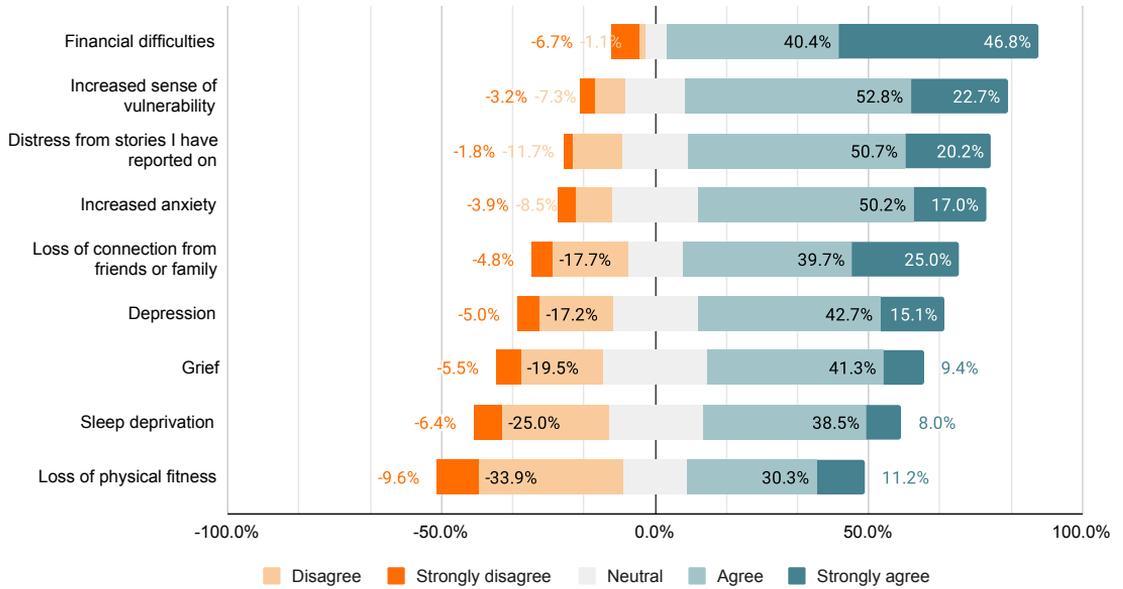


Figure 3

Female journalists

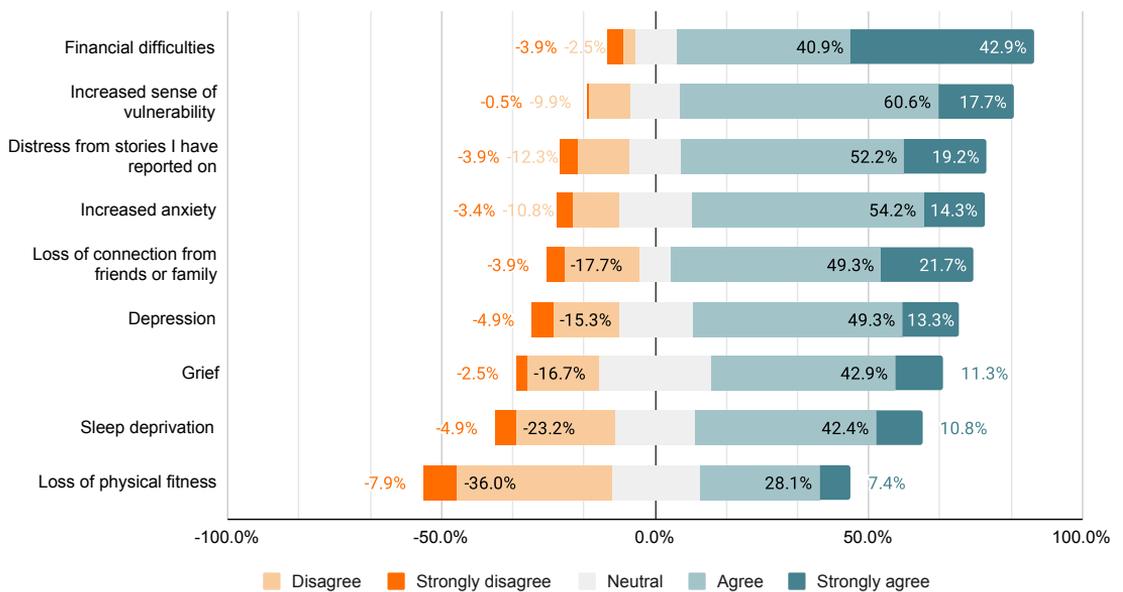


Figure 4

or strongly agreed that their situation was adversely affected by Covid-19, while the corresponding proportion of women respondents was 3.4% lower, at 83.7% (Figure 4).

Impact on working conditions

The impacts of Covid-19 on journalists have been significant in a number of professional areas. Our survey found that income, job security, working hours, and news production and reporting have undergone considerable disruption and changes due to the pandemic.

Employment

Covid-19 had a detrimental impact on Sierra Leone journalists' employment and income. Overall, 61.8% of journalists surveyed (n=395) experienced changes in their employment, including 3.8% (n=24) of journalists who reported that they had lost their jobs. A further 12.4% (n=79) said they had lost their jobs but were still working in journalism. 17.5% (n=112) of journalists responded that both their salary and working hours had been reduced (Figure 5).

Journalists working for online news outlets, in particular, were adversely affected by the pandemic, with 10.9% (n=7) reporting that they lost their jobs, and a further 20.3% (n=13) saying that they lost their jobs but were able to continue to work in journalism. In contrast, news agency and television journalists were most secure in employment terms, with 73.1% (n=19) and 49.1% (n=54), respectively, reporting no changes in their employment.

It is important to note that 38.2% (n=244) of journalists said that their employment had *not* been affected by Covid-19, with 43.8% (n=89) of female journalists and 35.6% (n=155) of male journalists reporting no changes.

4%
of journalists
have lost their
jobs due to
Covid-19 cuts

Provincial variations: employment

Exploring these results across the four provinces and Western Area, we find that journalists in Eastern and Northern Provinces were most likely to have lost their job, or faced a reduction in salary due to Covid-19. Of the journalists surveyed from Eastern Province, 8.9% (n=9) reported losing their jobs, with a further 16.8% (n=17) losing their jobs but able to continue to work in journalism. Journalists in Northern Province suffered most in terms of income, with 28.4% (n=23) reporting a reduction in their salary, followed by those in Eastern Province (25.7%, n=26).

Journalists from Western Area (45.3%, n=129), Sierra Leone's more-

How has your employment been affected by COVID-19?

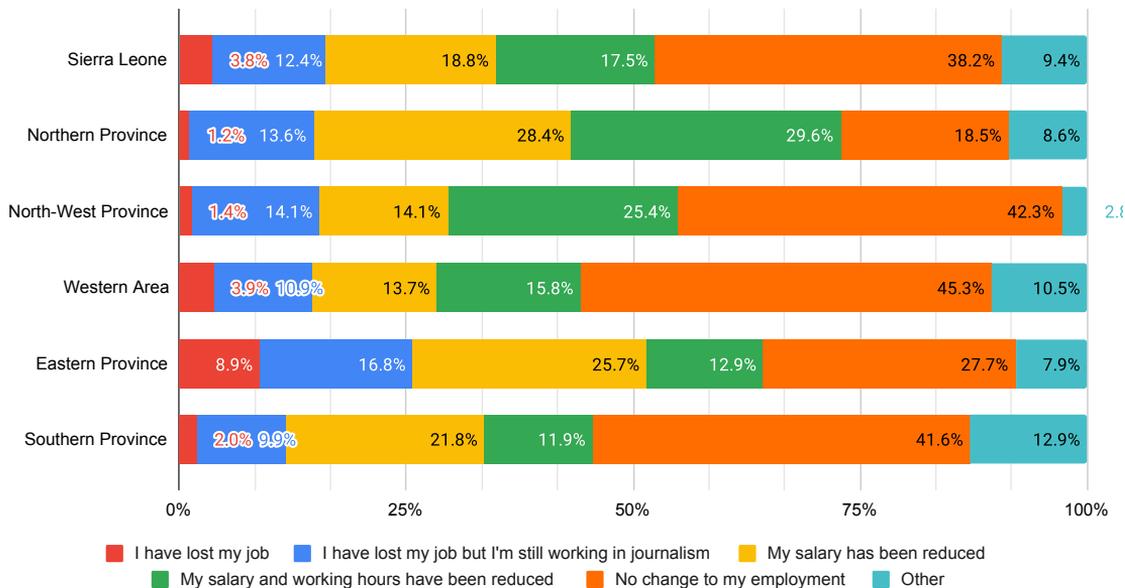


Figure 5

How has your income been affected by COVID-19?

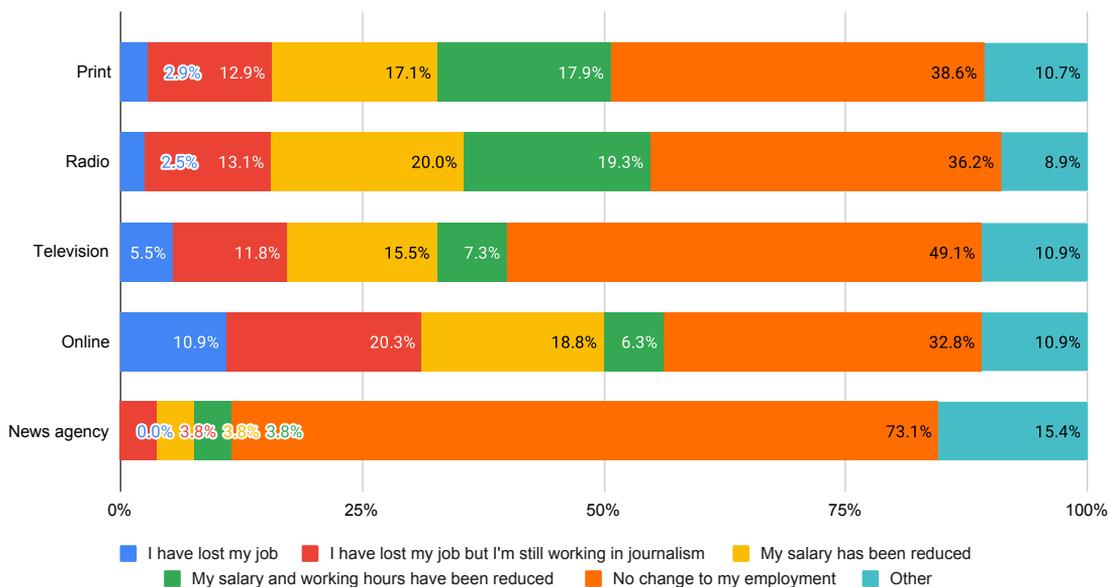


Figure 6

How has your income been affected by COVID-19? - MALE

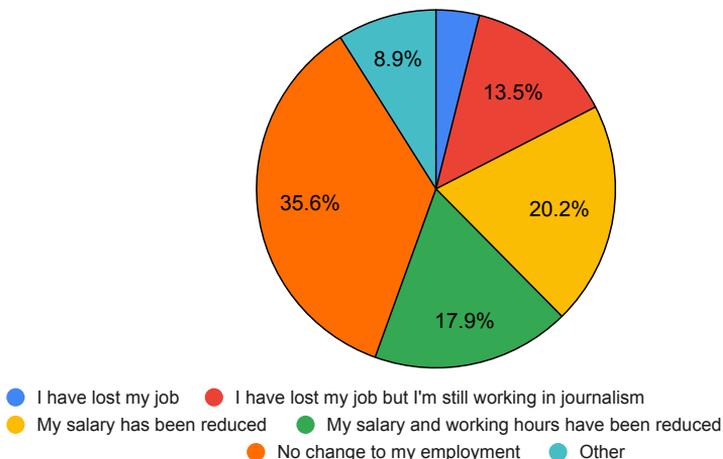


Figure 7

How has your income been affected by COVID-19? - FEMALE

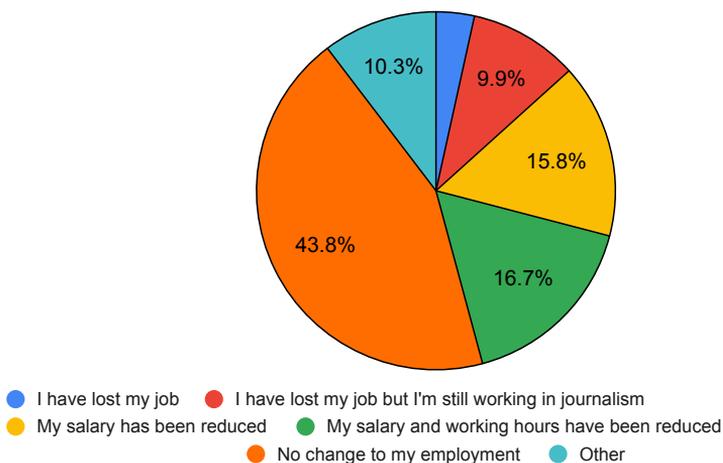


Figure 8

affluent administrative division, were most likely to report that their employment was unaffected, followed by those in North-West Province (42.3%, n=30) and then Southern Province (41.6%, n=42). The impacts of the pandemic on journalists’ employment and income, thus, were most acute outside Western Area and the capital city of Freetown.

Working hours

The largest group of respondents (36.4%, n=226) indicated that they were working fewer hours due to Covid-19. This was followed by those who

reported their hours had not changed (29.6%, n=184), then those who said they were, in fact, working longer hours (22.4%, n=139).

A smaller group of respondents (7.6%, n=47) reported that they were doing more weekend work as a result of the pandemic. That journalists are working longer hours and on weekends is possibly a consequence of reduced capacity in the workforce, and the general precarity of the profession in Sierra Leone.

Provincial variations: working hours

The survey data (Figure 9) showed that journalists in Northern Province (50%, n=40) and North-West Province (46.5%, n=33) were most likely to report working fewer hours due to Covid-19. Southern Province (40%, n=40) and Western Area (35.4%, n=97) had the largest percentage of journalists reporting no changes in their working hours.

There were also differences among the administrative divisions. A greater proportion of journalists who reported working longer hours were from Southern Province (29.2%, n=28) and Eastern Province (29.0%, n=29). In comparison, only 17.5% (n=14) of journalists from Northern Province reported working longer hours as a consequence of the pandemic.

How has your working hours changed?

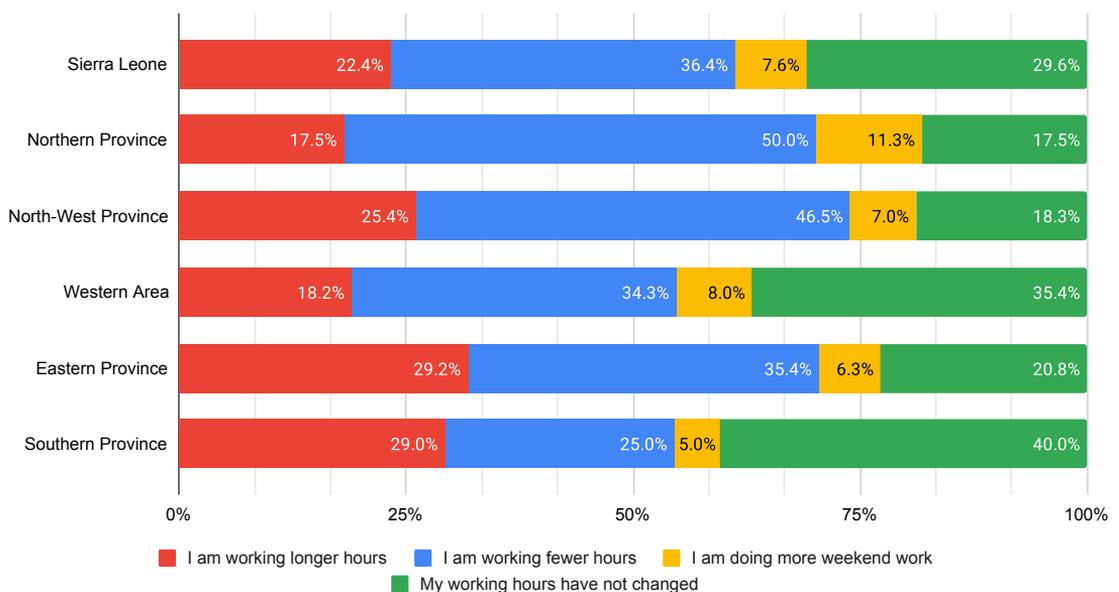


Figure 9

Job security

Covid-19 had a significant impact on journalists’ job security in Sierra Leone. Combining those who reported they felt much less secure (22.5%, n=140) in their employment with those who felt less secure (39.6%, n=246), we found that 62.2% (n=386) of journalists were worried to some degree about their jobs.

It is also worth noting that a number of journalists reported that the onset of the pandemic had *not* created employment insecurities: 26% (n=162) of respondents noted they felt no change, 8.5% (n=53) indicated they felt more secure, and 3.2% (n=20) said they felt much more secure than before.

62%
of journalists are worried about their jobs

Provincial variations: job security

Northern Province had the highest percentage of respondents who were concerned about their job security, with 32.5% (n=26) stating they felt much less secure, and 46.3% (n=37) agreeing they felt less secure about their employment. This produces a combined total of 78.8% (n=63) journalists who are worried about their jobs. Eastern and Southern Provinces followed, reporting a combined total of 68.7% (n=66) and 61% (n=61), respectively.

North-West Province and Western Area had the largest percentage of respondents who reported no concerns about job security. 26.8% (n=19) from the province indicated no changes in job security, with 16.9% (n=12) feeling more secure and a further 5.6% (n=4) feeling much more secure. For Western Area, 29.6% (n=81) said they had no change in perception of job security, with 9.1% (n=25) stating they felt more secure, and 2.9% (n=8) reporting they felt much more secure.

Covid-19 impact on job security for Sierra Leone journalists

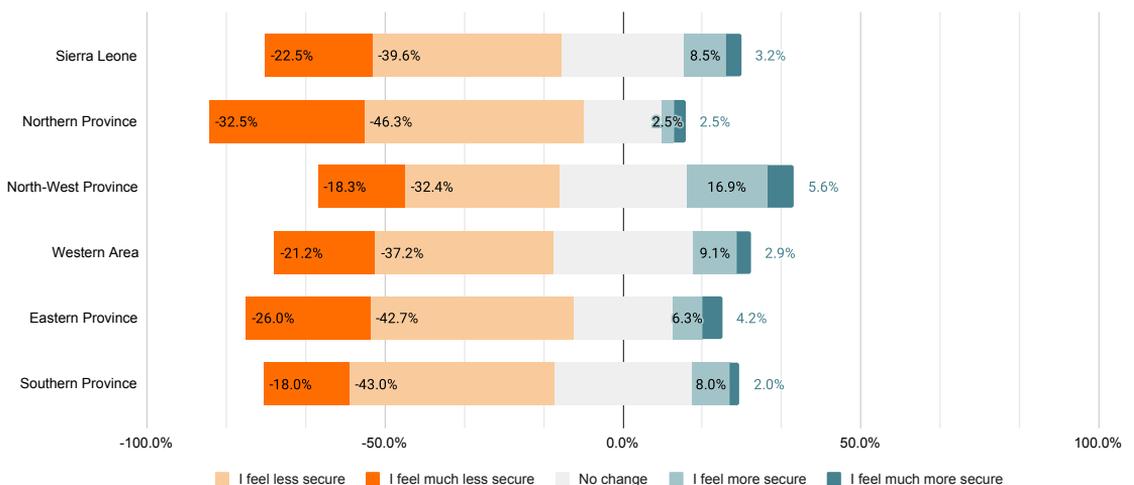


Figure 10

Changes to working practices

Covid-19 precipitated significant changes in the working practices of journalists in Sierra Leone. The vast majority of respondents to our survey reported changes in the types of stories that they could pursue, and workarounds in their approaches to newsgathering and sourcing.

Journalists reported that they had been unable to pursue certain investigations or stories, with 89.4% (n= 555) agreeing or strongly agreeing this was due to Covid-19, and 88.2% (n=548) attributing this to financial restrictions they faced.

The data also showed that journalists increased the use of mobile phones to aid newsgathering, such as by capturing mobile phone videos and photographs, with 81.7% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing (n=507), and 80.4% (n= 499) saying they were doing more internet-based research. There was also an increased use of social media material by journalists, with 63.4% (n=394) agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statement.

For sourcing, 68.9% (n=428) of journalists agreed or strongly agreed that they were now conducting more interviews via audio/video links, and 68.8% (n=427) acknowledged they were relying more on official and government sources.

Further impacts of Covid-19 include journalists reporting reduced opportunities for audience interaction (65.5%, n=407), and the need to work

Changes to newsgathering / production practices after Covid-19

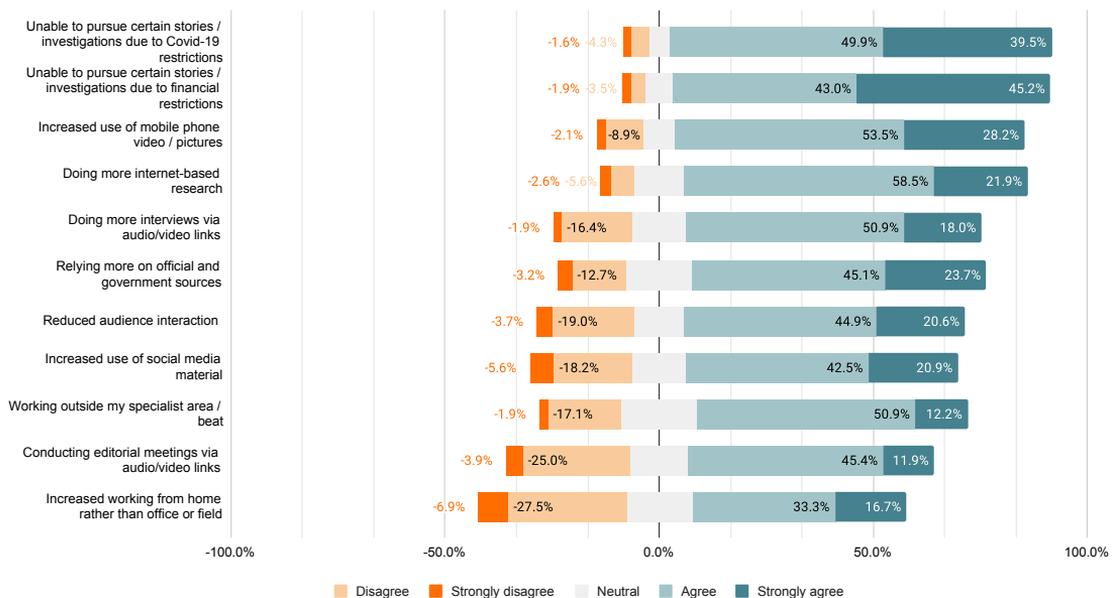


Figure 11

outside of their specialist areas or beats (63.1%, n=392).

These changes in working practices reported by journalists evidence how the pandemic has impacted journalism in Sierra Leone. It indicates that the news media have been restricted in adequately fulfilling its civic and societal roles. The limitations placed on journalists by the pandemic, it would appear, have constrained the quality of information they have been able to make available to the public during this public health emergency.

Response of news organisations

In addition to its significant impact on individual journalists, Covid-19 affected how news organisations have gone about their newsgathering, news production, and news dissemination. Across the nation, outlets responded to the pandemic in line with government regulations, adopting measures such as remote working, travel restrictions, and socially distanced workplaces, continuing to function as best as they could.

Our survey highlighted two worrying impacts on news outlets: *a substantial decline in the production of original news content and a decrease in news dissemination*. As well as their likely effects on the financial stability and sustainability of professional news outlets, such declines are of particular concern during a health crisis when the public needs reliable information, and journalists are expected to interrogate government responses to the crisis at hand.

Important, too, is a news organisation's capacity to support the wellbeing of its own journalists. While our analysis identified some areas in which such help is being provided, it also highlighted several gaps, such as in providing psychological counselling and social support.

Reduced outputs and dissemination

The production of print, video, audio, and online news content saw a marked decline across Sierra Leone, with the print and radio sectors being the most affected (see Figure 11).

More than half the respondents working for print outlets reported a decline in print frequency (56.4%, n=79), and almost a third (29.3%, n=41) reported that the number of pages published by print outlets had fallen. The province suffering the highest impact in terms of reduced pages was Western Area, which, in Freetown, houses the majority of Sierra's Leone's print media organisations. 56.9% (n=62) of Western Area respondents reported a reduced print frequency, and 33.9% (n=37) a fall in published pages.

Broadcast news production followed a similar pattern nationally, with 40.4% (n=176) and 35.5% (n=39) of respondents from the radio and television sectors, respectively, acknowledging reduced broadcast

News
content
 across all
 media sectors
 saw a marked
reduction

Has your news organisation made any of the following changes to its output since Covid-19?

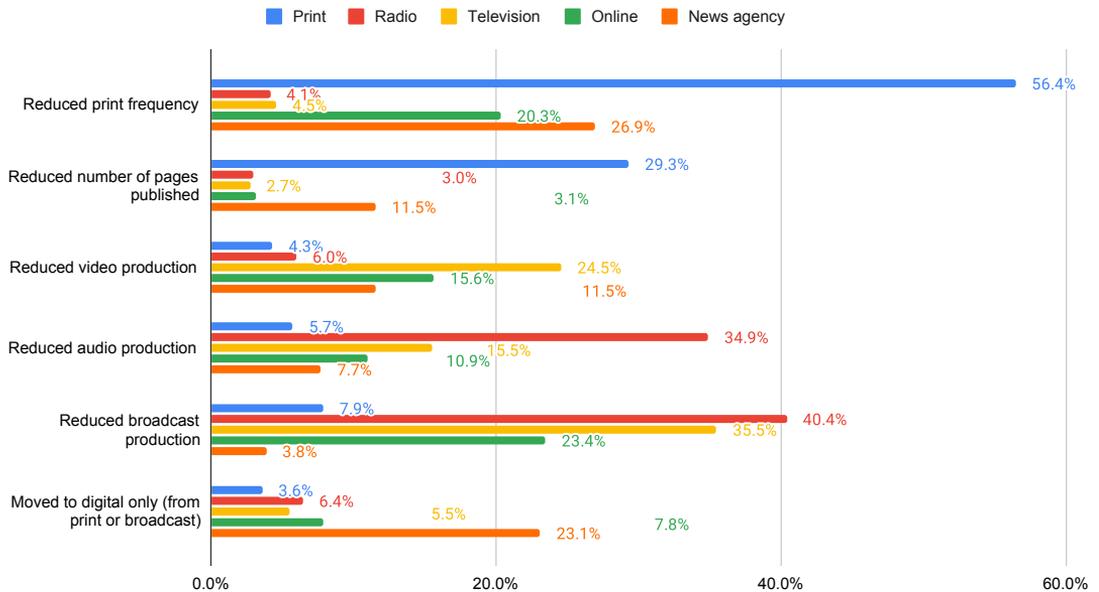


Figure 12

production. The reduction in radio production was particularly high in North-West Province, where 61.8% (n=42) of the journalists surveyed reported a decline. Of a total of 73 respondents from North-West, 68 classified themselves as working in radio. This highlights the importance of radio in the province, and underlines the gravity of such a decline in radio journalism.

Nationally, around a quarter of respondents from the television sector (24.5%, n=27) acknowledged a decline in video production, while 34.9% (n=152) from radio reported a fall in audio production.

Physical measures

Nearly three-quarters of our respondents (74.5%, n=476) reported that news organisations had implemented physical distancing measures in the workplace. But only half (49.9%, n=319) reported having access to Personal Protection Equipment (PPE). Less than half (43.5%, n=278) reported that organisations had measures in place for additional cleaning of newsgathering equipment. A similar number (46.3%, n=296) said their employers had adopted or implemented editorial policies in order to guide journalists during the pandemic.

Western Area, the centre of journalism activity in Sierra Leone, reported the lowest percentages in all areas of physical measures adopted to mitigate Covid-19 in newsrooms. For example, compared to the national average of

Changes to newsroom or newsgathering routines to mitigate Covid-19



Figure 13

Covid-19 support from news organisation

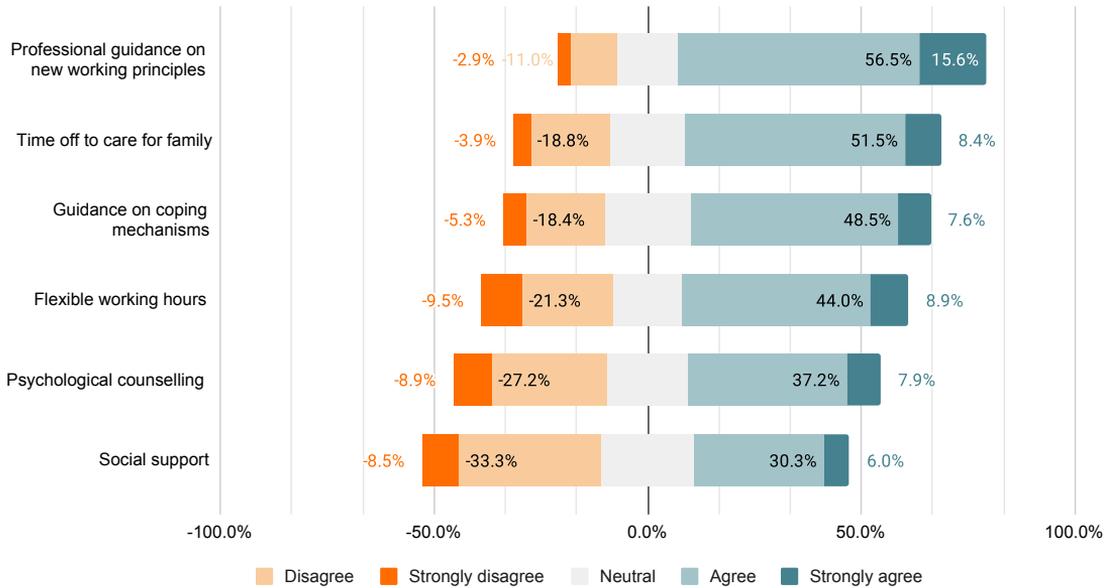


Figure 14

43.5% (n=278), only 33% (n=95) of Western Area respondents reported that there was additional cleaning of equipment, and, compared to a national average of 49.9% (n=319), only 42.1% (n=120) of journalists said they had access to PPE.

News organisations in Sierra Leone have taken several steps to support journalists during the pandemic. The most common help offered has been professional guidance on new working principles, with 72.1% (n= 448) of those surveyed saying they either agreed or strongly agreed to receiving such support. 59.9% (n=372) said they were offered time off to care for family, and 52.8% (n=328) said they were given flexible working hours.

Less common were psychological counselling and social support. 45.1% (n=280) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to having been offered psychological counselling, whereas 36.3% (n=225) agreed or strongly agreed to having been offered some sort of social support. Western Area, again, scored lowest in terms of journalists being offered psychological counselling, with only 34.3% (n=94) agreeing or strongly agreeing, compared to the national average of 45.1% (n=280).

Responses underlining lack of social support and psychological counselling are particularly significant in Sierra Leone. Aligned with the finding that the majority of journalists reported increased vulnerability, increased anxiety, grief and depression (see Personal impact on journalists), mental wellbeing emerges as a key capacity-building area for journalists here.

Disaster resilience and capacity-building

Previous research by Bournemouth University after the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak had indicated that there was a need for continued physical resilience training in Sierra Leone. To understand the current state of affairs, this survey queried respondents on the resilience training they had received, and asked them to assess their own disaster preparedness and future training needs.

Our results indicate that at the national level, the majority of journalists have *not* received any disaster resilience training. 52.1% (n=333) of those who responded to this question reported they had never taken part in such training, with a further 10.6% (n=68) respondents unsure if they had (Figure 15). Thus, some 62.7% of journalists in Sierra Leone could not confidently say they had received any disaster resilience training.

Of the rest, 15.2% (n=97) had participated before the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak, and 22.1% (n=141) afterwards — in other words, there appears to have been only a 6.9% increase in the number of journalists who received training, despite the lessons and vulnerabilities underlined by the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak.

52%
of Sierra Leone
journalists
have never
participated
in disaster
resilience training

Have you participated in disaster resilience training?

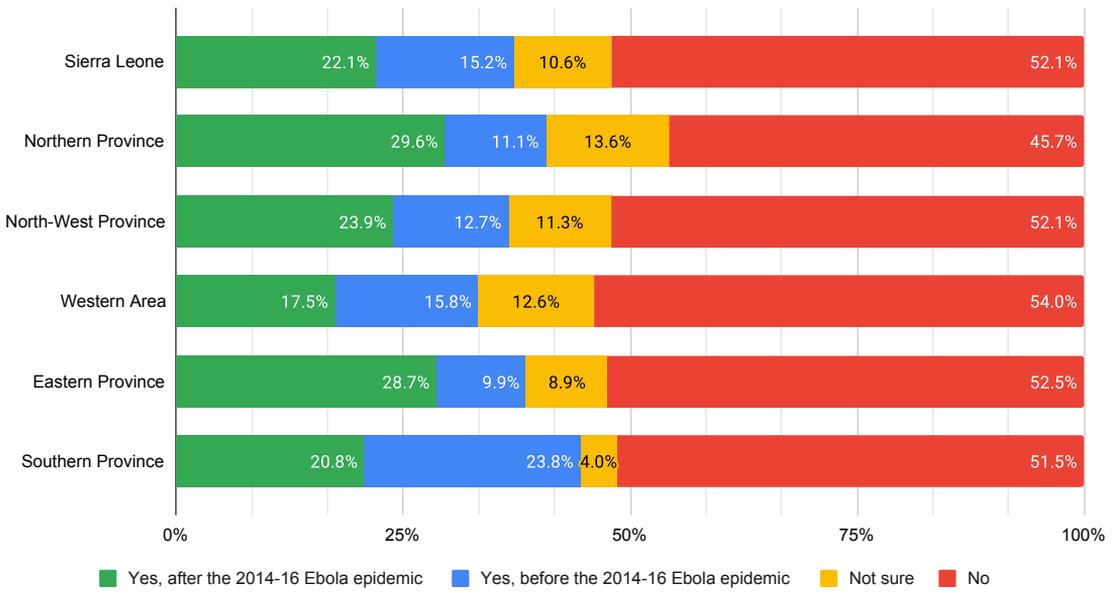


Figure 15

Have you participated in disaster resilience training?

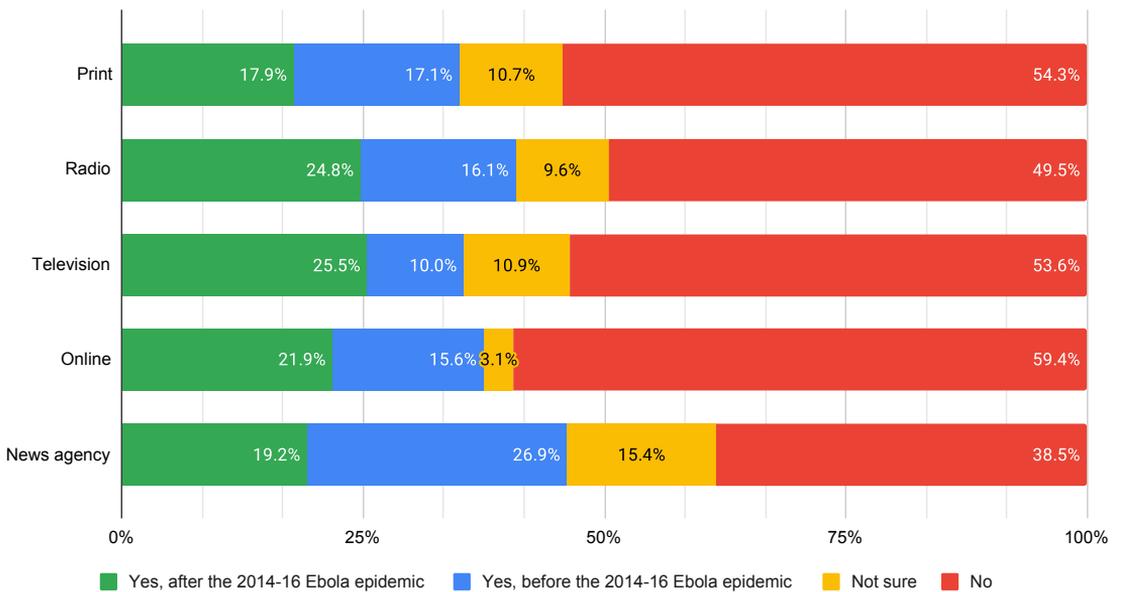


Figure 16

Levels of participation in disaster resilience training were lowest in Western Area, which includes the capital of Freetown. In some ways this is surprising, given the major impact that Ebola had on this region, and the onset of successive disasters afterwards, such as the 2017 landslide and the regular bouts of highly damaging flash floods that affect the capital city during the rainy seasons. In contrast, higher participation rates in disaster resilience training after the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak were recorded in Northern Province (29.6%, n=24), North-West Province (23.9%, n=17) and Eastern Province (28.7%, n=29) – which were above the national average (22.1%, n=141).

Analysing the responses across print, radio, television, online, and news agencies, we found that journalists attached to news agencies were most likely to have received resilience training. A total of 46.1% (n=12) of news agency respondents said they had participated in resilience training – 26.9% before and 19.2% after – compared to 35% (n=49) from print, 40.8% from radio (n=178), 35.5% from television (n=39), and 37.5% (n=24) for online.

The above figures, particularly the rather modest percentage rise of journalists who received disaster resilience training in recent years, point to a lack of continuity in disaster preparedness. Such continuity, as argued in previous works from Bournemouth University, is critical for both the percolation as well as sustenance of robust disaster journalism and the wider crisis communication.

Level of self-reported disaster preparedness

0 = not at all prepared; 10 = extremely prepared

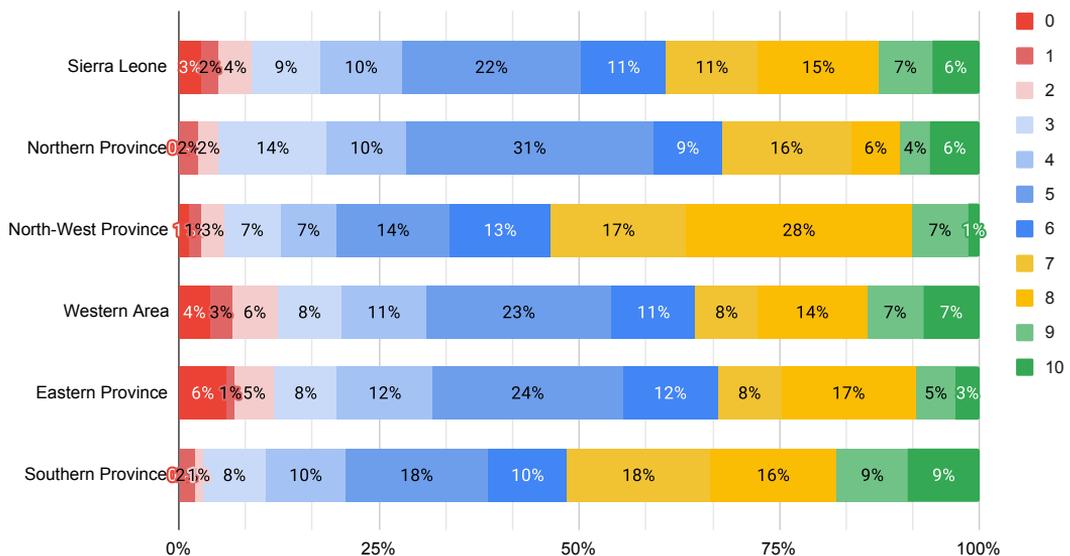


Figure 17

Self-assessment of disaster-preparedness

To understand the respondents’ own perception about their disaster preparedness, we used a Net Promoter Score calculation (see Appendix for more details). As seen in Figure 17, 61% (n=389) of our respondents at the national level self-reported as inadequately prepared, scoring 6 or below on an 11-point Likert scale. Of this, 9% (n=58) self-assessed as not at all prepared, scoring 0-2. At the other end of the scale, only 13% (n=80) of respondents assessed themselves as extremely well prepared, scoring 9-10.

A cross-divisional comparison of these figures show that Western Area (including Freetown) had the most discernible percentage spread of those

How has your disaster preparedness changed due to Covid-19?

0 = not at all prepared; 10 = extremely prepared

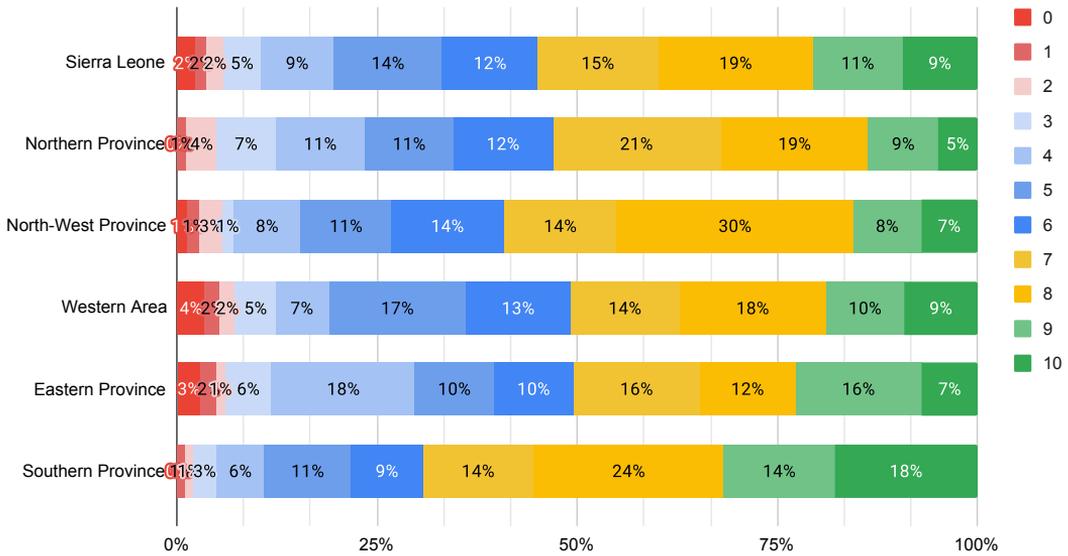


Figure 18

who scored on the extremes of the scale — in double digits both for 0-2 (12%, n=35) and at 9-10 (14%, n=40). Similar to Western Area, Eastern Province, too, registered a 12% score (n=12) for all ranks classified as not at all prepared. Interestingly, Southern Province had the highest percentage of journalists for all ranks classified as very well prepared (18%, n=18; scoring 9-10).

These findings indicate that a significant number of journalists in Sierra Leone have low or extremely low levels of confidence in their ability to carry out their professional duties during disasters. In the context of 62.7% journalists reporting they had never undertaken disaster-related training, or being unsure if they ever had (see Figure 18), this remains a key capacity-building area where more resources need to be invested.

Have you participated in disaster resilience training? - MALE

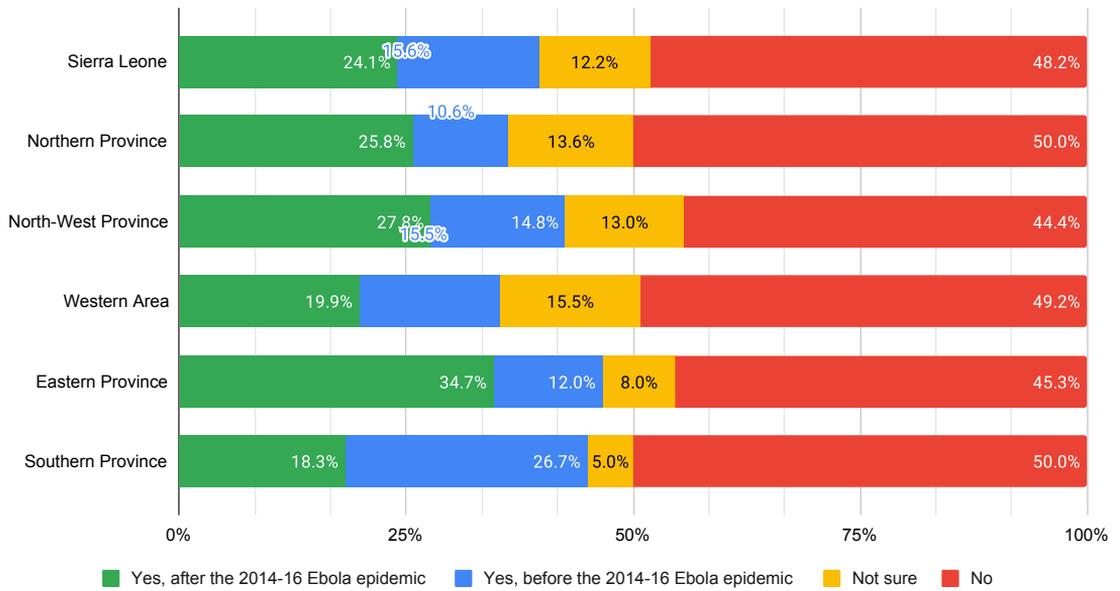


Figure 19

Have you participated in disaster resilience training? - FEMALE

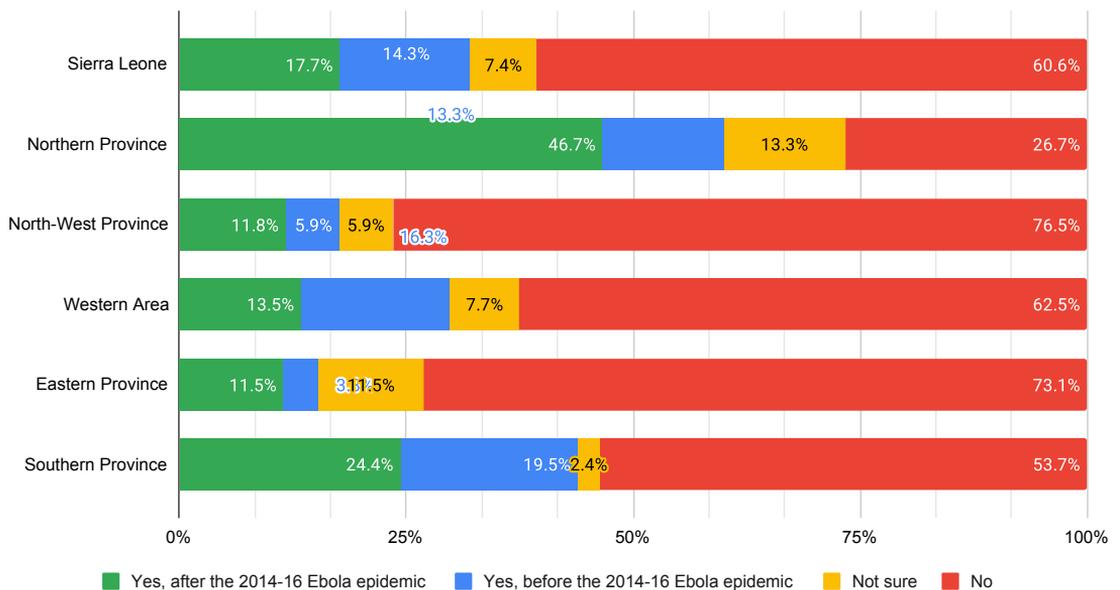


Figure 20

Disaster resilience: gender breakdown

The survey also revealed notable variations in the gender balance of journalists, both in terms of likelihoods of receiving disaster resilience training, and self-reported disaster preparedness.

Level of self-reported disaster preparedness - MALE

0 = not at all prepared; 10 = extremely prepared

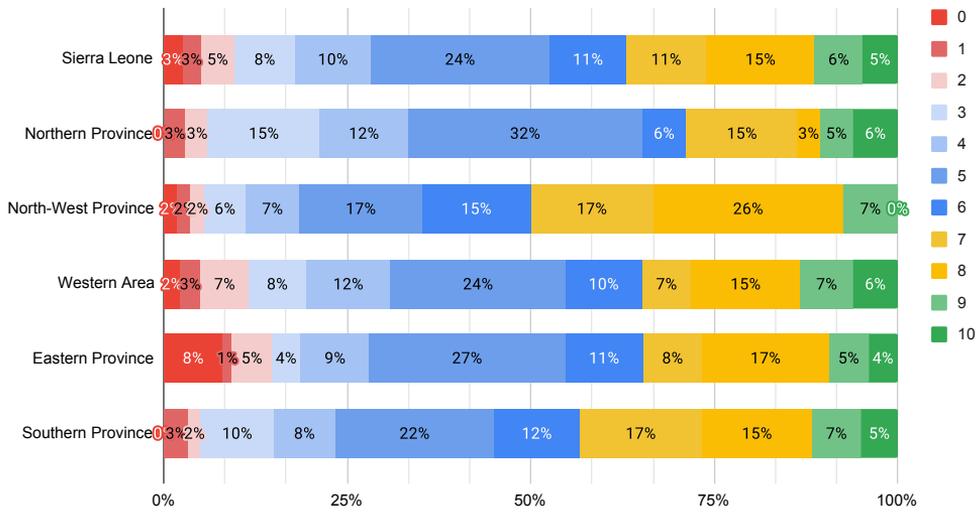


Figure 21

Level of self-reported disaster preparedness - FEMALE

0 = not at all prepared; 10 = extremely prepared

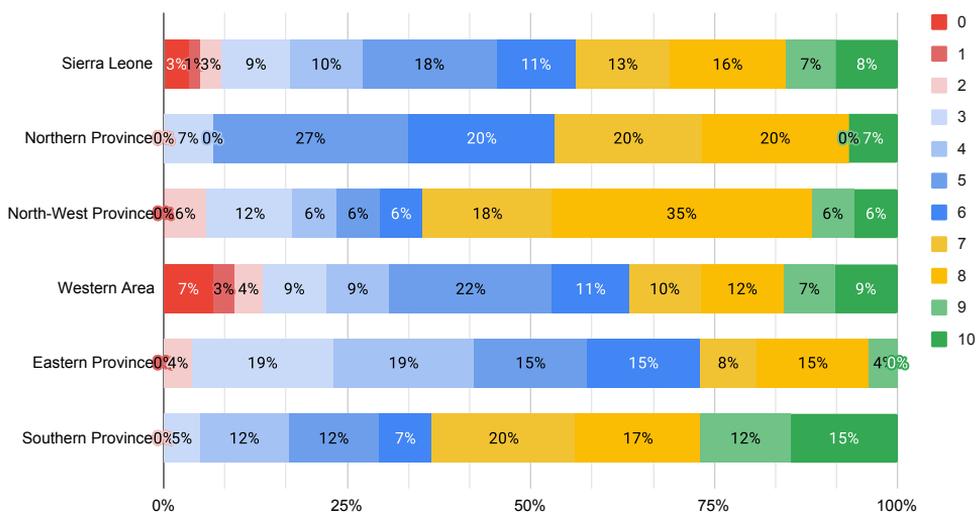


Figure 22

Across Sierra Leone, a larger proportion (39.7%, n=173) of male journalists had received disaster resilience training either before or after the Ebola outbreak. In comparison, only 32% (n=65) of female journalists had received training.

Significantly, 60.6% (n=123) women journalists reported they had received no training at all. This is 12.4% more than the percentage of male journalists who fell into this category (48.2%, n=210) – which suggests the need for more focussed training initiatives to address the gender imbalance in terms of access to disaster resilience training across Sierra Leone.

These conclusions are also borne out through an analysis of the situation across all administrative divisions. Just one province (Northern) had a higher percentage of female (60%, n=9) than male (36.4%, n=24) journalists who received disaster resilience training, with a notable improvement in the uptake of females being trained (46.7%, n=7) after the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak.

Some parity was registered in the case of Southern Province, with higher percentages of female (24.4%, n=10) than male (18.3%, N=11) journalists being trained after the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak. In all other divisions, higher percentages of male journalists received disaster resilience training either before or after the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak.

There also remains notable gender disparity among those who agreed that they received no training at all across administrative divisions. Higher percentages were recorded in terms of female journalists who had not participated in disaster resilience training in North-West Province (76.5%, n=13) and Eastern Province (73.1%, n=19), compared to male respondents

Would personally welcome training in the following areas

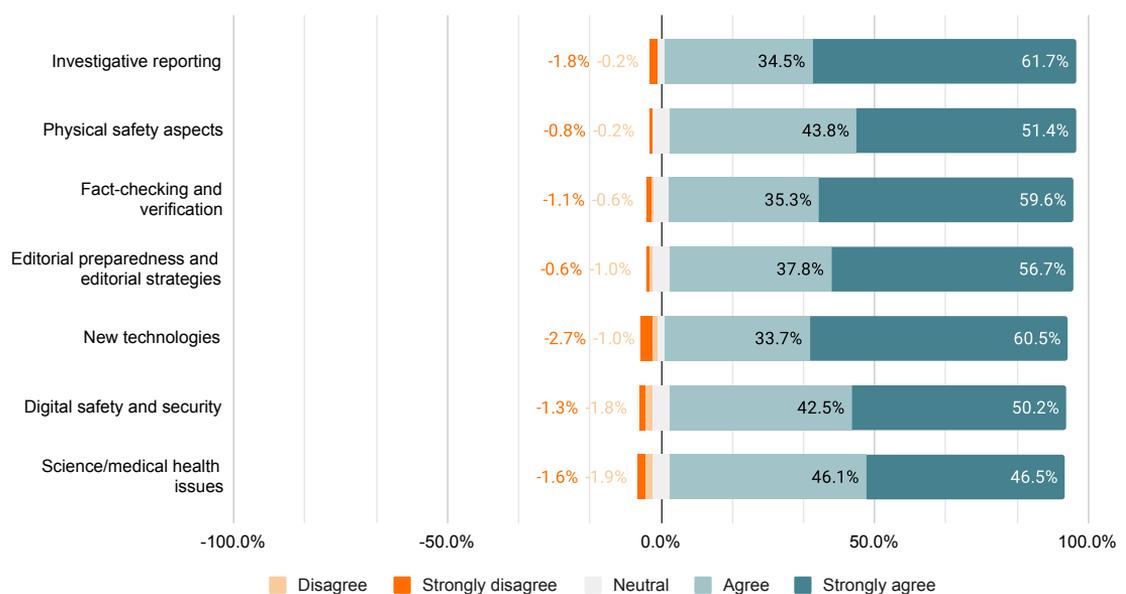


Figure 23

there (44.4%, n=24; and 45.3%, n=34, respectively).

Gender differences are also detectable in terms of levels of self-reported disaster preparedness. As seen in Figures 21 and 22, 47% (n=204) of our male respondents compared to 41% (n=84) of females across the country self-reported as inadequately prepared, scoring 6 or below on an 11-point Likert scale. Of this, 6% (n=28) of males self-assessed as not at all prepared, compared to 4% (n=9) of female respondents, scoring 0-2. At the other end of the scale, some 20% (n=87) of male, and 22% (n=44) of female respondents assessed themselves as very well prepared, scoring 9-10.

Training needs

The survey queried journalists on seven areas (see Figure 23) they might require training in, and also their preferred modes of accessing such training. More than three-quarters of our respondents reported that they welcomed training across all the seven areas.

Investigative reporting emerged as the most preferred area in which journalists sought training in, with 96.1% (n=597) agreeing or strongly agreeing that it was so. It was also the category for which the strongest preference was shown by the highest percentage of respondents (61.7%, n=383).

Addressing physical safety aspects emerged the second preferred area for training, with 95.2% (n=591) journalists agreeing or strongly agreeing it was so. This was closely followed by fact-checking and verification (94.8%, n=589) and editorial preparedness and editorial strategies (94.5% n=587).

New technologies (94.2%, n=585), digital safety aspects (92.8%, n=576), and science and medical issues (92.6%, n=575) also emerged as highly preferred training areas. Strikingly, more than 50% of journalists registered the strongest preference for training in six of the seven areas, indicating a significant demand for increased and focused training in core journalism skills.

Training delivery

Delivery of physical workshops was clearly the most preferred mode by journalists for accessing training. Some 87% (n=540) of the respondents indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed to delivery of workshops in their province. Similarly, 84.4% (n=523) of the respondents also either agreed or strongly agreed that physical workshops would also be advantageous in Freetown.

Lower levels of support were expressed for online delivery modes, with 54.2% (n=337) agreeing or strongly agreeing with the use of online website materials, 47.7% (n=296) with online video webinars, and 43.8% (n=272) with training delivery through podcast.

This, to an extent, reflects concerns about the realities of information and communication technology in Sierra Leone, where internet connectivity

and access, especially in areas outside Freetown and major urban areas, are particularly challenging. It is possible that this also reflects the desire of journalists to see a return to normality, given the challenges they have faced both in their personal lives and while undertaking journalism constrained

Preferred ways of receiving training

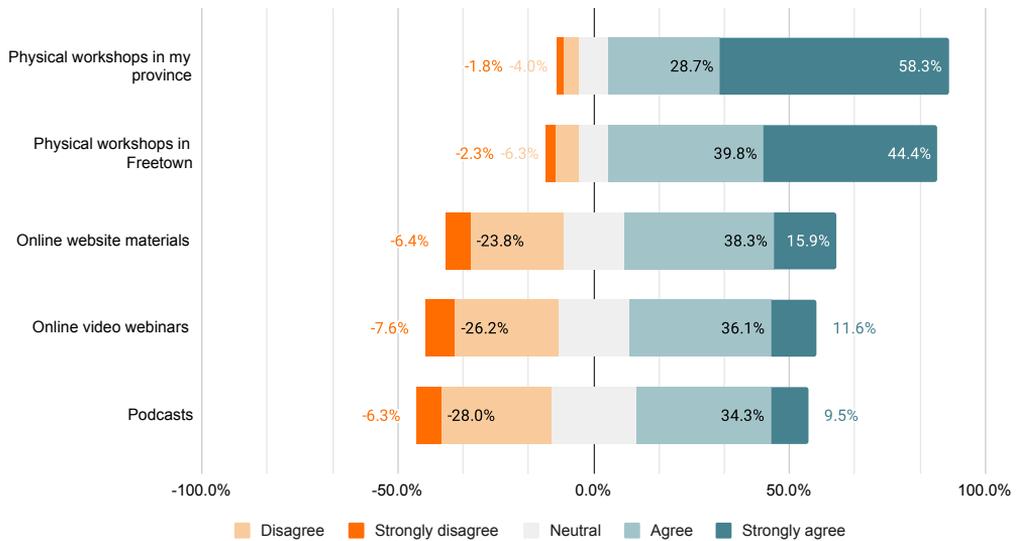


Figure 24

by the ongoing crisis. The latter reasoning finds support in the fact that a majority of journalists indicated their preference for face-to-face training as well. Not surprisingly, a slightly higher percentage (87%, n=540) preferred the physical workshops to be conducted in places other than Freetown, as opposed to the 84.2% (n=523) who preferred such training to occur in the national capital.

Nevertheless, the results pertaining to online modes of delivery remain substantial. Although podcast was the least preferred mode for training delivery, the door remains open for blended packaging, since journalists have indicated high positive receptivity to multiple modes. Even podcast appears a valid option for Sierra Leone, as 43.8% (n=272) of our respondents indicated their willingness to access training via this mode.

Areas for action

This rapid response national survey found that the Covid-19 crisis has had a severe impact on the journalism industry in Sierra Leone, posing further challenges for a vulnerable nation still grappling with the legacies of a traumatic civil war and the more recent Ebola outbreak of 2014-16. Covid-19 affected the mental and financial wellbeing of journalists, and changed their newsgathering, news production, and news dissemination practices in disadvantageous ways across the country. Further, the survey findings have underlined disaster resilience as a key capacity-building area that requires urgent investment at the national and divisional levels.

Here, it is also important to recognise that the impact of Covid-19 percolates beyond morbidity. Sierra Leone has to date recorded a low infection rate, including amongst journalists, according to our survey — yet the pandemic has had a broader societal impact that is important to recognise. Not only were news personnel affected at multiple levels, but the restrictions placed on their journalism by the Covid-19 situation is likely to have impacted Sierra Leone’s disaster response.

In view of the critical role that the news media play during public health crises and disasters, the results of this rapid response survey have highlighted the need for urgent action in four key areas:

Psychological resilience

- ▶ The government, at both the national and local levels, should make the **mental wellbeing of journalists a key priority**, and invest resources that will *directly* benefit them in this area (eg: creation of trauma networks, facilities for counselling).
- ▶ A similar commitment is required from news organisations as well as national and local journalism associations. They must work together, and with other stakeholders (government, NGOs, INGOs), to **protect the emotional and mental health of journalists**.

Financial resilience

- ▶ **The government should provide financial aid**, such as grants and cash payments, to support ailing news organisations and journalists for short-term business continuity, and to support access to PPE and other relevant disaster-related equipment.
- ▶ **The government should provide short-term loans** to help bridge revenue gaps commonly faced by news organisations in times of

health crises and disasters, especially **with a view to support news production and dissemination.**

- ▶ **News organisations and media houses should establish contingency funds** to facilitate business continuity during disasters, including protecting news output and timely payment of workers.

Health protection and resilience

- ▶ News organisations and media houses should work together with other stakeholders (government, NGOs, INGOs) to **facilitate disaster-related equipment (eg: PPE) and clear guidelines on physical as well as mental health** for all staff.

Building future disaster resilience

- ▶ **News media must be integrated as a key stakeholder in the national disaster reduction and response plans.** Journalists and news media personnel must be represented on disaster management committees, both at the national and local levels.
- ▶ All stakeholders (government, news organisations, NGOs, INGOs) should **recognise disaster training for journalists as a key priority** in mitigating Sierra Leone's disaster vulnerability. Investments to build capacity in this area must increase, and regular disaster journalism exercises should be an essential part of the training offered to news personnel.
- ▶ A concerted approach is required to **mitigate the gender imbalance evident in disaster journalism training opportunities available to women journalists.** Capacity-building for female journalists in this area must be prioritised.
- ▶ Educational and professional training institutions should embed **disaster reporting as a core training area** in their curriculum.
- ▶ News organisations and journalism associations should take the lead in working with other stakeholders (government, NGOs, educational institutions, UN bodies, etc) to **establish a system for delivering continued disaster journalism training** for Sierra Leone journalists.
- ▶ News organisations should facilitate better preparedness for their newsrooms by **publishing clear editorial policies and codes of practice** to guide journalists during disasters.

Appendix

Method

This survey was conducted online in English, using Microsoft Forms, and via telephone. A link to the survey questionnaire was distributed by email and on WhatsApp by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) to their members in all four provinces and Western Area. The link was also circulated by other journalism associations and news outlets on their WhatsApp groups. To reach journalists based in provinces where internet access is lower, four research assistants based in Freetown administered the questionnaire over telephone. The survey was open from 14:00 GMT on 22nd February to 10:00 GMT on 23rd March 2021. Ethical approval was granted by Bournemouth University’s Social Science and Humanities Research Ethics Panel in January 2021.

A total of 652 journalists responded to the survey. Of this, 98% (n=639) agreed to participate. The survey received the highest rate of response – 44.6% (n=285) – in Western Area, which includes the national capital of Freetown, where many of the major media houses are based. A comparison of the responses from each province can be seen in Figure M1.

Number of respondents by region

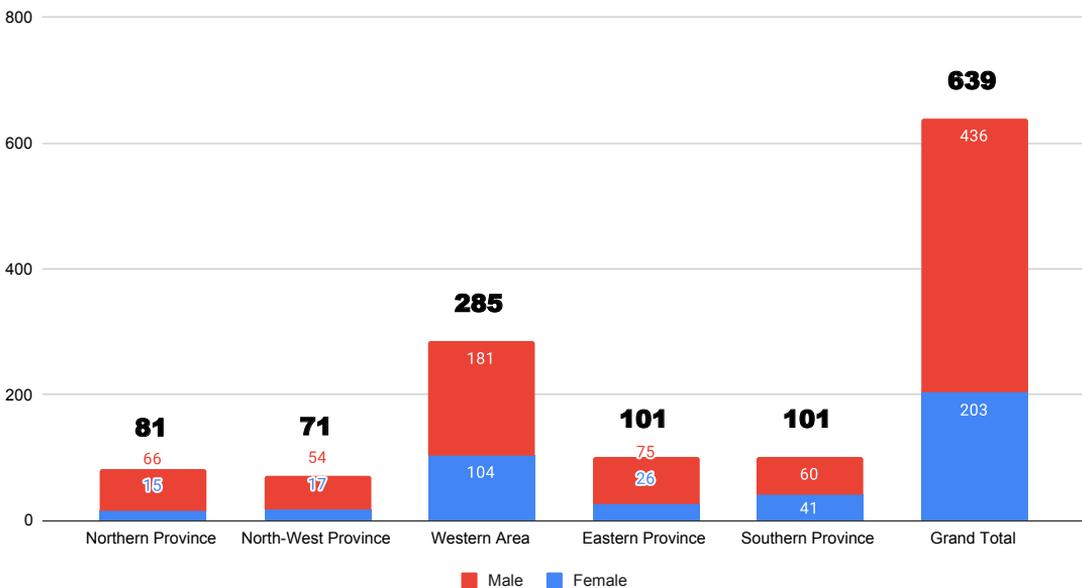


Figure M1

Gender breakdown

Broken down by gender (Figure M1), 68.2% (n=436) of our respondents were male and 31.8% (n=203) female. The fact that respondents were largely male reflects the dominance of men in the news industry in Sierra Leone. The lowest response rate from female journalists, compared to males, was in Northern Province (18.5%), followed by North-West Province (23.9%), Eastern Province (25.7%), and Western Area (36.5%). The highest was in Southern Province (40.6%).

Breakdown by media type

Participants in the survey included those working across the media sectors of print, radio, television, online, and news agencies (Figure M2). Respondents could select more than one media sector, so numerical values are larger than the reported sample size, but percentages illustrate the proportion of these respondents.

Radio appears to be by far the most common sector for journalists to be employed in: of our respondents, 56% (n=436) identified themselves as radio journalists.

This was followed by print, with 14% (n=140); television, with 14% (n=110); online, with 8% (n=64); and news agency, with 3% (n=26). It is important to note here that respondents at times worked in more than one sector — for example, radio and television, radio and online, or print and online.

Type of news organisation

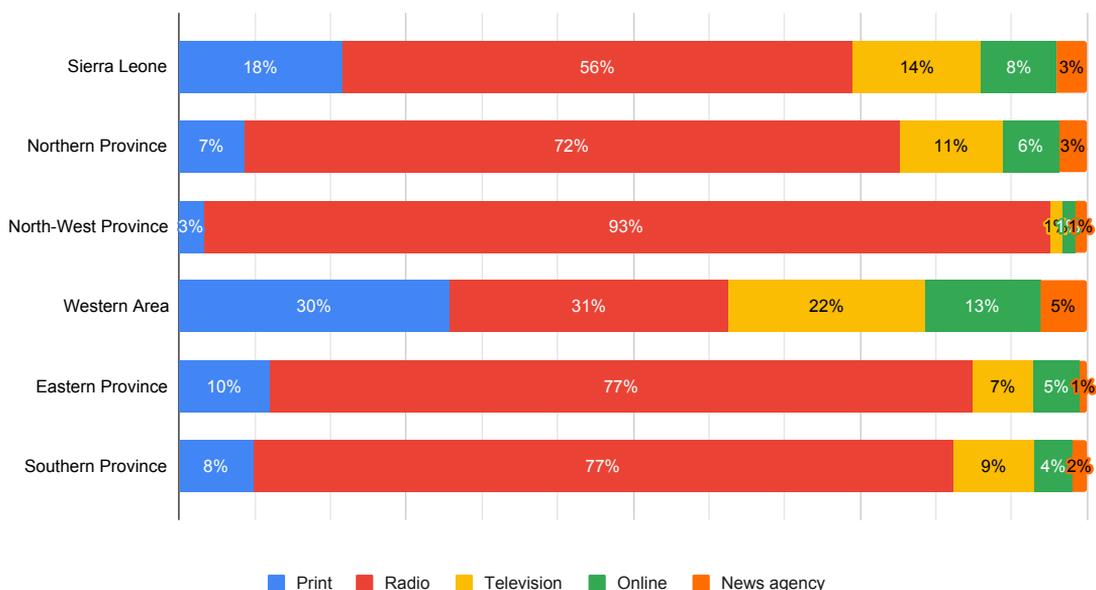


Figure M2

Regionally, there was some difference between the proportion of journalists who responded from each sector. Across all provinces, radio was the most common sector for journalists to work in. This was true in Western Area, too, although print appeared to be on a similar footing here with radio.

In Northern Province, 72% (n=70) respondents said they worked in radio, followed by television at 11% (n=11). In North-West Province, 93% (n=68) reported being radio journalists, which was the highest proportion of any region. In Western Area, both radio and print responses were similarly placed at 31% and 30% (n=112 and 109, respectively).

Eastern Province also had a very high proportion of radio journalists (77%, n=92). The second-highest percentage of response from that province came from the print sector (10%, n=12). Southern Province, similarly, saw a high response rate from journalists working for radio stations, also at 77% (n=94). This was followed by the print sector, which recorded 8% (n=11) of the responses there.

Print appeared to be the second most-common sector for journalists to be employed in, in most regions, going by the response rate. Television came third in most regions, but second by proportion in Northern Province (11%, n=11) and Southern Province (9%, n=11). Western Area, however, recorded a significantly higher percentage of responses in this sector (19%, n=79). The province with the lowest percentage of responses from television journalists was North-West (1%, n=1).

The percentage of journalists employed by online and news agencies, in all provinces and Western Area, appeared to be considerably low compared to radio, print, and television. Nationally, only 3% (n=26) of the responses were from news agency journalists. This was particularly low in North-West Province and Eastern Province (1%, n=1).

Online saw a higher response rate, at 8% (n=64), nationally. Most of the respondents were from Western Area (13%, n=46), largely based in the capital city of Freetown, where internet connectivity is less of a challenge than in the provinces. The lowest responses from journalists working in the online sector were from Southern Province (4%, n=5) and North-West Province (1%, n=1).

Net Promoter Score

In order to assess journalists' own perception about their disaster preparedness, we used a Net Promoter Score (NPS) calculation. While this is normally utilised in brand marketing, it can be applied here to understand both the extent of journalists' self-reported resilience, and the extent to which they are likely to promote disaster preparedness to others.

NPS was calculated using a 0-10 scale, for the question: How would you rate your disaster preparedness? Respondents who scored 9-10 were classified as Promoters, loyal enthusiasts who appreciated disaster

preparedness and were likely to promote it to others. Respondents who scored 7-8 were classified as Passives, satisfied but unenthusiastic, and those who scored 0-6 were Detractors. Subtracting the percentage of Detractors from the percentage of Promoters yields the Net Promoter Score, which can range from a low of -100 (if every respondent is a Detractor) to a high of 100 (if every respondent is a Promoter). Applied in this survey, the NPS score was -48, which indicates a low level of disaster preparedness.

How would you rate your current disaster preparedness

Promoters	80
Passives	170
Detractors	389



Figure M3

For the second question, How has your disaster preparedness changed due to Covid-19?, the NPS score was -24, which still indicates a low level of disaster preparedness, but some improvement over the previous response.

How has your disaster preparedness changed due to Covid 19

Promoters	131
Passives	220
Detractors	288



Figure M4

Northern Province

The survey received 81 respondents from Northern Province. Similar to the other administrative divisions in Sierra Leone, the responses were largely from male journalists (81.5%). Female journalists accounted for 18.5%. Male respondents, thus, were considerably higher here than the national average (68%), while responses from women journalists were 13% lower than the national average of (31.5%).

Radio appeared to be more common in Northern Province than it is nationally, accounting for 72% of all media responses (the national average is 56%). Television (11%), print (7%), and online (6%) accounted for smaller share of responses, against the national averages of 14%, 18%, and 8%, respectively.

Northern Province - gender breakdown

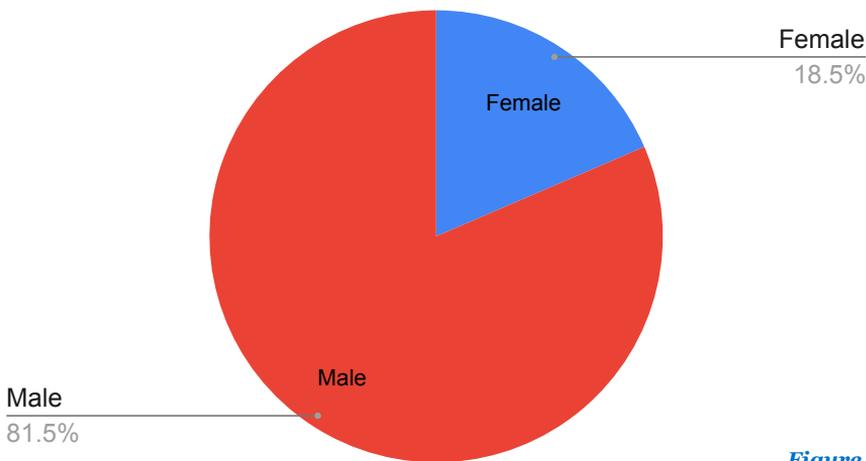


Figure A1

Northern Province - breakdown of media type

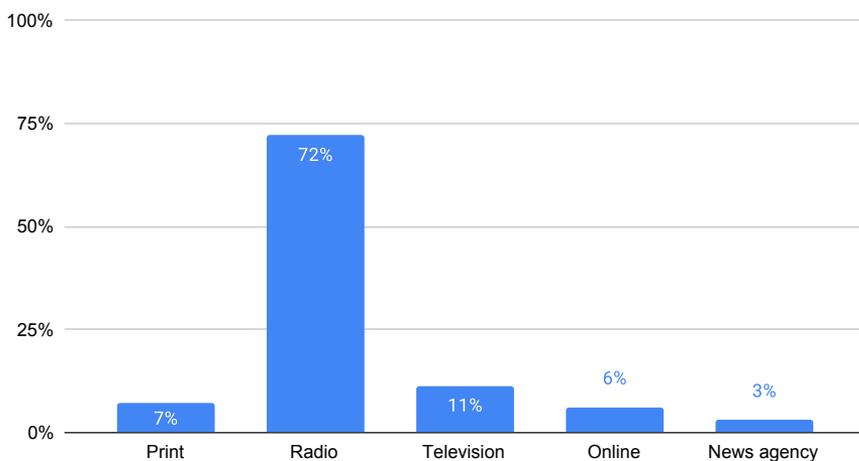


Figure A2

Northern Province - Covid-19 related impact on Sierra Leone journalists

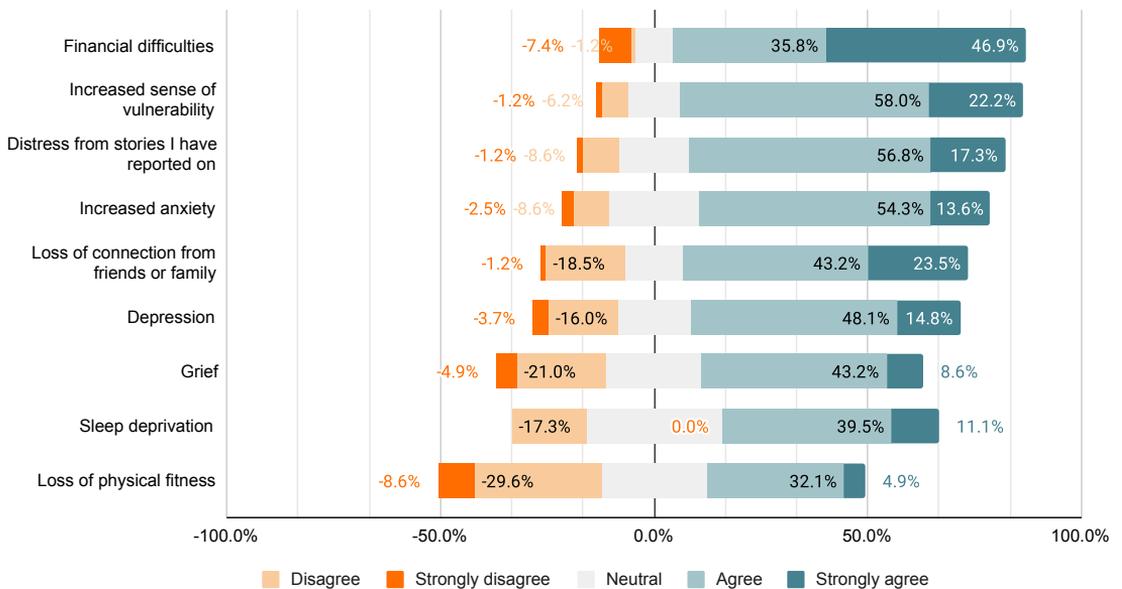


Figure A3

Impact on journalists

Covid-19 had a significant impact on journalists in this province. 82.7% of our respondents noted they experienced financial difficulties as a result of the pandemic. 80.2% experienced increased sense of vulnerability, while 74.1% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt distress from stories they reported on.

In addition, 67.9% said they experienced increased anxiety, and 66.7% reported a loss of connection from friends and family. 63% noted that Covid-19 resulted in their experiencing depression.

Sleep deprivation was reported by 50.6%, while 51.9% said they experienced grief. Loss of physical fitness was of lesser concern, with only 37% agreeing or strongly agreeing that it was an issue.

Changes to newsgathering practices

Newsgathering patterns in Northern Province were similar to that seen across the nation. 91.3% of respondents in this province noted that they were unable to pursue certain stories or investigations because of Covid-19 restrictions. 88.8% of journalists agreed or strongly agreed that financial restrictions left them unable to report on certain issues or to conduct investigations.

The pandemic also resulted in a shift to increased use of technology for newsgathering among the journalists in this province, much like elsewhere. Thus, 80% reported increased use of mobile phones for videos and

Northern Province - Changes to newsgathering / production practices after Covid-19

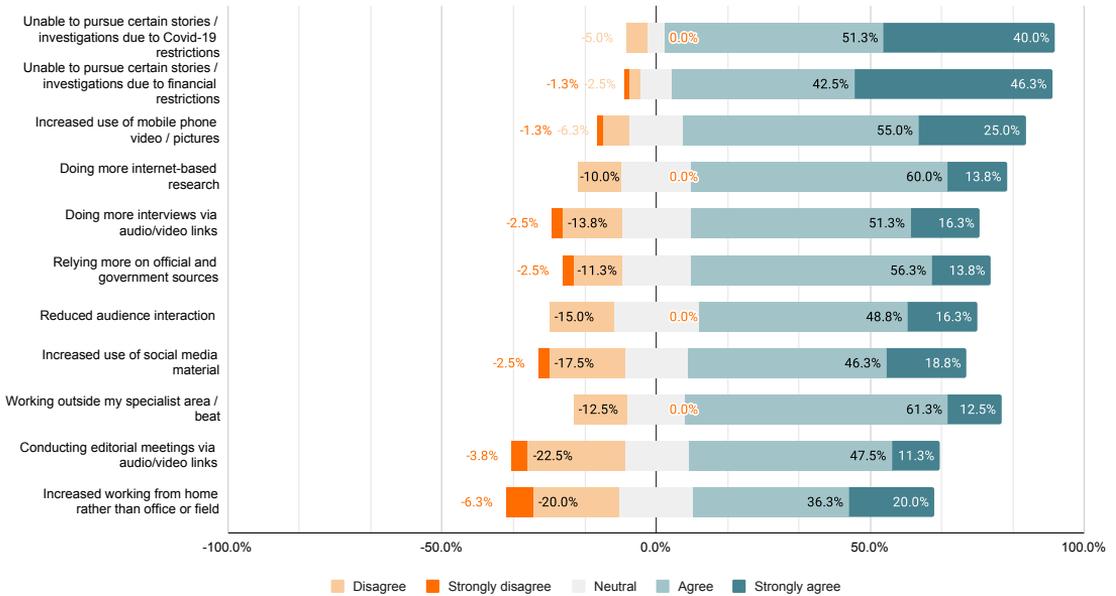


Figure A4

photographs, 73.8% noted a higher level of internet-based research, and 67.5% acknowledged that they conducted more interviews through audio or visual links. In addition, 65% agreed or strongly agreed that there was an increased usage of social media material.

Respondents here noted an increase in their reliance on official and government sources (70%), and 65% reported experiencing reduced interaction with their audiences. 73.8% said that they have been working outside their specialist area or beat.

The majority also reported that they were conducting editorial meetings through audio or visual channels (58.8%), and that they worked from home (56.3%).

Changes to news outputs

Respondents in Northern Province reported reduced news outputs across all sectors. Reduced audio production was reported by 42.9% of radio respondents (36.1% respondents overall).

Reduction in broadcast and video productions were highlighted by 37.1% and 10.3%, respectively. Smaller segments also pointed to reduced print frequency (7.2%) and a shift to digital-only format (5.2%).

Possibly because of the dominance of radio journalists among the respondents in this province, reduced audio production emerged as a key highlight — 12.1% more than the national average of 24%.

Northern Province - Has your news organisation made any of the following changes to its output since Covid-19?

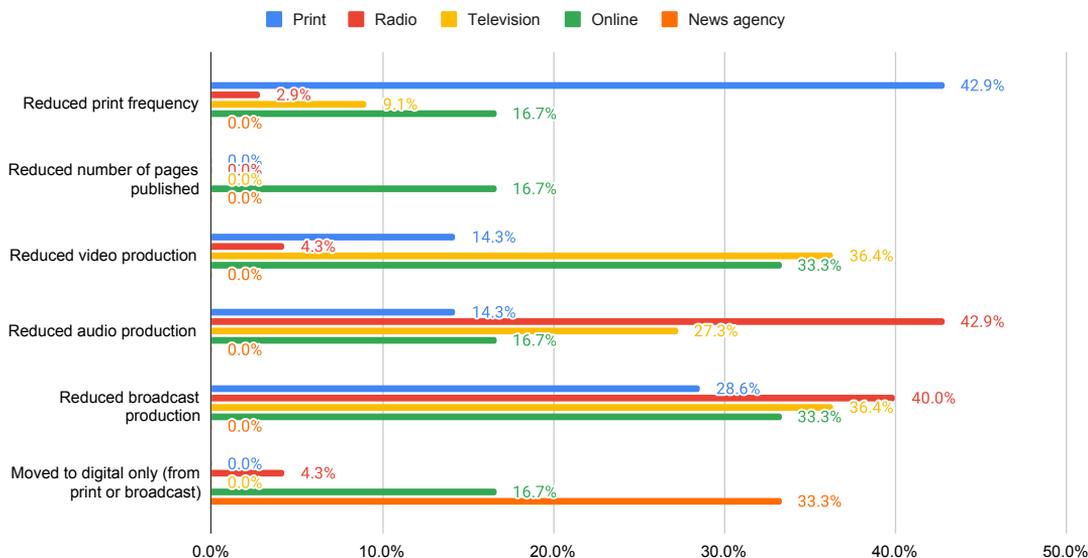


Figure A5

Northern Province - Covid-19 support from news organisation

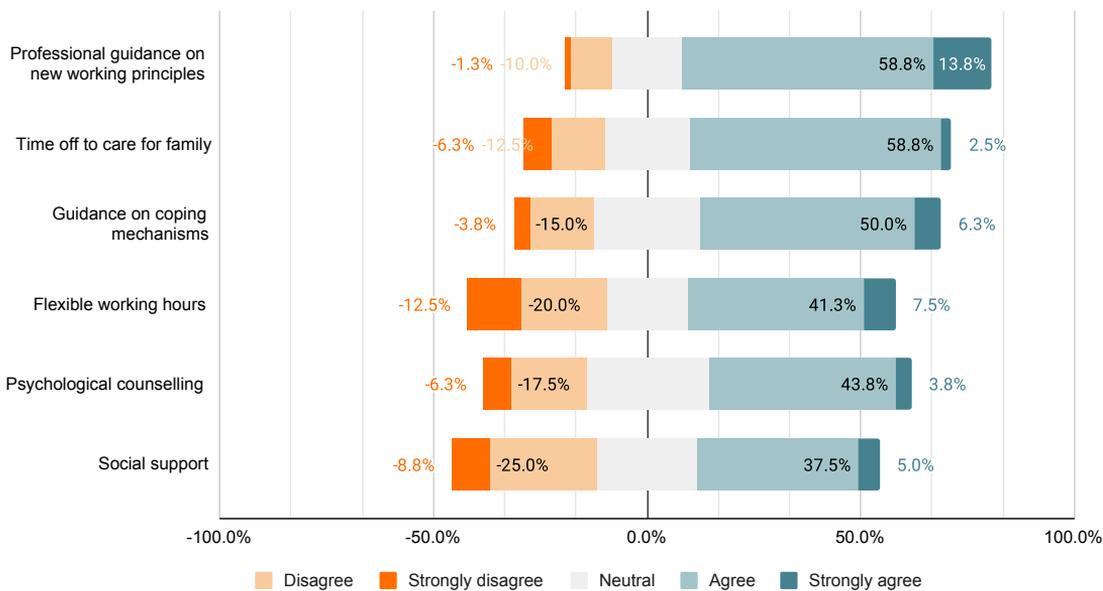


Figure A6

Support from news organisations

The majority of respondents (72.5%) agreed or strongly agreed to receiving professional guidance on new working principles from news organisations. Further, 61.3% noted that their employers gave them time off to care for family, while 56.3% reported that they had been given guidance on coping mechanisms.

Comparatively, social support was the least accessible measure for respondents: 42.5% agreed or strongly agreed they had access to it (6.3% higher than the national average of 36.2).

Training needs

Similar to the national trend, respondents in Northern Province welcomed training in all seven areas. In fact, the province showed a more pronounced eagerness for training, with a higher percentage of respondents indicating the need for it across all areas but one.

Thus, 96.3% each agreed or strongly agreed with investigative reporting, and physical safety aspects; 97.5% with fact-checking and verification; 95% with editorial preparedness and editorial strategies; 96.3% with new technologies; and 95% with digital safety and security. Science/medical health issues was the only area where they showed less preference than the national average (88.8%, against 92.6%).

Training delivery

Respondents largely preferred physical workshops in their province (roughly 87.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing) or in Freetown (80%).

For online website materials, 46.3% indicated a preference, while 38.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed that it was a preferred way. Slightly more respondents indicated less interest in online video webinars, with 37.5% disagreeing with its use, and 35% agreeing or strongly agreeing.

Podcasts were preferred by 42.5% respondents, while 33.8% indicated disagreement or strong disagreement with that format.

Northern Province - Preferred ways of receiving training

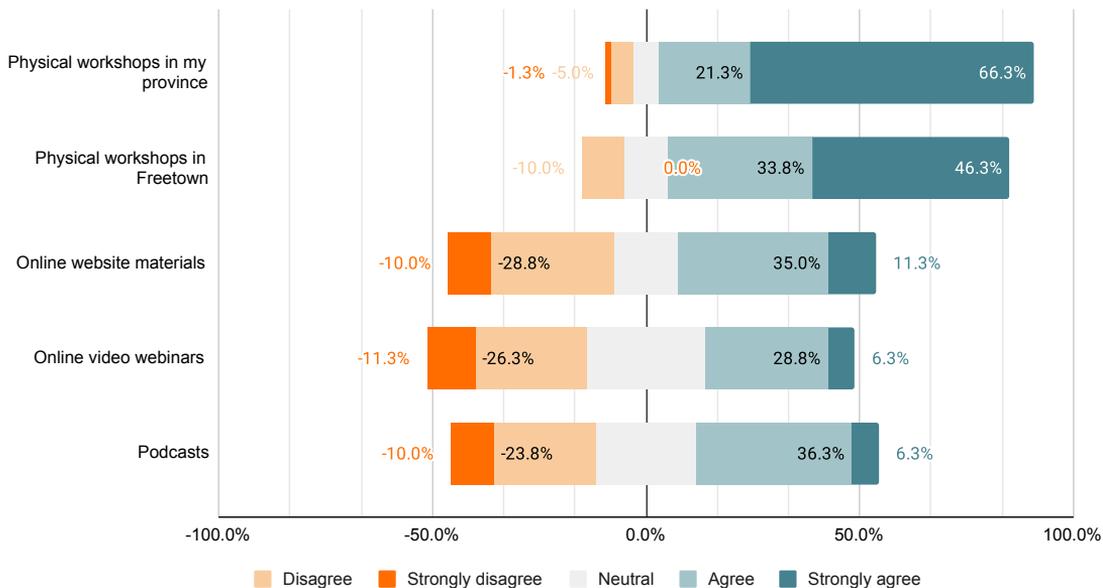


Figure A8

Northern Province - Would personally welcome training in the following areas

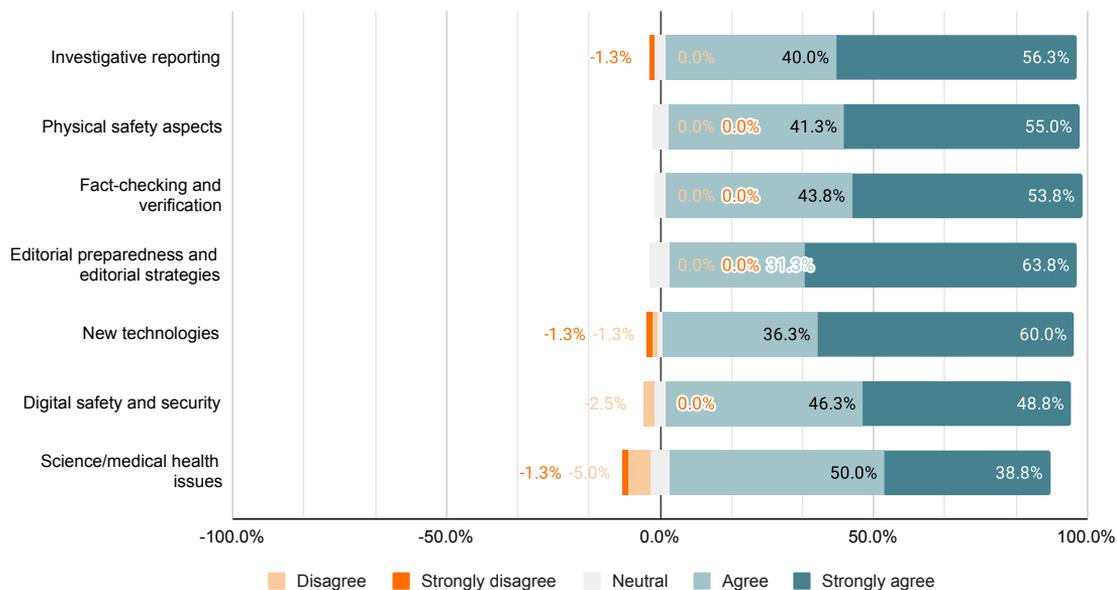


Figure A7

North-West Province

The survey received 71 responses from North-West Province. As in other regions, the responses were largely from male journalists (76.1%). Female journalists accounted for 23.9%. The province recorded a significantly higher percentage of male respondents and a lower percentage of female respondents compared to the national averages for each gender (68% and 31.5%, respectively).

Radio was overwhelmingly the most common sector in which respondents in this province worked, at 93%. This was 37% higher than the national average of 56%. Print accounted for 3% of the responses, followed by 1% respondents each from television, online, and news agencies — all of which are considerably lower than their respective national averages (print, 18%; television, 14%; online, 8%, and news agency, 3%).

North-West Province - gender breakdown

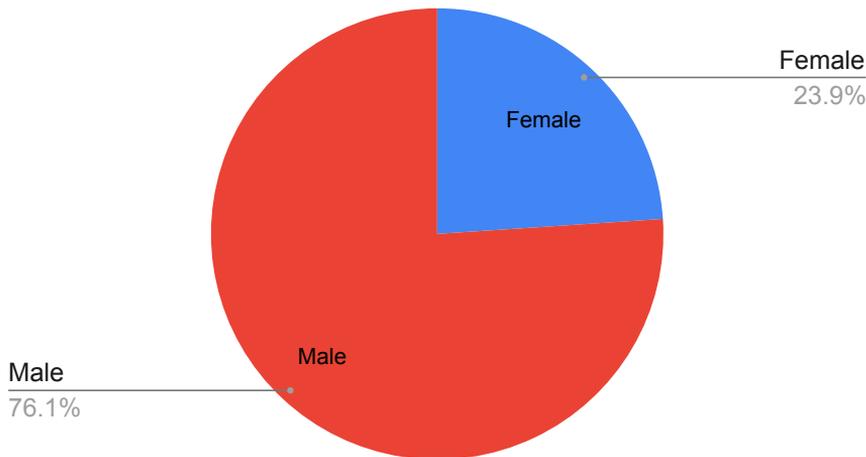


Figure B1

North-West Province - breakdown of media type

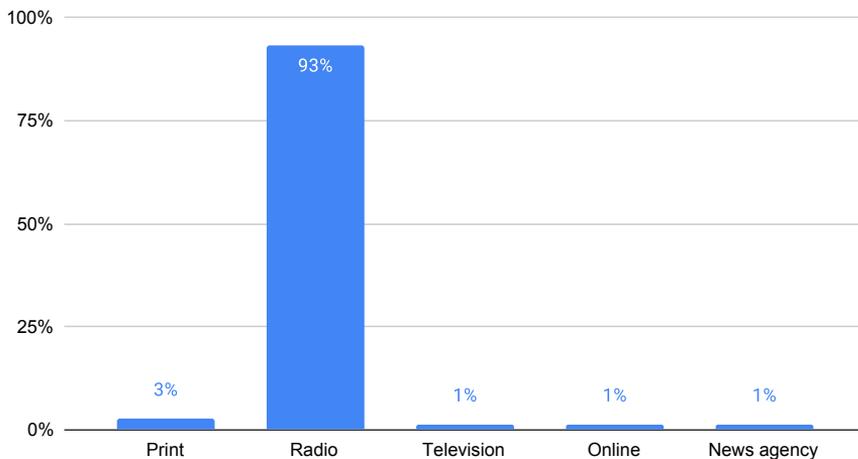


Figure B2

North-West Province - Covid-19 related impact on Sierra Leone journalists

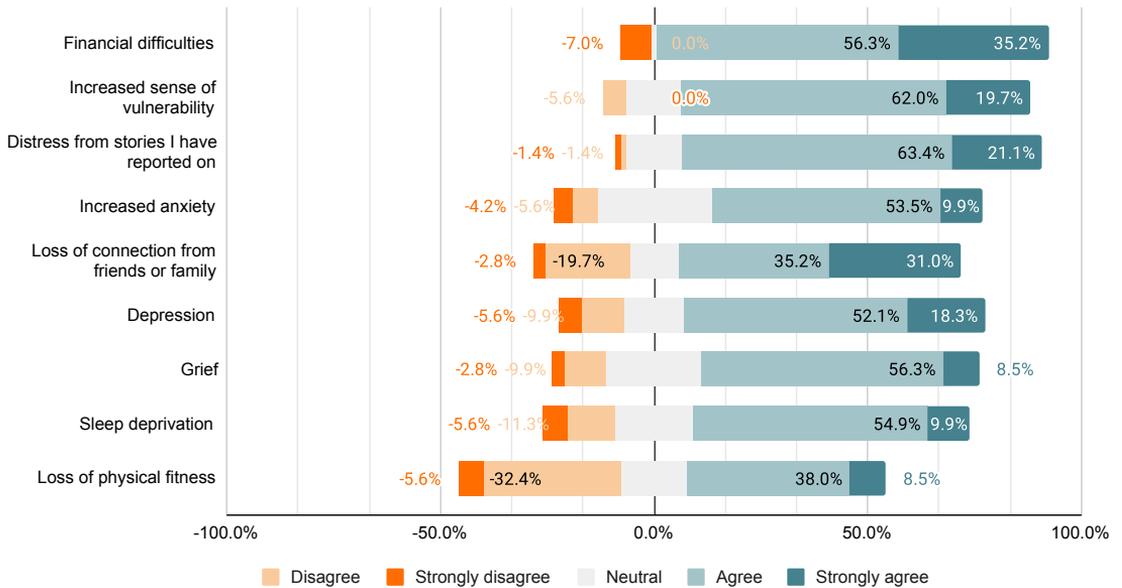


Figure B3

Impact on journalists

North-West Province recorded elevated levels of financial difficulties, compared to the national average of 86.7%: 91.5% of respondents here agreed or strongly agreed that they faced monetary issues.

The province saw comparatively higher percentages of respondents who reported increased sense of vulnerability (81.7%, against the national average of 76.4%), and distress from stories they reported on (84.5%, against 71.0%).

Changes to newsgathering practices

North-West Province saw patterns approximately similar to other administrative divisions in terms of newsgathering practices. 94.4% said they were unable to pursue stories and investigations due to Covid-19 restrictions, while 91.5% reported their inability to do so due to financial restrictions.

Increased use of mobile phone video and photographs was reported by 81.7% of the respondents, and 80.3% said they were doing more internet-based research. 80.3% of the respondents also acknowledged increased reliance on official and government sources.

The percentage of those who reported increased use of social media material for newsgathering in this province was 43.7%, considerably lower than the national average of 63.4%.

A majority (54.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had to work outside their specialist area or beat, and 63.4% noted that they conducted editorial meetings through audio or visual channels.

North-West Province - Changes to newsgathering / production practices after Covid-19

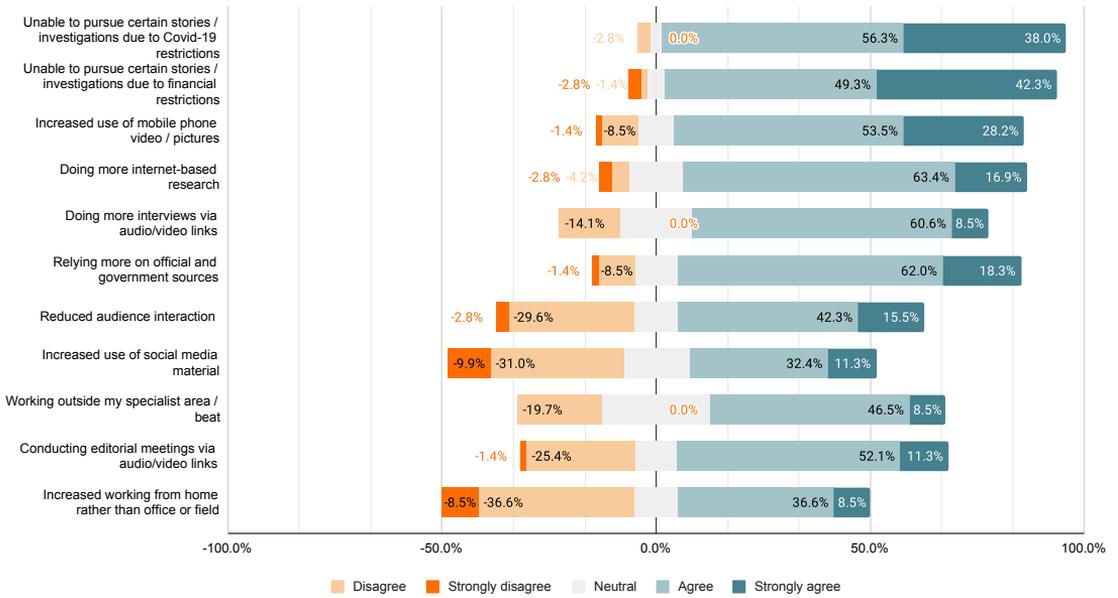


Figure B4

North-West Province - Has your news organisation made any of the following changes to its output since Covid-19?

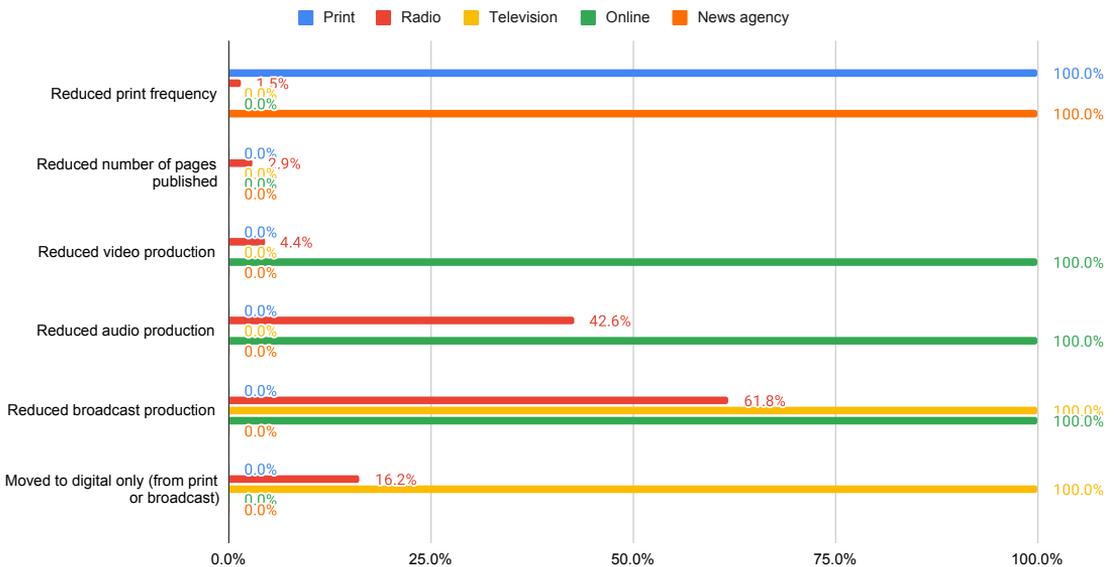


Figure B5

Changes to news outputs

News organisations in North-West Province followed a similar pattern to that was witnessed nationally, indicating a reduction of news content across all sectors. 42.6% of radio respondents indicated a significant impact on their news organisations, reporting reduced audio production.

A drop in broadcast content was reported by television respondents and a significant percentage of 61.8% of the radio journalists, who dominated those surveyed in this province. A notable segment of the respondents from North-West also pointed to a move to digital-only (from print or broadcast), and reduced print frequency because of the pandemic.

Support from news organisations

The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed to receiving professional guidance on new working principles from their news organisations (69%), time to care for family (70.4%), guidance on coping mechanisms (56.3%), and psychological counselling (52.1%).

Compared to the national average (59.9%), time to care for family was acknowledged by 10.5% more respondents in this province. Psychological counselling was noted by a higher proportion of respondents here, against the national average of 45.1%. Social support was the least available measure

North-West Province - Covid-19 support from news organisation

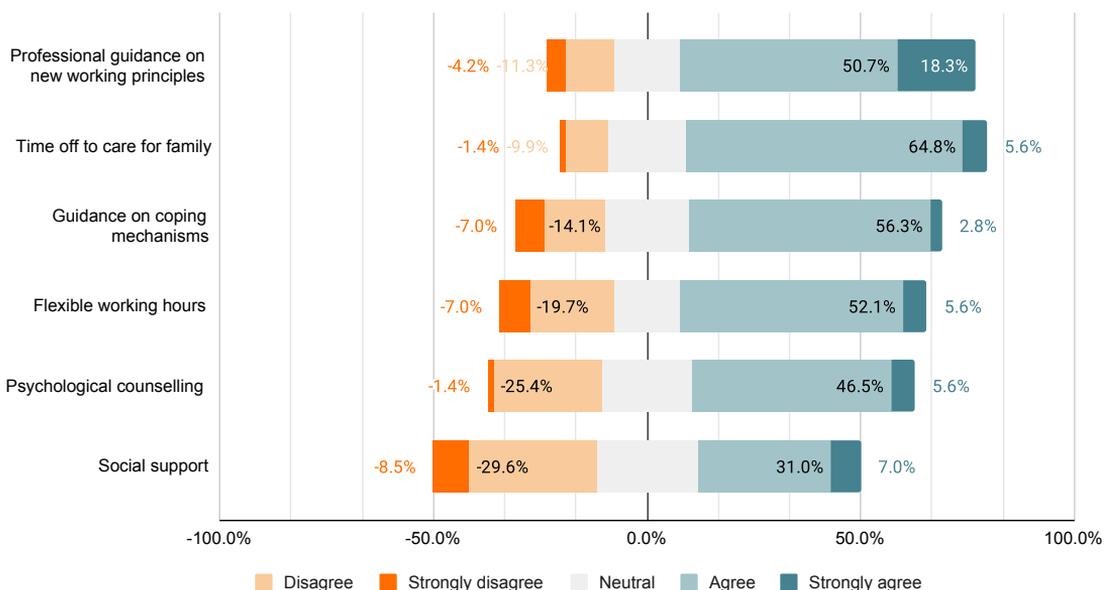


Figure B6

North-West Province - Would personally welcome training in the following areas

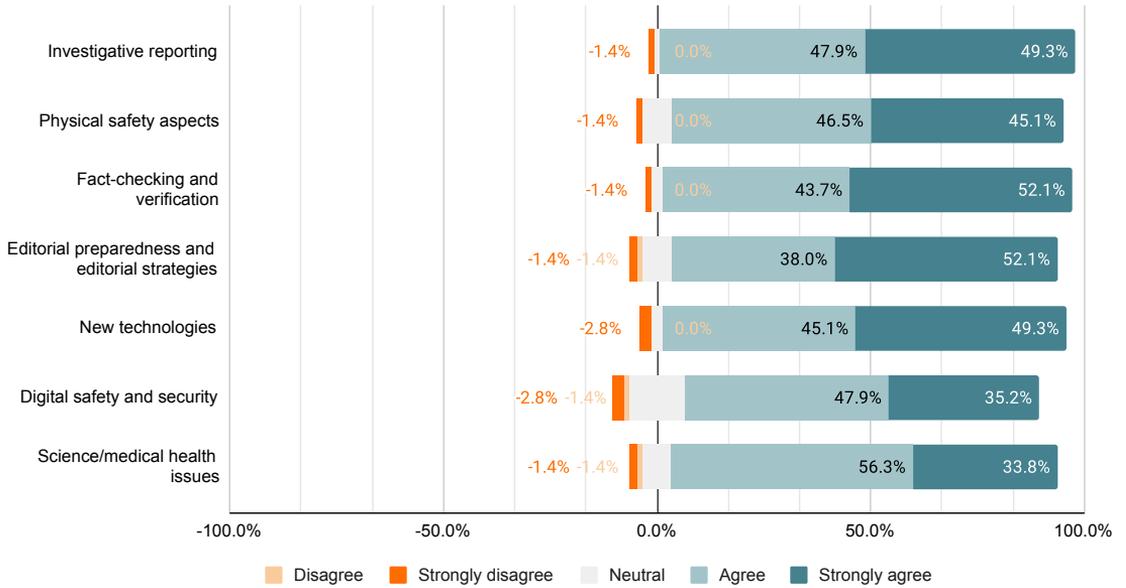


Figure B7

North-West Province - Preferred ways of receiving training

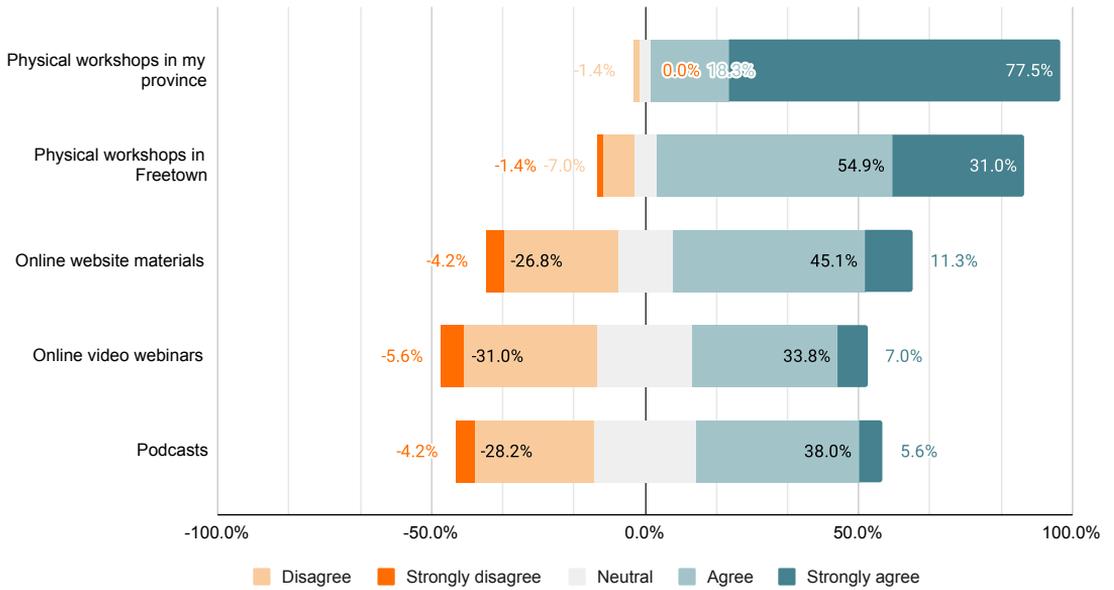


Figure B8

to journalists in this province, with only 38% agreeing or strongly agreeing, compared to the national average of 36.2%.

Training needs

North-West Province recorded the national trend in terms of training, with an overwhelming majority of respondents welcoming training in all seven areas. Digital safety and security emerged as the least-preferred area, though even this had 83.1% respondents indicating their preference.

All other options elicited more than 90% agreement or strong agreement. Thus, investigative reporting was welcomed by 97.2%, new technologies by 94.4%, fact-checking and verification by 95.8%, physical safety aspects by 91.5%, editorial preparedness and editorial strategies by 90.1%, and science/medical health issues by 90.1%.

Training delivery

Results were in line with the national trend on training delivery. Respondents largely preferred physical workshops in their province, with 95.8% agreeing or strongly agreeing, or in Freetown (85.9%). Online website materials were preferred by 56.3%. The least-preferred options, at 40.8% and 43.7% respectively, were online video webinars and podcasts.

Western Area

The survey received 285 responses from Western Area. As in other administrative divisions, the responses were largely from male journalists (63.5%). Female journalists accounted for 36.5%. This is roughly in line with the national averages of 68% male, and 31.5% female respondents.

Radio and print were the most common sectors in which respondents in Western Area worked, with sectors contributing 31% and 30% of the responses, respectively. Radio responses were below the national average of 56%, while print was higher than the national average of 18%. These were followed by television (22%), online (13%), and news agencies (5%), all of which were slightly higher than their respective national averages (television, 18%; online 7%; and news agency, 3%).

Western Area - gender breakdown

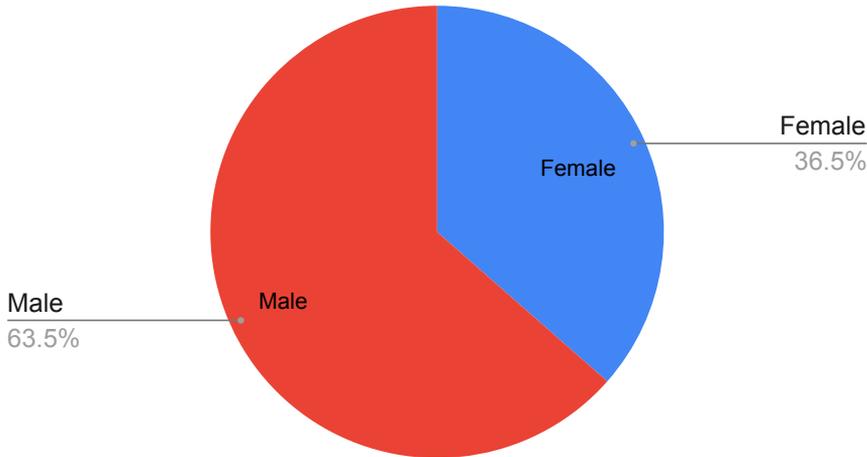


Figure C1

Western Area - breakdown of media type

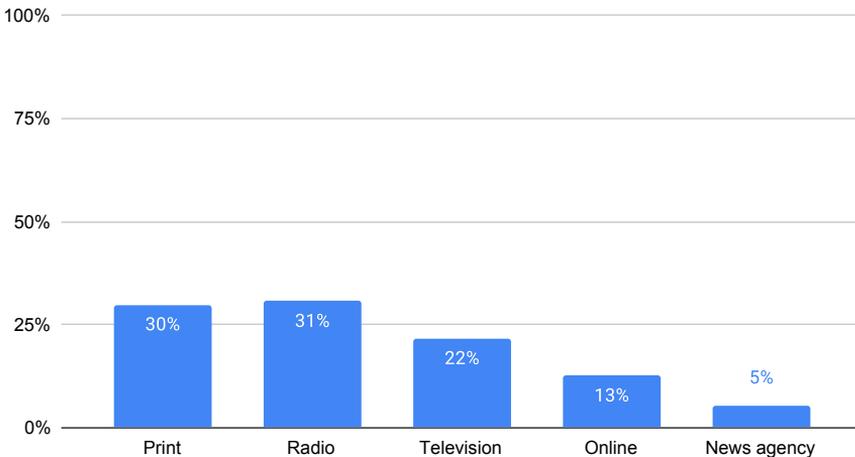


Figure C2

Western Area - Covid-19 related impact on Sierra Leone journalists

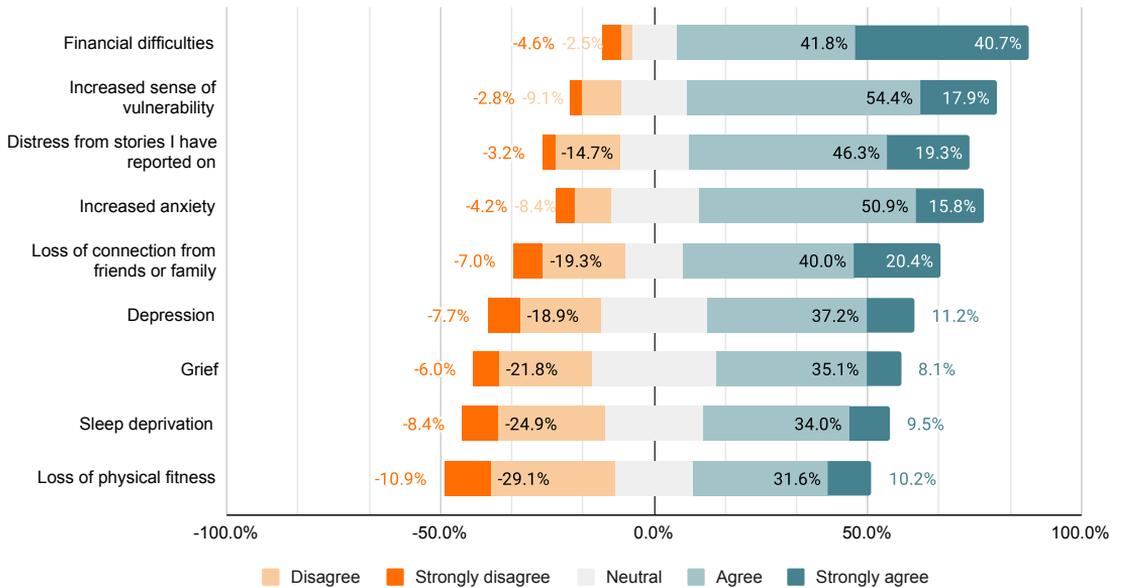


Figure C3

Impact on journalists

82.5% of respondents from Western Area noted that they experienced financial difficulties as a result of the pandemic. This is lower than the national average of 86.7%. Western Area also saw a comparatively lower percentage of respondents reporting an increased sense of vulnerability (72.3%, against the national average of 76.4%), and in those agreeing or strongly agreeing they felt distress from stories they reported on (65.6%, against the national average of 71%).

A loss of connection from family and friends (60.4%), depression (48.4%) and grief (43.2%), were also noted by journalists from Western Area — but all at lower levels than the national averages of 66.7%, 59.3%, and 51.8%, respectively.

Changes to newsgathering practices

Western Area saw results broadly in line with national averages in terms of newsgathering practices. 86.9% of respondents said they were unable to pursue stories and investigations due to Covid-19 restrictions, compared to the national average of 89.4%. 84.3% reported their inability to do so due to financial restrictions, slightly below the national average of 88.2%.

Increased use of mobile phone video and photograph was reported by 81.8% of respondents, while 81% said they were doing more internet-based research. An increased reliance on official and government sources was also acknowledged by 71.9%.

Western Area - Changes to newsgathering / production practices after Covid-19

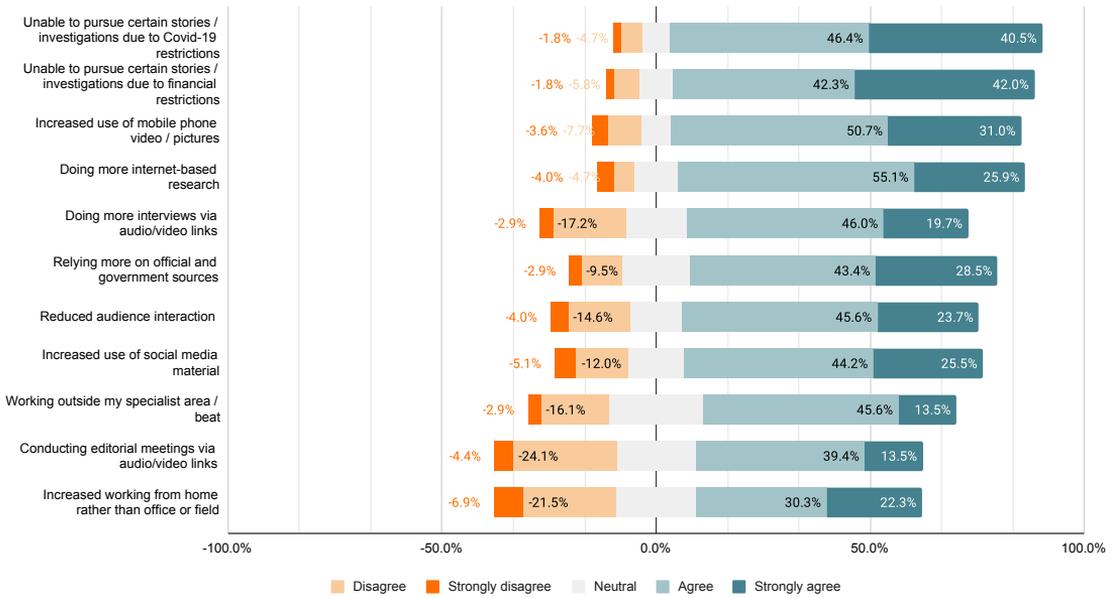


Figure C4

Western Area - Has your news organisation made any of the following changes to its output since Covid-19?

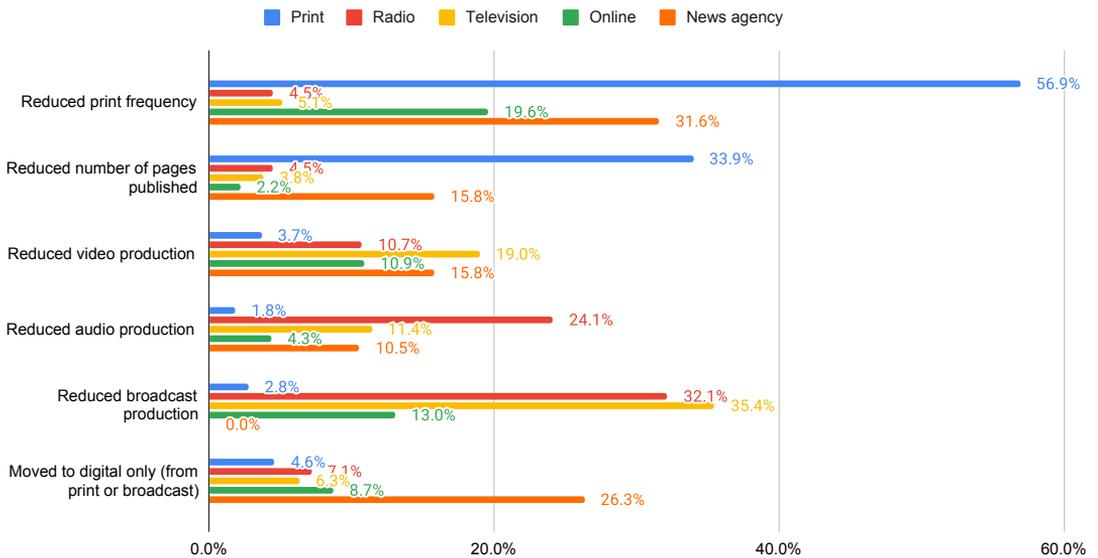


Figure C5

The percentage of those who reported an increased use of social media material for newsgathering in this province was 69.7%, higher than the national average of 63.4%.

A majority (59.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had to work outside their specialist area or beat, and 52.9% noted that they conducted editorial meetings through audio or visual channels.

Changes to news outputs

News organisations in Western Area followed a similar pattern to that witnessed nationally, indicating a reduction in news content across all sectors. 56.9% of those working in print reported a reduced print frequency, and 33.9% reported a reduction in the number of pages published.

For those in television, 35.4% noted reduced broadcast production, while 24.1% of those in radio reported reduced audio production, and 32.1% reported reduced broadcast production. For news agencies, 26.3% noted that their news organisation has moved to a digital only format, compared to just 4.6% of respondents in print.

Western Area - Covid-19 support from news organisation

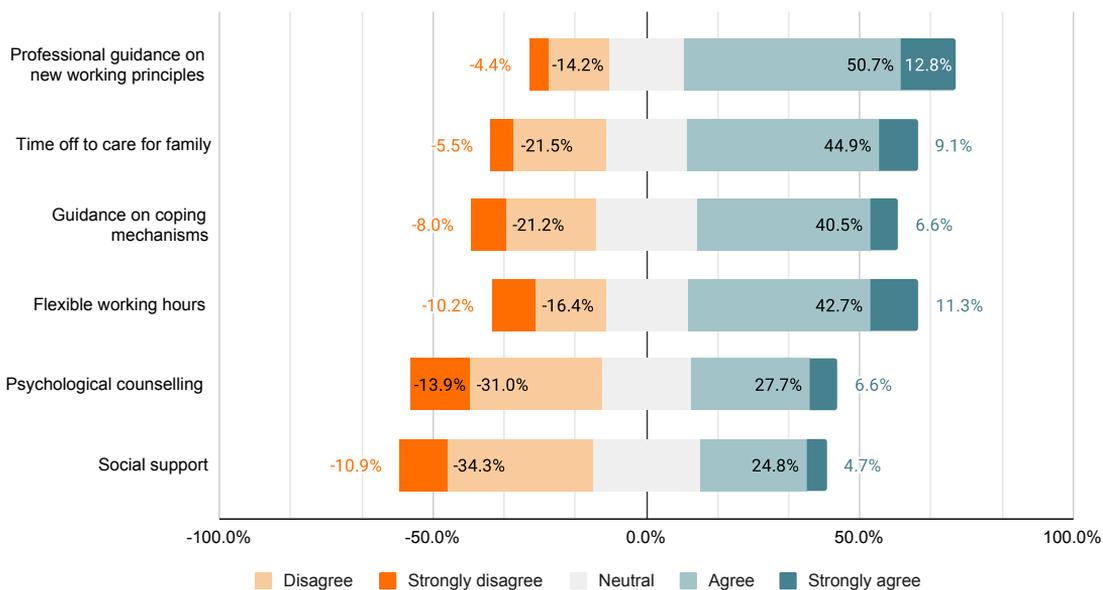


Figure C6

Western Area - Would personally welcome training in the following areas

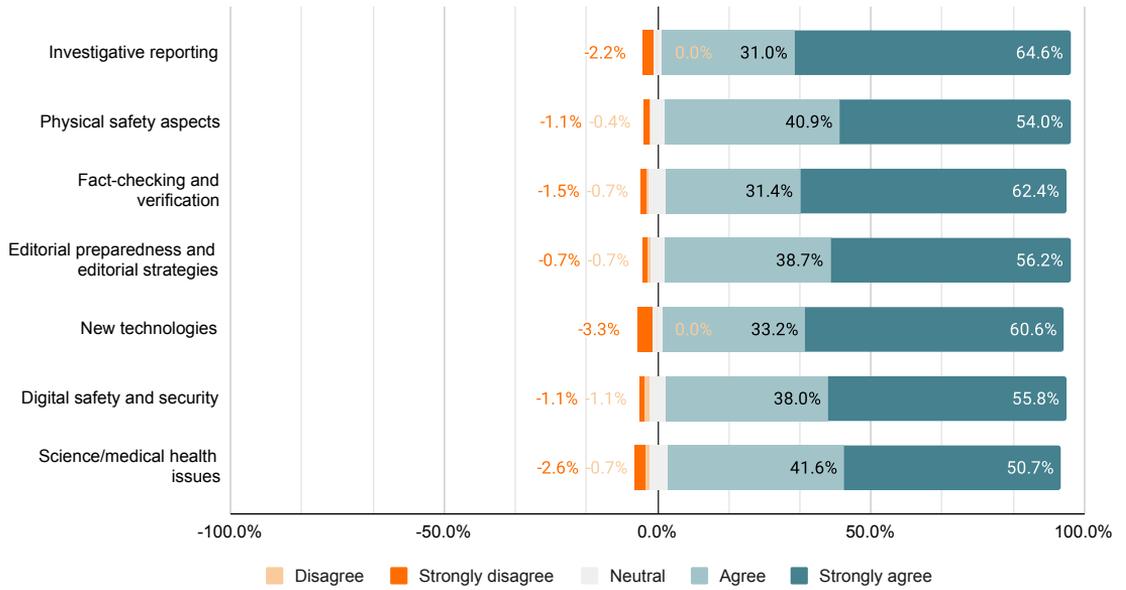


Figure C7

Western Area - Preferred ways of receiving training

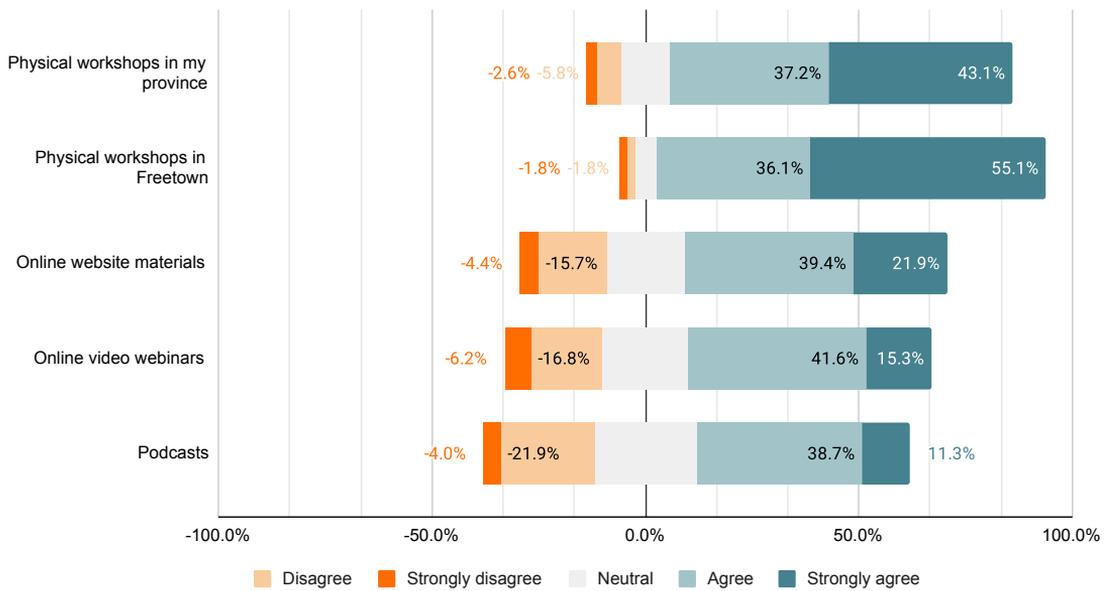


Figure C8

Support from news organisations

The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed to having received professional guidance on new working principles from their news organisations (63.5%) and time to care for family (54%). However, Western Area respondents reported less support from news organisations in most other areas.

Psychological counselling and social support were the least accessible forms of support in Western Area. Only 34.3% of respondents said they had been offered counselling, compared to the national average of 45.1%. 29.6% of respondents said they had received social support, compared to a national average of 36.3%. Compared to a national average of 56%, 47.1% of respondents said they had received guidance on coping mechanisms. However, a slightly higher percentage of journalists in Western Area (54%) reported flexible working hours, compared to the national average (52.8%).

Training needs

Western Area was in line with the national trend in terms of training, with an overwhelming majority of respondents welcoming training in all seven areas.

Science/medical health issues emerged as the least-preferred area, though even this had 92.3% of respondents indicating their preference.

All options elicited more than 90% agreement or strong agreement. Thus, investigative reporting was welcomed by 95.6%, physical safety aspects by 94.9%, editorial preparedness and editorial strategies by 94.9%, new technologies by 93.8%, fact-checking and verification by 93.8%, and digital safety by 93.8%.

Training delivery

Respondents largely preferred physical workshops in Freetown (91.2% agreeing or strongly agreeing) or in Western Area (80.3%). For online website materials, 61.3% indicated a preference, while 56.9% indicated online video webinars as a preferred way of training. Podcasts were of slightly less interest, with only 50% agreeing that they preferred podcasts to receive training.

Eastern Province

The survey included 101 responses from Eastern Province. The majority of respondents were male (74.3%), with female journalists accounting for 25.7%. The province, thus, recorded a higher percentage of male respondents and a lower percentage of female respondents compared to the national averages for each gender (68% and 31.5%, respectively).

Radio was the most common sector that respondents from Eastern Province worked in, at 77%. This was considerably higher than the national average of 56%. Print accounted for 10% of respondents, followed by television at 7%, online at 5%, and news agency at 1% — all are lower than the respective national averages (print 18%; television, 14%; online, 8%, and news agency, 3%).

Eastern Province - gender breakdown

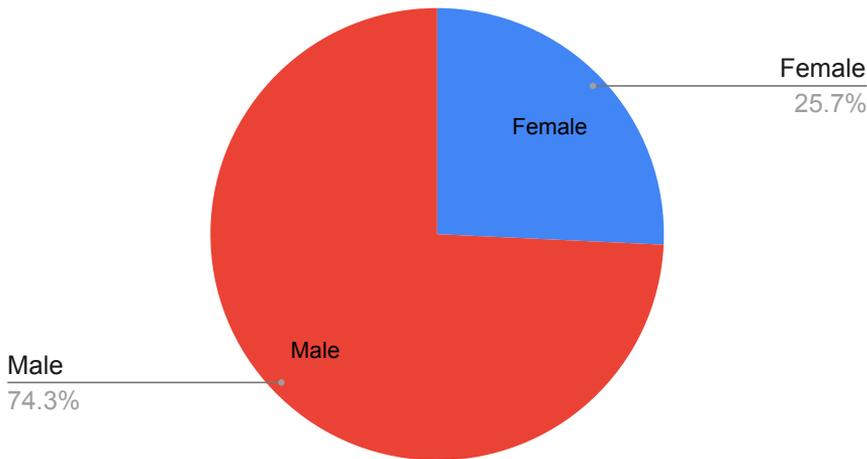


Figure D1

Eastern Province - breakdown of media type

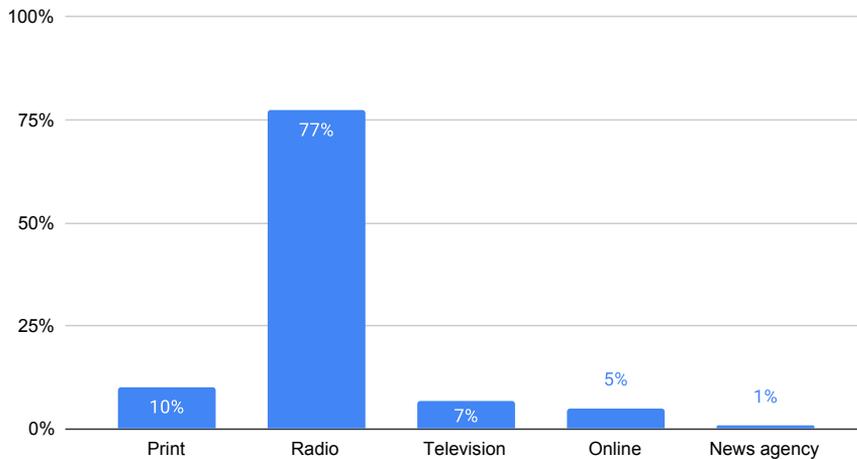


Figure D2

Eastern Province - Covid-19 related impact on Sierra Leone journalists

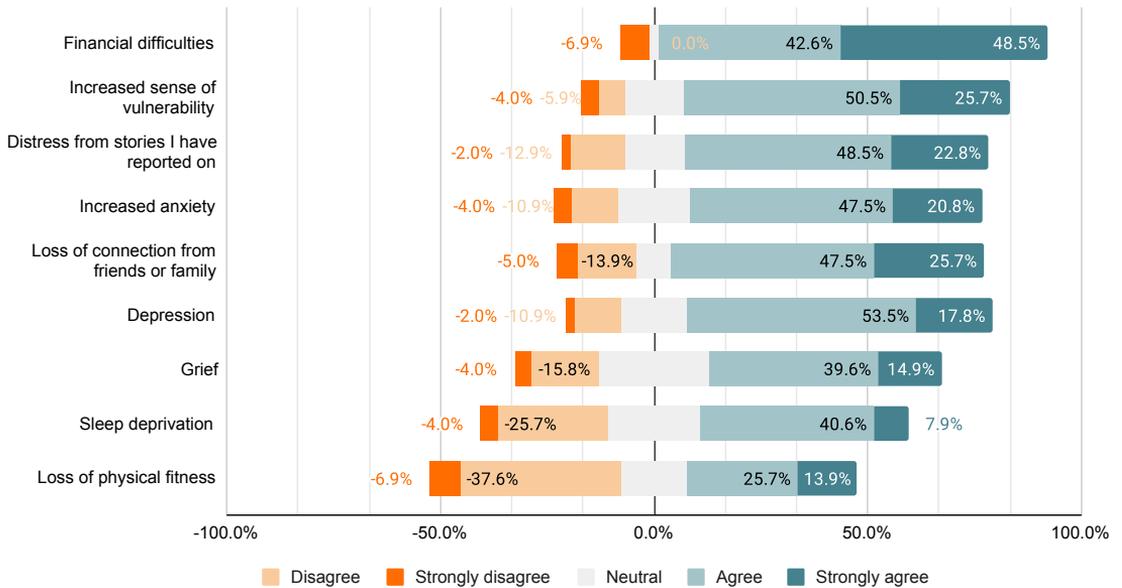


Figure D3

Impact on journalists

Financial difficulties were the most prominent Covid-19-related impact noted by respondents from Eastern Province. 91.1% agreed or strongly agreed they faced monetary issues, which is higher than the national average of 86%.

Respondents from Eastern Province also noted feeling an increased sense of vulnerability (76.2%), experiencing distress from stories they reported on (71.3%), and increased anxiety (68.3%). All of these were in line with the national averages at 76.4%, 71%, and 67.6%, respectively.

A loss of connection from family and friends (73.3%), depression (71.3%), and grief (54.5%) were also noted by journalists from this province — all of which are higher than the national averages, at 66.7%, 59.3%, and 51.8%, respectively.

48.5% of respondents from Eastern Province noted that they experienced sleep deprivation, and 39.6% issues related to a loss of physical fitness, both lower than the national average of 59.2% and 48%, respectively.

Changes to newsgathering practices

In Eastern Province, 91.7% of respondents acknowledged that Covid-19 restrictions, and 92.7% that financial restrictions limited their ability to pursue particular stories and investigations. Both of these are higher than the national average of 89.4% and 88.2%, respectively.

82.3% noted an increased use of mobile phone or video pictures, and

Eastern Province - Changes to newsgathering / production practices after Covid-19

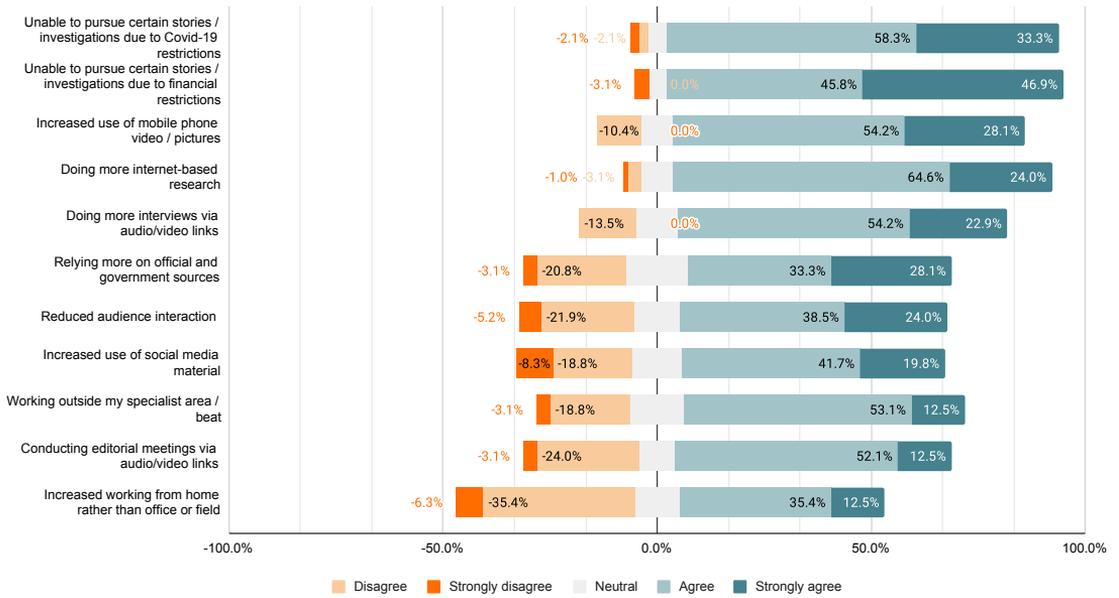


Figure D4

Eastern Province - Has your news organisation made any of the following changes to its output since Covid-19?

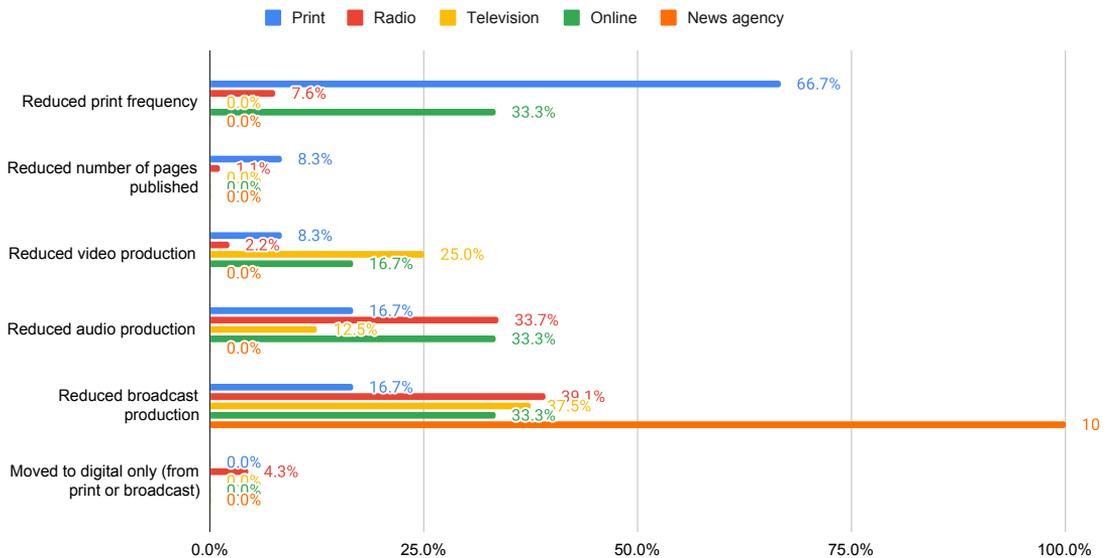


Figure D5

88.5% that they were doing more internet-based research, both higher than the respective national averages (81.6% and 80.4%). 77.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were doing more interviews via audio/video links. This is significantly higher than the national average of 68.9%.

Respondents also recognised that the pandemic had led to a greater reliance on official and government sources (61.5%), reduced their audience interaction (62.5%), and increased use of social media material (61.5%), all broadly in line with the national averages (68.8%, 65.5%, and 63.4%, respectively).

Journalists in the province reported conducting editorial meetings online or remotely (64.6%), and a need to work outside their specialist area/beat (65.6%). Both are higher than the corresponding national averages (63.4% and 63.1%).

Respondents also acknowledged that they were now conducting editorial meetings via audio/video links (68.8%), which is higher than the national average of 57.3%.

Changes to news outputs

66.7% of print journalists and 33.3% of online journalists from Eastern Province noted that there had been a reduction in print frequency. A reduction in video production was noted by 25% of television and 16.7% of online journalists, while 33.7% of radio and 33.3% of online journalists acknowledged that there had been reduced audio production.

Eastern Province - Covid-19 support from news organisation

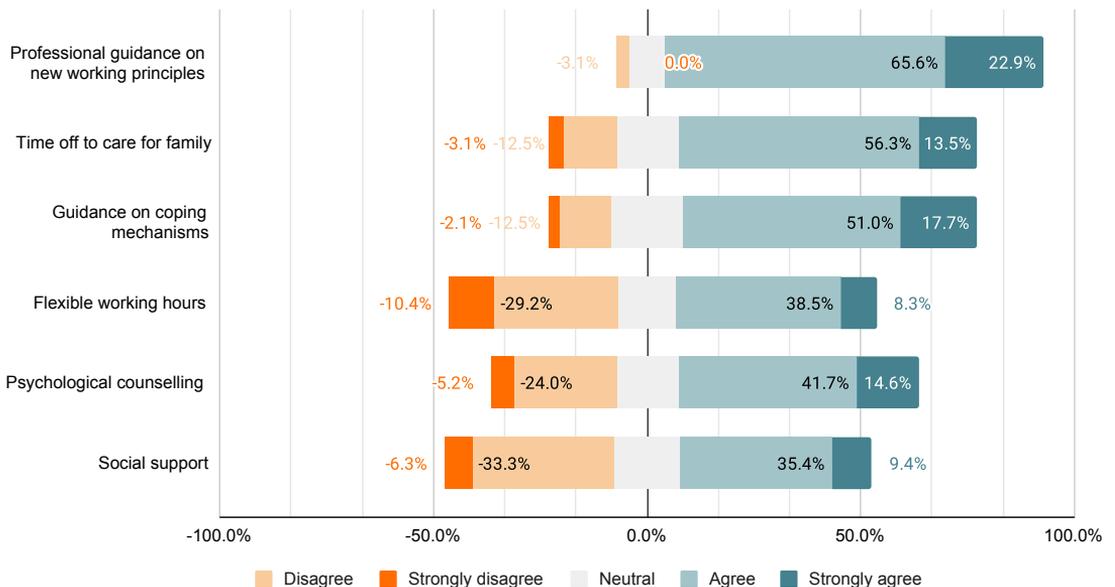


Figure D6

Eastern Province - Would personally welcome training in the following areas

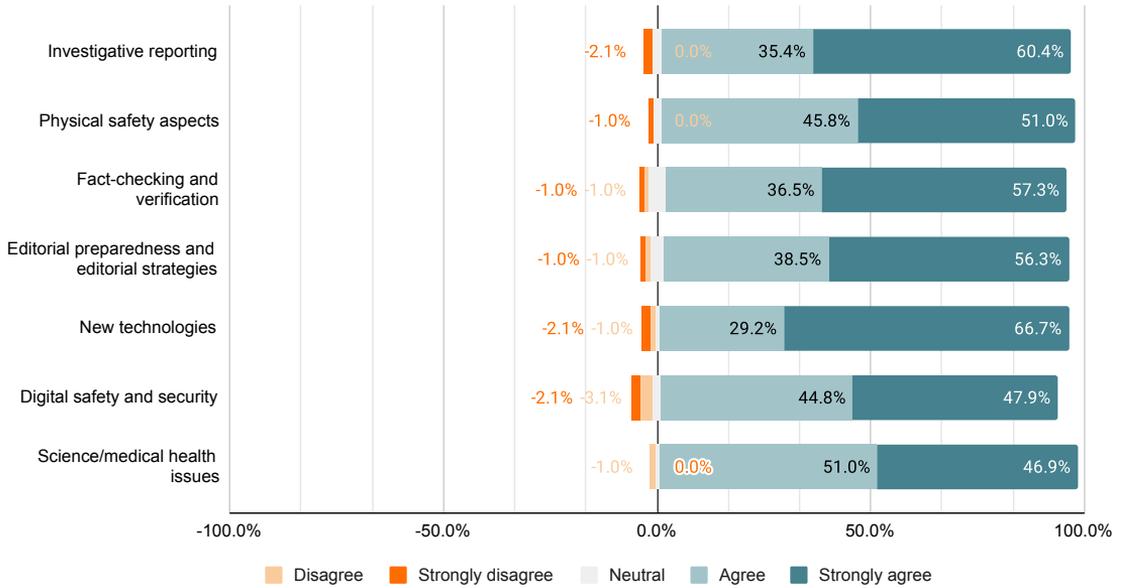


Figure D7

Eastern Province - Preferred ways of receiving training

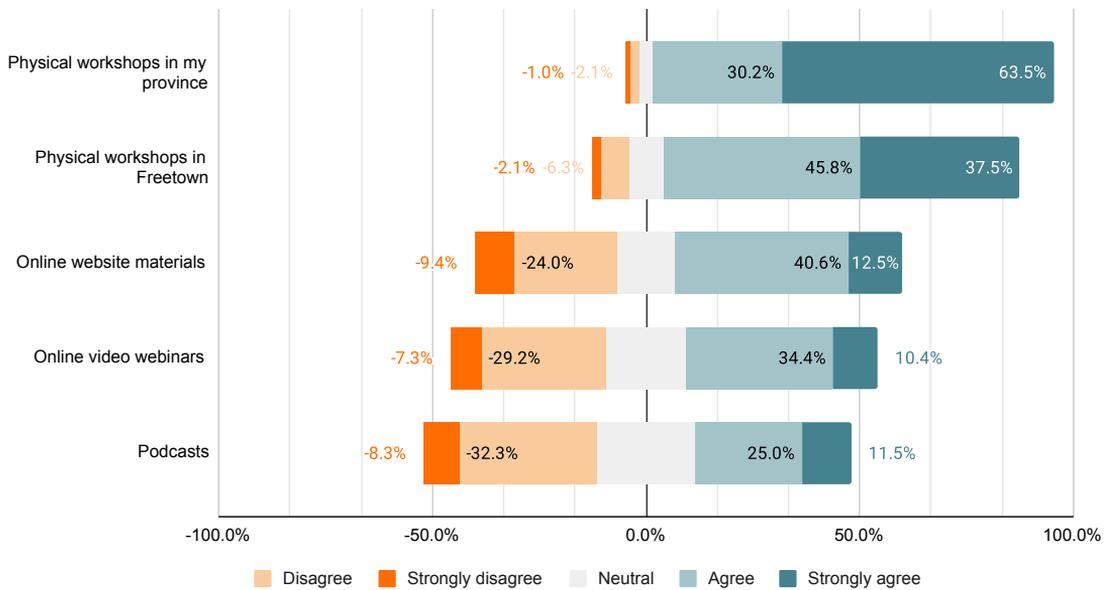


Figure D8

A reduction in broadcast production (37% overall) was also highlighted by respondents.

Support from news organisations

92.7% of respondents in Eastern Province agreed or strongly agreed that they received Covid-19 related support from their news organisations in the form of professional guidance on new working principles. This was 13.6% higher than the national average of 79.1%.

77.1% of journalists noted that they were given time off to care for family, and 77.1% that they had received guidance on coping mechanisms. 53.6% of respondents also recognised that they had been able to work flexible hours. A further 63.5% said that they received psychological counselling, and 52.6% that they received social support.

Training needs

Much like the other administrative divisions of Sierra Leone, the vast majority of respondents from Eastern Province indicated that they welcomed training in all seven key areas.

Digital safety and security was cited as the least-preferred area, but still was favoured by 92.7% for further training. All other options received more than 90% agreement or strong agreement.

Training in investigative reporting was welcomed by 95.8%, physical safety aspects by 96.9%, fact-checking and verification by 93.8%, editorial preparedness and strategies by 94.8%, new technologies by 95.8%, and science/medial health issues by 97.9%. All are broadly in line with the national averages of 97.1%, 97.1%, 96.5%, 96.5%, 95.2% and 94.5%, respectively.

Training delivery

Respondents overwhelmingly preferred physical workshops to online materials or podcasts. 93.8% agreed or strongly agreed that they welcomed physical workshops in Eastern Province and 83.3% workshops in Freetown. 53.1% expressed a preference for online website materials, 44.8% for online video webinars, and 36.5% for podcasts.

Southern Province

The survey included 101 responses from Southern Province. The majority of respondents were male (59.4%). Female journalists accounted for 40.6%. The province, thus, had a higher percentage of female respondents than the national average of 31.5%.

Radio was the most common sector that respondents from Southern Province worked in, at 77%. This was considerably higher than the national average of 56%. Print accounted for 8%, television 9%, online 4%, and news agency 2% — all lower than the corresponding national averages (18% print, 14% television, 8% online, and 3% news agency).

Southern Province - gender breakdown

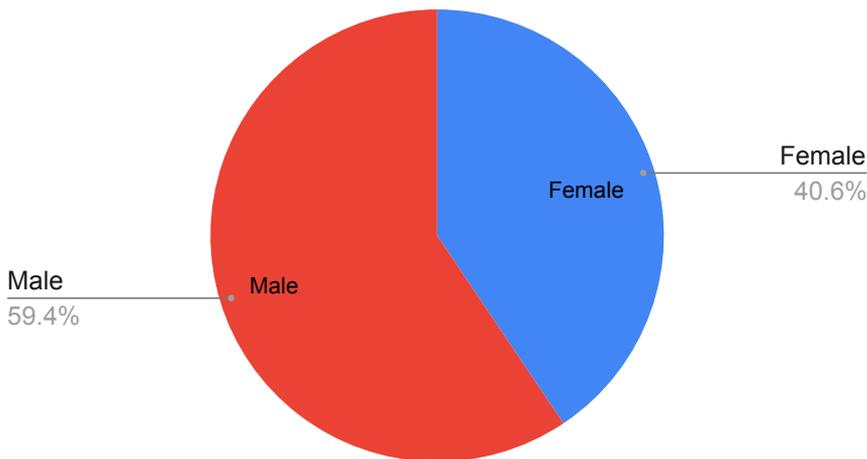


Figure E1

Southern Province - breakdown of media type

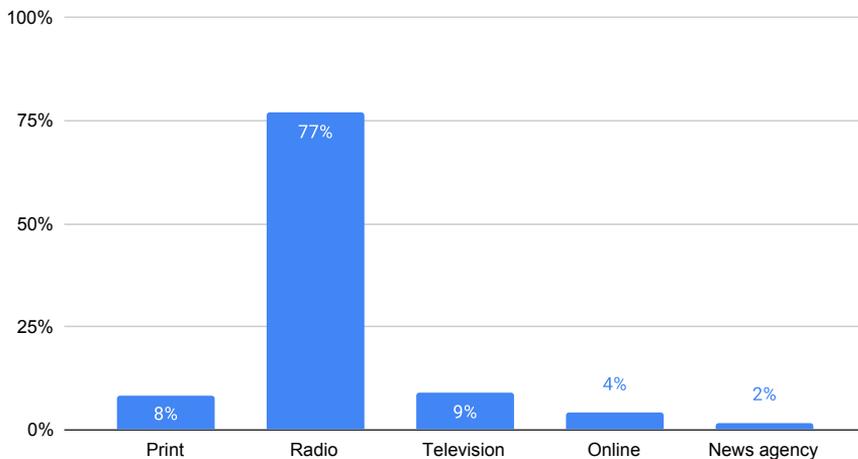


Figure E2

Impact on journalists

Covid-19 has impacted journalists in Southern Province in a number of ways. 90.1% of respondents noted that they experienced financial difficulties, which is higher than the national average of 86%. Respondents also acknowledged an increased sense of vulnerability (81.2%), distress from the stories they reported on (74.3%), and a sense of increased anxiety (72.3%). All are higher than the national averages, at 76.4%, 71%, and 67.6%, respectively.

A loss of connection from friends and family (78.2%) and grief (64.5%) were also noted by journalists from this province, which were higher than the national averages of 66.7% and 51.8%, respectively. Sleep deprivation (50.5%) and a loss of physical fitness (30.7%), however, were reported as being of less concern.

Southern Province - Covid-19 related impact on Sierra Leone journalists

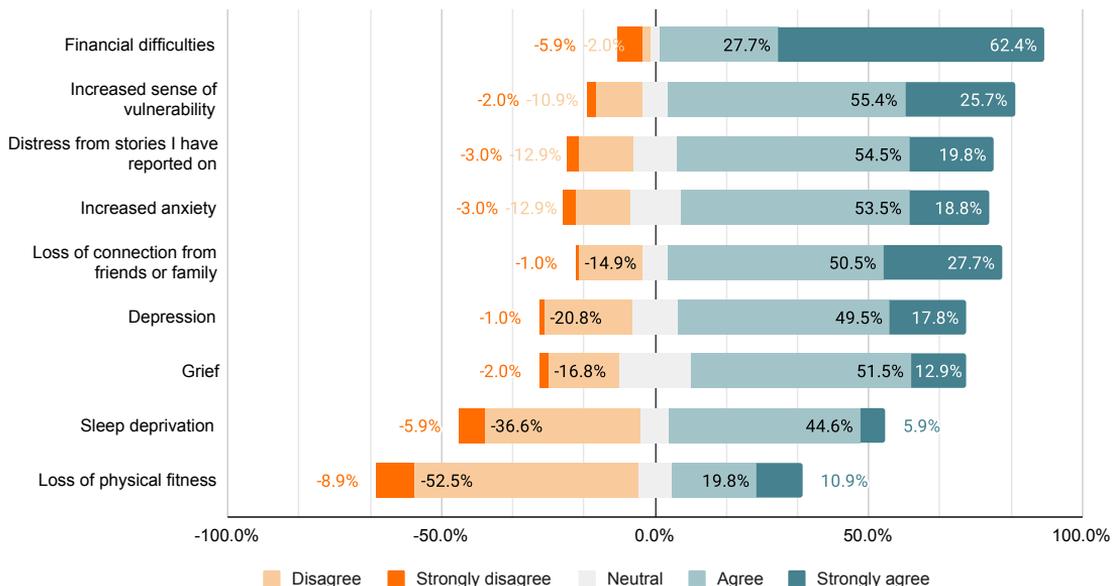


Figure E3

Changes to newsgathering practices

Journalists from Southern Province noted that Covid-19 restrictions (89%) and financial issues (92%) arising from the pandemic had limited their ability to pursue certain stories and investigations. Both of these are in line with or higher than the national averages of 89.4% and 88.2%, respectively.

Reliance on technology during the pandemic was also brought to light by respondents. 82% highlighted an increased use of mobile phones and video technologies, 76% reported an increased use of the internet to research topics and stories, 71% highlighted an increased use of video links to complete interviews, and 61% reported an increased use of social media material in their reporting. Most are higher than or broadly in line with the national average (81.6%, 80.4%, 68.9%, and 63.5%, respectively).

Journalists also acknowledged that they were conducting more editorial meetings online (57%), which was also in line with the national average, at 57.3%.

Respondents recognised that the pandemic led to a greater reliance on official and government sources (58%), and reduced their audience interaction (64%), which were below the national averages (68.8% and 65.5%, respectively).

69% of respondents also felt that Covid-19 had led to their working outside of their main specialist area or beat, which is higher than the national average of 63.1%.

Southern Province - Changes to newsgathering / production practices after Covid-19

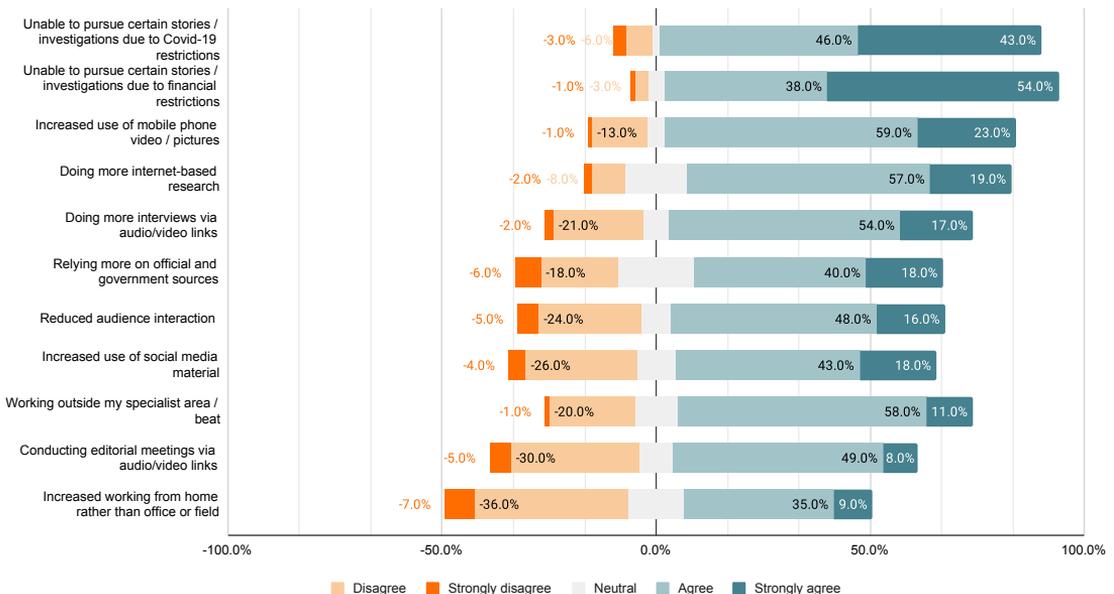


Figure E4

Changes to news outputs

The pandemic led to changes in the news outputs of journalists working in Southern Province.

The biggest impact was a reduction in broadcast production, with over 80% of online journalists reporting a drop in broadcast content, as well as 40% of print journalists, 36.2% of radio journalists, and 27.3% of television journalists acknowledging the same.

Southern Province - Has your news organisation made any of the following changes to its output since Covid-19?

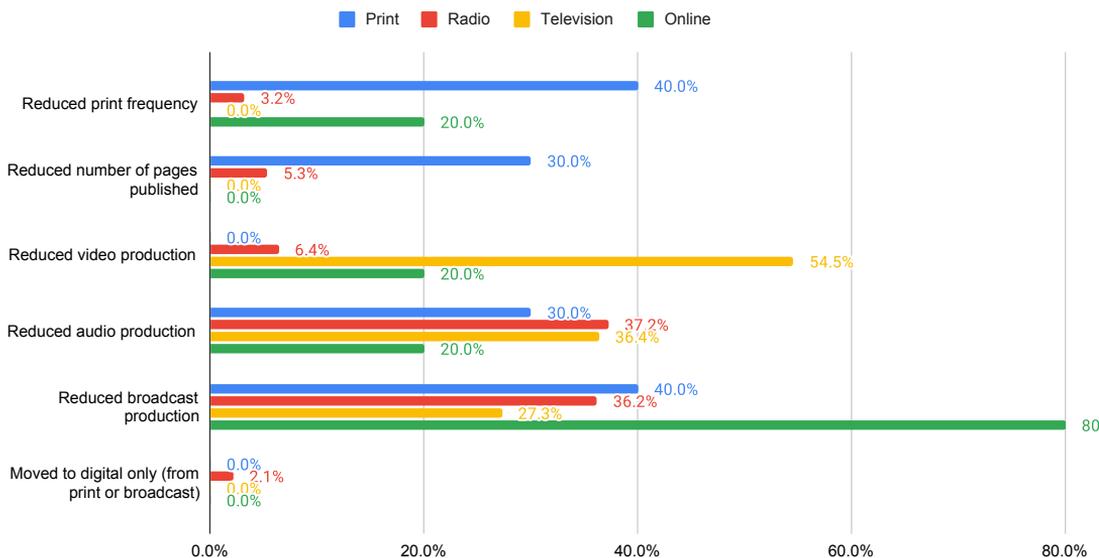


Figure E5

Support from news organisations

A relatively high proportion of journalists from this province reported that they were provided with professional guidance on new working principles, at 85%. This was higher than the national average of 79.1%.

Similarly, 66% of respondents from Southern Province felt they were given adequate guidance on coping mechanisms, and 58% that they were given time off to care for family members.

60% of respondents also recognised that they had been able to work flexible hours. A further 61% said that they received psychological counselling, and 48% that they received social support.

Southern Province - Covid-19 support from news organisation

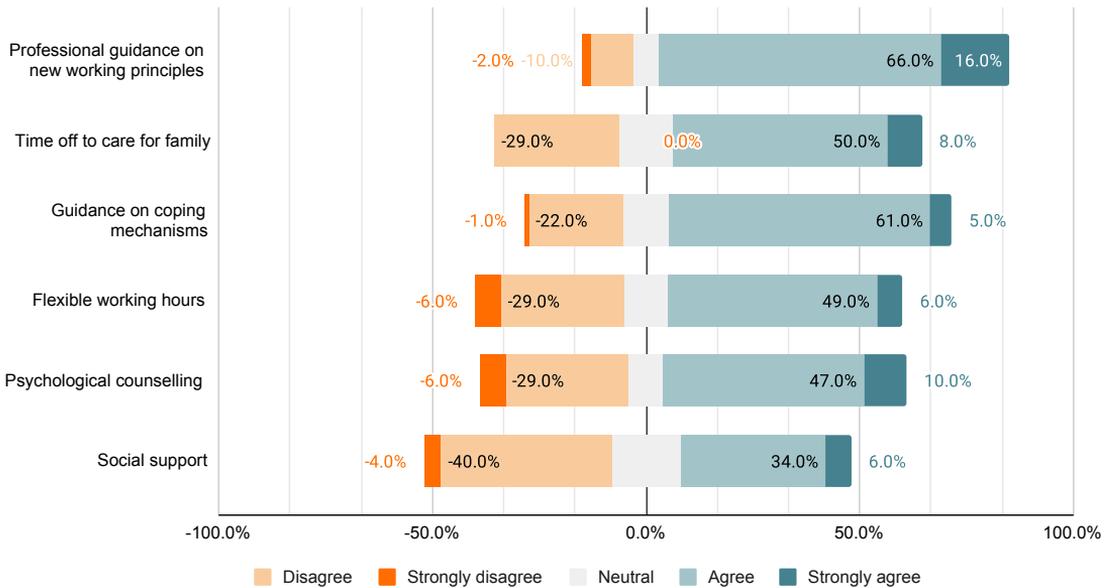


Figure E6

Training needs

Much like the other administrative divisions of Sierra Leone, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they welcomed training in all seven key areas.

New technologies was cited as the least-preferred area, but still was favoured by 92% for further training. All other options received more than 90% agreement or strong agreement.

Training in investigative reporting was welcomed by 97%, physical safety aspects by 96%, fact-checking and verification by 96%, editorial preparedness and strategies by 96%, digital safety and security by 95%, and science/medial health issues by 93%. All are broadly in line with the national averages of 97.1%, 97.1%, 96.5%, 96.5%, 94.8% and 94.5%, respectively.

Training delivery

Respondents overwhelmingly preferred physical workshops to online materials or podcasts. 92% agreed or strongly agreed that they welcomed physical workshops in Southern Province. 68% said they preferred workshops in Freetown.

41% expressed a preference for online website materials, 40% for online video webinars, and 35% for podcasts.

Southern Province - Would personally welcome training in the following areas

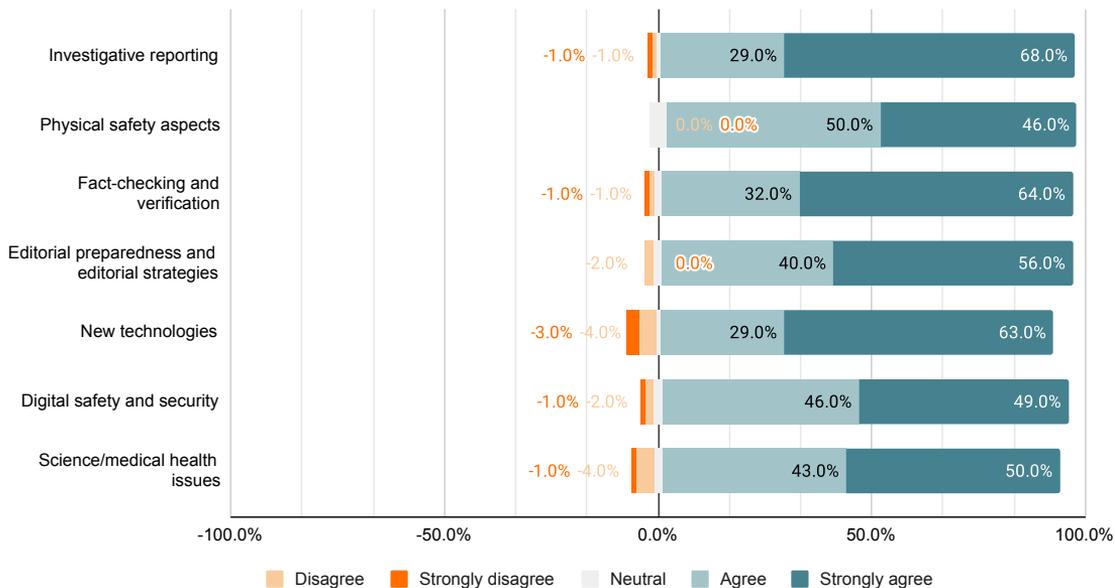


Figure E7

Southern Province - Preferred ways of receiving training

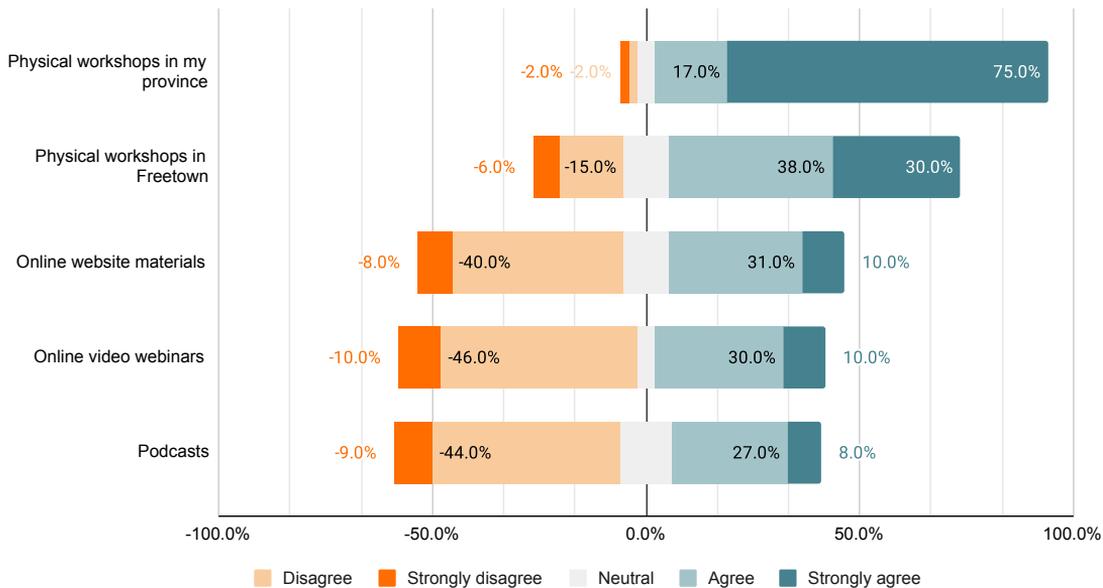


Figure E8



"This publication offers new reflections on the impact of Covid-19 on journalism. It demonstrates the need for cooperation among policymakers, communities and journalists for effective disaster reporting in Sierra Leone."

YVONNE AKI-SAWYERR
Mayor of Freetown

"Urgent intervention is needed to place journalists in Sierra Leone on a firm footing to fight future disasters. Based on an extensive, nationwide survey, this report provides valuable recommendations for the media and the Government."

WILLIETTE JAMES (Ph.D)
University of Sierra Leone

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