

**Ethical practices of journalists: With special reference to newspaper articles on
COVID - 19 that were published in national English newspapers in Sri Lanka**

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Journalists/ media persons should play a significant role in crisis situations. COVID - 19 is a crisis at the local and global level. There are several arguments that, media including the print media has not acted ethically in some causes related to COVID - 19 in Sri Lanka (Gunawardena, 2020). Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to examine the ethical practices of journalists in the context of COVID - 19 pandemic. The specific objectives are to identify the contemporary print media behavior and identify the role of print media in this pandemic. Some 30 articles that published in the national English newspapers in Sri Lanka from April to August 2020 were randomly selected for this study due to the time limitation since there are no research have been conducted based on the English newspaper articles. Because the content of the Sinhala newspapers has been analysed for several research in Sri Lankan context. The theories such as the Authoritarian theory, Social responsibility and Agenda setting which highlight that the media reality is a construction by the authority and public, are the main theoretical frameworks of this study. Qualitative approach has been used and the content analysis has been conducted thematically. As far as the results were concerned, it was found that some journalists reported the news ethically and objectively during COVID - 19 pandemic to empower and educate general public. As far as some of the other findings were concerned, reporting news without touching the depth of the issue, reporting fake news, representing personal agendas and ideologies through the content etc. were identified as issues. It was specially noted that, state owned print media highlighted their own activities related to COVID - 19. The private owned print media highlighted the activities and events organized by their media institutions. It was found that some journalists created news contents/ stories to get the publicity without respecting to the confidentiality, humanity, and privacy of people. In this context, the government and responsible authorities must make sure that media including print media should provide accurate, factual, and timely information in an ethical manner to empower and educate the general public in crisis situations like COVID - 19. Introducing the professional code of ethics for the journalists in Sri Lanka is the best solution for this critical issue.

Keywords: COVID - 19, Ethical practices, Journalists, National English newspapers, Sri Lanka