ADVANCE PRAISE FOR

Journalism as the Fourth Emergency Service: Trauma and Resilience

"In this increasingly complex and challenging world, there is a real need to consider extra mental health support for journalists. This book is a very valuable addition to that debate."

—Ian MacGregor, Editor Emeritus at the Telegraph and Chair of the Society of Editors.

"Journalists head towards danger when everyone else is running away. They see things that are the stuff of nightmares. They can be viciously trolled for telling the truth. The work is exciting and important - but there can be a heavy price to pay in trauma that can last a lifetime. This important book is essential reading for journalists and those concerned about their welfare."

—Jonathan Grun, Emeritus Editor, Press Association.

"*Journalism as the Fourth Emergency Service: Trauma and Resilience* is a well-researched and insightful read for anyone wanting to enter the industry. The authors have carefully crafted the perfect guide to navigate new journalists through the new and ever-changing world. Their understanding and acknowledgement of the struggles and difficulties faced by journalists makes for an insightful and honest read about what to expect before entering any newsroom. I wish I had this before becoming a journalist."

—Katie Ridley, Journalist ITV Anglia.

"An essential read for journalists at all stages of their career, this book is an invaluable resource for navigating the challenges both in and beyond the newsroom. It provides much-sought-after guidance that reporters have been yearning for, blending research-based insights with actionable advice - and will be beneficial for trainees and seasoned professionals alike."

—Harriet Rose Gale, Head of Features (Digital and Print), SWNS Media Group.

Journalism as the Fourth Emergency Service

Journalism as the Fourth Emergency Service

Trauma and Resilience

Edited By

Lisa Bradley and Emma Heywood

PETER LANG

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Foreword

Jo Healey

Do your job, do it well, do no harm…

Across thirty years as a journalist, I have interviewed hundreds of people whose lives and emotions have been shattered, as have many journalists. However, we are rarely taught how to go about it. Our industry tradition is that we effectively, or not, practise on the grieving public. We barely give a thought to the effect this work may be having on us.

"We're not psychologists, we're not counsellors and we're not trained and we're asking them to relive horrific moments in their lives," says TV reporter Simon Hare.

For several years, I have been training journalists globally in how best to work with victims and survivors and how to look after themselves as they go about these emotionally tough assignments.

Whether covering harrowing court cases, hearing horrific accounts, or witnessing tragedies first hand or via graphic imagery, journalists may be impacted. They cannot unsee or unhear this stuff.

Vicious online abuse, cuts in newsroom budgets, and intensifying pressure to deliver material to multiple platforms all add to the mix.

"No story is worth a person's mental health or a person's life, not yours and not theirs either," says BBC Paris Correspondent Lucy Williamson.

That is why this much-needed book is so important. It offers clear insight into why and how journalists may be affected by the stories they may be covering daily, from war zones to court rooms and just about everything in between. However, it does not shy away from the journalist's mission to report and deliver.

Edited by Lisa Bradley and Emma Heywood, *Journalism as the Fourth Emergency Service: Trauma and Resilience* deep dives into the key issues for journalists covering trauma and distress. It not only shares invaluable insight from a raft of experts but also provides a wealth of important advice in the form of *tips, talking points, and tasks* for students and teachers alike. The innovative form of the book,

as a "hybrid" academic-textbook, has something to offer everyone, from those researching trauma and journalism to those preparing to become journalists and those already in the field.

I have been lucky enough to work with some of Lisa and Emma's journalism students at the University of Sheffield and to witness first-hand the progressive nature of their work in this growing field of trauma reporting.

In my training sessions, countless working journalists shared how much they wished they had been taught the basics of trauma reporting while at university, particularly how best to approach people at emotionally sensitive times and how to go about interviewing them.

As journalists, we are geared towards reflecting other people's lives, and we forget that we too need some self-reflection and care. As the book points out, along with emergency responders, we can run towards the danger that others are fleeing, and this can take its toll on us.

BBC Middle East Editor Jeremy Bowen is a veteran of scores of international conflicts, wars, disasters and humanitarian crises. "The cost of spending years going to places where you see the best of humanity as well as the worst of humanity you do eventually pay some kind of price, and that's why you need to be aware of your mental health, deal with things as they arise, talk always, share with your colleagues. Do not bottle it up," he told me.

From attacks to abuse to lost homes, lost health, lost livelihoods and lost lives, we often tell our stories best through the people they affect. However, that can mean that so many journalists may be dealing regularly and closely with people who are suffering but who choose to share their painful experiences. It can be a relentless part of the job both in regular and conflict reporting.

Journalists need to know how to do this work well, know how it may affect them and their colleagues, and know what to do about it before, during and after the assignments. This book will enlighten and support them while hopefully making them better journalists.

Jo Healey, Author of *Trauma Reporting, A Journalist's Guide to Covering Sensitive Stories*.

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We would firstly like to thank the wonderful authors who have contributed to this book and without whom it would not have been possible. They have been a joy to work with and their advice and expertise throughout the process has been invaluable.

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Our thanks also go to the many unnamed friends and colleagues who have helped and supported us. Our particular thanks go to our families—Mark, Tommy and Oscar on Lisa's side, and John, Mollie, Rory and Ted on Emma's. But mostly, our dogs.

List of Abbreviations/Glossary

Death knocks	The practice of knocking on the door of a bereaved family to obtain an interview
DSM-V	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—a taxonomic and diagnostic tool published by the American Psychiatric Association
Emotional labour	The process of managing emotional responses to meet the requirements of a job (Hoschschild, 1979). Hopper and Huxford define it as "the suppression of personal, emotional identity for the sake of an ideologically driven, detached professional self" (2015, p. 38).
HEFAT	Hostile Environment and First Aid Training
Information disorder	First Draft defines information disorder as a collective noun for false information that is shared either with or without intent. Hence, disinformation, misinformation and mal-information can be termed collectively as "information disorder". For more detail see: <https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/understanding-information-disorder/> (see chapter by Fowler-Watt et al.)
Information ecosystem	The information ecosystem is understood to be complex adaptive systems that include information infrastructure, tools, media, producers, consumers, curators, and sharers. They are complex organisations of dynamic social relationships through which information moves and transforms in flows.
Information war	Information war can be defined as the use of information to achieve national objectives. According to NATO, information war can be waged to gain an information advantage over the opponent (see chapter by Fowler-Watt et al.)
IWMF	International Women's Media Foundation
Moral compass	A personal set of beliefs and values regarding right and wrong

Moral injury	A moral injury may occur when a person witnesses or participates in an event, which strongly conflicts with that person's morals, i.e. one's core beliefs and expectations about the nature of the world, particularly regarding how other persons and oneself ought to behave. Moral injury can arise where sustained moral distress leads to impaired function or longer-term psychological harm.
MSM	Mainstream media
NCTJ	National Council for the Training of Journalists (UK)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NUJ	National Union of Journalists (UK)
Psychological resilience	The ability to cope mentally and emotionally with a crisis, or to return to pre-crisis status quickly
PTSD	Post traumatic stress disorder
SLAPPs	Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation
SRA	Solicitors Regulation Authority
STS	Secondary traumatic stress, or STS, like PTSD produces flashbacks, desensitisation, numbness, a heightened responses to perceived dangers, but is experienced not by the person to whom the trauma has occurred, but by the person hearing about it
Vicarious trauma	Vicarious trauma is the indirect exposure to a traumatic event through first-hand account or narrative of that event. It can trigger a change in how the affected person views the world and their core beliefs about themselves and other people

The material in this book contains images and descriptions of violence, death, trauma, and other triggering events. This content has been included in order to exemplify, support, and clarify the arguments in the chapters. Readers who might find this material upsetting or may be sensitive to these issues please take note.

Introduction

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Emma Heywood and Lisa Bradley

Trauma in journalism is not a new phenomenon. From the battlefields to the city streets, humanitarian crises to the courtrooms, trauma has plagued the profession whether directly or indirectly, vicariously or through lived experience, since the ink dried on the first newspaper sheets in 1566.

A systematic review of studies conducted between 2010 and 2022 revealed significant numbers of journalists who reported either PTSD, PTSD symptoms, depression, and/or substance use (Flannery, 2022). Whilst it could be expected that these journalists would include war reporters and foreign correspondents given the nature of their job, it also includes "lower level" reporters whose jobs are perhaps not perceived as being so glamorous, but who cover, day in day out, the epitome of human misery. The build-up of this work-related trauma has long been considered to be just part of the job, but the increasing numbers of those leaving the industry because of mental health disorders (MHD) or associated medical conditions, to say nothing of new starters resigning after being forced to watch graphic videos just days into the job, all point to a broken, or even non-existent, support system that we can no longer ignore. If journalism, an essential and key part of democracy, is to be preserved, this darker side of the industry must be addressed.

Journalism has been called the fourth emergency service, rushing towards the danger rather than away. Unlike the fire, police and ambulance services, however, the role of a journalist is not to provide immediate help but rather to observe and report. An inaction that some would say is traumatic in itself (Osofsky et al., 2005; Osmann et al., 2021). However, journalists suffer in similar ways to the emergency services, witnessing the same horrors and victims (Cote & Simpson, 2000), but are additionally affected by their inability to act and provide direct help immediately. Moreover, unlike the emergency services, counselling or mental health support is not routinely offered to journalists.

The demand for trauma training is now at the forefront of the industry debate. In the UK, the National Council of Training for Journalists (NCTJ) has included safety and resilience in its accreditation requirements for training centres for 2024. This means that all journalism training courses that intend to deliver the NCTJ diploma must demonstrate how they educate their students in trauma

literacy, resilience and safety awareness, both physically and mentally. The aim is to equip the next generation of journalists for the ever-growing harsh realities they face, as an increasing number of journalists work remotely, or hybrid, without the camaraderie or immediate support from senior and other journalists. Trauma is no longer seen as "just part of the job"; instead, there is an emerging recognition from newsrooms that reporters need to learn how to take care of themselves and their own mental health to do the job to the best of their ability.

And this starts in the classroom.

What Is Trauma?

The debate about trauma and its impact on journalists has been gaining attention over recent decades, and a substantial body of literature already exists concerning the psychological and emotional effects that journalists are exposed to as a result of work-related stressors. The Dart Centre (2007) makes the distinction between stressful and traumatic incidents, defining trauma as follows:

> Any event to which a person is connected, that is unexpected, outside that person's usual range of human experience, and that involves some form of loss, injury or threat of injury, whether actual or perceived.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a narrower definition of trauma, is widely used as a trauma identifier and emerges frequently throughout this book's chapters. It is defined by the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2023) as follows:

> A psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, series of events or set of circumstances. An individual may experience this as emotionally or physically harmful or life-threatening and may affect mental, physical, social, and/or spiritual well-being.

The APA goes on to emphasise that whilst PTSD may have been initially linked to combat veterans, it can manifest in all peoples, ages, locations and jobs. However, the academic literature suggests that PTSD is more likely to arise as a result of severe stressors such as war or terrorist attacks (Backholm & Björkqvist, 2010; Brewin et al., 2000). The relevance to journalists and their daily work cannot go unnoticed.

Osmann et al. (2021), in their mapping review, which complements systematic reviews by Macdonald et al. (2017) and Aoki et al. (2103), identified seven themes according to which academic literature on trauma grouped potential triggers of trauma among journalists. These include war reporting, terror attacks, state-sponsored violence, natural disasters, local unrest, domestic stressors, and exposure to images of violence. The severity of a particular trigger compounds the trauma that is suffered. Added to this is the cumulative effect of repeated trauma. The cumulative effects of trauma can have different definitions, including discrete traumas experienced over long periods of time, repetitions of the same trauma, or the effect of all traumatic events of all types over a lifetime. Whatever the definition, repeated, cumulative or prolonged, exposure to traumatic events may generate more serious adverse outcomes than single events of trauma (Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2010).

Journalists are at increased risk of exposure to potentially trauma-triggering events and therefore also to the aggregate effect of the multiple trauma types mentioned above. Their emotional, psychological and behavioural reactions can range widely from PTSD (Feinstein et al., 2002; Flores Morales et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2018; Newman et al. 2003) to depression (Feinstein, 2012; Feinstein et al., 2002) and maladaptive coping strategies such as alcohol or drug abuse (Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Feinstein et al., 2002, 2016). While informal coping strategies abound among journalists in their attempts to address the traumatic effects of their role, further research is needed not only to understand the multiple layers

of trauma experienced by journalists but also to address them by incorporating training and awareness into teaching curricula.

The Structure of the Book

This book arose from many lengthy discussions we had, as the editors, about our working experiences. Lisa Bradley, a former journalist and now a journalism lecturer, was keenly aware of the significant gaps in the curriculum regarding trauma. Students increasingly required additional support as they faced practical assignments, and feedback from alumni included somewhat grim accounts of the trauma they were facing on the job, not helped by the lack of organisational support and resources. Emma Heywood, an academic with extensive experience of conducting in-the-field research into journalism in conflict-affected areas, was also increasingly aware of the trauma faced by conflict reporters, whether they were local or foreign to the event, as they witnessed the horrors of war. The more we discussed the topic, the more gaps and the more support for a hybrid academic-textbook emerged. We tested the idea with the Advisory Board of the University of Sheffield's School of Journalism, Media and Communication —a team of the country's leading editors and journalism experts—and with NCTJ members at large teaching events, and the response was unanimous; the inclusion of trauma-sensitive teaching into journalism curricula, both at the university level and within media organisations, was essential, and a hybrid academic textbook would be a very welcome tool. This book therefore has been structured to appeal to a range of audiences, including undergraduate and postgraduate students of journalism, those working in media organisations, those teaching the students, and academic researchers.

In structuring the book, we have endeavoured to provide a broad range of contexts and topics to avoid homogenising trauma or considering it as confined to single countries or environments. These contexts shape different ways of understanding, recognising, accepting, and handling trauma. We have also been attentive to the fact that the stages of development of research into, and understanding of, trauma differ according to context and country. The chapter authors have provided us with a vast array of topics, covering experiences and knowledge from many contexts and many countries, echoing the primary need behind the creation of this book. We have divided it into several parts comprising this introductory section, and then sections on first-hand trauma, second-hand or vicarious trauma, trauma triggered within a cyber environment, gender-related trauma, and a final section for those teaching trauma literacy. Whilst there may be some overlap between chapters, this merely serves to emphasise the importance of certain findings, gaps and recommendations. It should also be noted that not all topics can be covered in a single volume, and some areas, such as interviewing survivors to avoid retraumatising them, have not been specifically covered but would be worthy of separate discussion in future publications.

Each section is bookended by short journalistic accounts of the real-life experiences of reporters and correspondents who have undergone particularly traumatic events as part of their job. These are written as short news features. Our intention behind including these personal accounts is not only to provide examples of experienced journalists and the trauma they have suffered, with which both future and experienced journalists can identify, but also to provide a rich classroom resource for further discussions.

The introduction section of the book starts with this chapter by the editors, in which we provide the definition and scope of the book. Tyson, in Chapter 2, then provides an essential discussion of how viewing journalism as an emergency service—as a clear explanation of the very title of the book—can enable a better understanding of the psychological impact that reporting traumatic events has on an individual and how journalists can be supported psychologically in their role. This is bolstered by

Smith and Wake et al. in Chapter 3, who draw on research conducted in Australia and present a useful overview of trauma, its effects on journalists and the need to integrate trauma literacy into journalism curricula and embed trauma awareness and mental health literacy training for all staff into ongoing professional development.

Section I of the book focuses on first-hand trauma, providing definitions of the term and wide-ranging experiences encountered by journalists. Stevens and Parr, in Chapter 6, draw on the personal account of one of the authors (Stevens) to explore the complex negative experiences often encountered by humanitarian journalists and examine the concept of moral injury. This harrowing chapter recounts Stevens' distressing quest to identify "body 422", one of many human remains housed in a Bosnian warehouse-cum-makeshift mortuary. The chapter outlines how, whilst humanitarian journalists may be particularly vulnerable to trauma and moral injury, they can also use their journalistic craft to make narratives out of their pain and the pain they see in others.

Chapter 7 sees Urbániková and Haniková examine the field of investigative journalism in Slovakia following the murder of Slovak journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancee Martina Kušnírová near Bratislava. This chapter goes beyond the experiences of journalists themselves and discusses the challenges that their news organisations and leadership faced when tasked with supporting them and helping them cope with first-hand traumatic experiences.

Jabeen et al., in Chapter 8, underpin the global nature of trauma's impact on journalists and complement the book's international dimension by studying the first-hand trauma experienced by field journalists who covered Pakistan's worst flooding caused and aggravated by ongoing climate change. They discuss the effectiveness of the existing journalistic structure in Pakistan for journalists' readiness to deal with trauma-related coverage and ensuing ordeals, enabling comparisons to be made with different contexts in other chapters.

Fowler-Watt et al. continue the theme of first-hand trauma, in Chapter 9, experienced by journalists reporting in the age of "information disorder". This chapter examines how the very fact of being a journalist within an environment of downwards spiralling levels of trust and accusations of elitism can act as stressors. The authors go on to suggest how trauma and resilience awareness can be built into journalism practice and how professional identities as journalists working in unhealthy information ecosystems can be strengthened.

Staying on an international theme, Heywood et al., in the final chapter (10) of this section, extend our awareness of others working in the field and discuss local journalists working in war-torn areas. Drawing on the example of conflict-ridden Burkina Faso in West Africa, the authors encourage (future) foreign conflict reporters to consider the trauma of local journalists reporting on massacres, murders, and destruction of their own communities to those communities. The chapter highlights the need to pay close attention to different contexts and their cultural nuances, perspectives and beliefs about mental health and trauma.

Section II examines second-hand or vicarious trauma experienced by journalists in the course of their daily work. Lawler starts this section on vicarious trauma in Chapter 13, examining the vital role of the court reporter, a theme we return to later in the book, and emotional labour. She outlines the "emotionally laden" experience of court reporters who not only hear the details of deaths, suicides, violence and crimes in court but also interview victims and survivors before having to write up the details. The chapter provides four case studies of trauma experienced by court reporters and proposes various important coping strategies.

In Chapter 14, Watson then approaches the "death knock", or interviews with bereaved family members, drawing on her study of Australian print and digital journalists who have gone through this "rite of passage". The impact of moral injury on new and experienced journalists is discussed alongside the rights and wrongs of death knocks and corresponding coping strategies.

Following discussions of death knocks, de Novaes and Marcelino discuss thanatology, or the study of death, in Chapter 15 to help journalists report on the death and trauma of others while dealing with their own fears and sense of finiteness. As covering death can bring its own anxieties, especially given the spectacularisation and commercialisation of death and its mediatised experience, the authors advocate death education and offer a guide named "It-I-Thou" as a responsible and empathetic approach to help journalists report on death issues and communicate with bereaved people.

Completing this section, Kotišová discusses ethical and sustainable collaboration in Chapter 16 among reporters, fixers, and local producers covering warzones and builds on that of Heywood et al. Drawing on research conducted in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and in Ukraine, Kotišová advocates that media organisations extend their duty of care obligations to all (news)workers involved in conflict reporting and offer all their collaborators, including freelancers and local collaborators, respect, peer support, counselling, and psychological assistance. She goes on to provide essential tips to aspiring foreign conflict reporters calling on the need for significant consideration not only for themselves but also for those working around and with them.

Section III focuses on trauma faced by journalists caused by intimidation and the cyber environment. Kean and Maclure start this section in Chapter 19, discussing the increasing volume of online abuse and violence against journalists, much of which is gender-based and racially motivated. They question what advice should be given to journalism students as they start working in this environment and approach a number of UK journalists and editors for suggestions for a definitive checklist that tutors and students alike could use. The next chapter (20) by Longo-Flint and Price broadens our understanding of journalism by entering the world of investigative journalism, clearly defining the in-depth, systematic approach needed to ensure social justice and accountability. They discuss attempts to prevent investigative journalists from doing their work via online and legal threats and provide a fascinating study on SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) which they describe as "costly legal battles filed by powerful individuals or corporations aimed at silencing investigative media organisations and journalists" and "a form of intimidation against media freedom and freedom of expression, with battles that can last for years, causing psychological and physical distress to the victims."

In Chapter 21, keeping within the theme of online abuse, Whittington discusses the significant change in journalistic environments triggered by the exponential increase in online violence, abuse and harassment targeting journalists. This abuse, legitimised during and following Trump's presidency and his attacks against the media, is explored alongside other factors to blame for the rise in mistrust of mainstream media. Whittington then presents her Safe Workplace Culture Model, which prioritises physical, online and psychological safety and will help managers and media organisations take back some control.

Whilst gender plays a part in many chapters, *Section IV specifically approaches trauma from a gender, diversity and inclusion perspective*. Pixley's chapter (22) addresses an important failure of traditional journalism safety training (HEFATs) that consistently lacks the inclusion of diverse journalist backgrounds and experiences. HEFATs emerge as being out of date, exclusive, with complex layers of inaccessibility and cultural insensibility. With a tendency to prioritise physical over psychological risks, safety training can exclude the different embodiments and lived experiences of journalists who are not white male war correspondents such as Black, Indigenous, nonbinary, queer, disabled and neurodivergent journalists. Pixley emphasises the need for identity-aware risk management to become the norm in journalism safety training. Newman et al., in Chapter 23, then cover the complex phenomenon of sexual harassment and the many reasons behind journalists' unwillingness to come forward to report it. The authors' aim is to provide clear strategies to help journalists and organisations not only design and implement policies and procedures to ensure workplace safety but also encourage reports of sexual harassment so that they can respond accordingly.

Finally, *Section V provides necessary contemplation for those teaching the teachers*. Price and Bradley, in Chapter 25, discuss interviews with new journalists, fresh out of UK universities who have studied journalism. They discuss what these students wish they had been taught during their degrees with regard to trauma resilience. The chapter provides important tips for journalism teachers based on the real-life experiences of new starters. In the next chapter (26), Murphy outlines a new training method devised by an international consortium to teach trauma and resilience to journalists. He outlines how four cohorts were asked to undergo simulated resilience and safety skills training by being immersed in a forest, a forest and classroom, or a classroom. He goes on to document the effectiveness of the training with additional tips on resilience training. In our final chapter (27), Bradley et al. discuss their award-winning teaching experiment. They show how, by designing a "mock" rape trial, journalism students significantly contributed to trauma awareness and resilience in readiness for court reporting, both as part of their course and in the future.

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CHAPTER 2

Journalism as an Emergency Service and the Psychological Impact

Gabriella Tyson

The Journalist as an Emergency Worker

Ninety-five percent of those working in the journalism sector will be exposed to a traumatic event in their career (MacDonald, Hodgins & Saliba, 2017). This is comparable to those working in the emergency services, such as police officers, firefighters and ambulance workers. Journalists get much closer to the scene than typical bystanders, not only at the time of the incident but also following it, repeatedly reviewing footage, editing copy, and monitoring public reaction to their work. Just like emergency workers, they are often working unusual shift patterns, or even around the clock, to keep on top of constant deadlines.

The role of a journalist is to engage with the public and raise awareness of local, national, and international events that the world may not otherwise learn about. By reporting on traumatic events, they can ensure that those responsible can be held accountable, aid can be directed to the right areas and people can get the help they require. Their work can save lives and prevent further disasters, and it is clearly an emergency service that the journalism sector is providing.

However, there is a crucial difference between the role of a journalist and that of a traditional emergency worker. Typically, a journalist is instructed not to influence the event they are attending in any way. While a paramedic will immediately begin to perform life-saving medical techniques when they reach a scene, the help a journalist's work might bring is not always noticeable until some time after the event.

Both roles are extremely important in their own way, but these crucial differences mean that we need to consider the unique psychological impact that trauma exposure may have on media workers compared to traditional emergency services.

This chapter will discuss how viewing journalism as an emergency service can help us understand the psychological impact reporting has on an individual and how we can psychologically support journalists in their role.

Occupational Hazards: Trauma Exposure

Historically, psychological research has focused on traditional war correspondent reporting from the frontlines of dangerous conflicts and crisis zones, as it was believed that these were the only journalists who might suffer from the after-effects of being exposed to traumatic events. However, it is important to consider that trauma exposure is not only defined as events we witness in person. Healthcare professionals around the world use the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) as a guide to diagnose mental health disorders. It provides criteria to assess a large number of disorders. In the DSM-5, trauma is something that can be experienced first-hand, witnessed, learned about happening to someone close to, or one can be repeatedly exposed to traumatic details as a part of their job. This is highly relevant to the journalism sector, especially in the age of user-generated content (UGC), that is, pictures and videos submitted by members of the public that are used as a part of a news story. Often journalists who may not have even attended the original event end up repeatedly watching footage of it to edit a news package. Feinstein, Blair and Waknine (2014) found that journalists frequently exposed to trauma via UGC had high levels of emotional distress.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

One of the major consequences of being exposed to trauma is the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a type of anxiety disorder that can follow a stressful experience and is composed of symptoms that impact day-to-day life:

- Re-experiencing: flashbacks, nightmares and memories that involve reliving the event.
- Avoidance: pushing memories out of mind, avoiding places or people who are related to the event.
- Negative cognitions: beliefs such as "the world is a dangerous place", "I am a bad person", and feelings of guilt.
- Hyperarousal: jumpy, easily startled, feeling on guard.

For a diagnosis of PTSD, the symptoms persist for more than one month.

Note for readers based in the United Kingdom: If you think you might be suffering from PTSD, you can seek treatment from your GP or by self-referring to your local Talking Therapies service here: <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-nhs-talking-therapies-service>. The mental health charity Mind, also runs a helpline with trained personnel who will be able to help: 0300 123 3393. For readers outside the United Kingdom, please contact your local authority for assistance.

The cognitive model of PTSD (Ehlers & Clark, 2000) suggests that the symptoms arise as a result of the individual having a continued sense of serious and current threat. The prevalence of PTSD in the general population ranges from 1 to 12% (NICE, 2022), but in journalists, it is as high as 28.6%, even higher than that in police officers (Feinstein et al., 2002).

Frans et al. (2005) found that traumatic events are fairly commonly experienced among the general population, and it is common to experience some of the above symptoms immediately after a traumatic event. However, it is much less common for them to continue for a long time afterward and subsequently develop into PTSD. Two different dimensions of trauma exposure predict whether a person may develop PTSD: the subjective level of distress experienced from the trauma and the frequency of trauma exposure. The latter is particularly relevant when thinking about high-risk occupations, such as journalism, where frequent exposure cannot be avoided. This is clearly illustrated in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic. Tyson and Wild (2021) found that journalists who had covered stories related

to the viral outbreak repeatedly had higher rates of PTSD symptoms and overall psychological distress than those who only covered it once or not at all. In a constantly evolving news cycle, the same topic may be covered in several different ways, leading to repeated exposure for journalists and amplifying the psychological impact.

The high frequency of trauma exposure is an inevitable consequence of working in the journalism field and must be borne in mind when considering the psychological impact working as a journalist can have on a person. Although the research on the journalism sector itself is still in its infancy, the wider literature on the psychological consequences of being an emergency worker can be very informative in how we think about the psychological health of journalists.

Psychopathology in Journalists

Psychopathology here refers to the collective description of mental health features such as symptoms, behaviours, causes and treatments. This section will describe several different aspects of mental health that can be affected by working in the journalism sector.

As previously mentioned, PTSD is more common in journalists than in the general public and even other emergency services, such as police officers. Along with this, journalists also have higher rates of major depression and substance abuse (Feinstein et al., 2002).

Major depression is a mental health condition that exhibits as a persistent feeling of sadness that can be accompanied by a loss of interest that interferes with daily life. In the general population, major depression is relatively common, with an average lifetime prevalence of 14.6% in adults (Bromet, 2011). However, in the journalism population, it is even higher at 21.4% (Feinstein et al., 2002).

Following on from this, substance abuse is also more common in the journalism population. Feinstein et al. (2002) found that 14.3% of journalists report drinking to excess on a weekly basis. This can be viewed as a coping mechanism for dealing with the trauma that they are exposed to on the job. Alcohol has a numbing effect that can make it easier to deal with PTSD symptoms such as flashbacks, which can elicit strong emotions that are difficult to process. It should also be noted that there is somewhat of a drinking culture surrounding newsrooms (see Haugh & Collins, 2020), and this may feed into the use of alcohol as a coping strategy for difficult emotions, as it is considered to be socially acceptable among peers. Not only does this not help the journalist effectively process the feelings they are experiencing, but it also has serious physical health consequences and would benefit from being addressed.

Seeking Treatment

Despite these higher rates of psychopathology identified by Feinstein and colleagues (2002), they did not find that the journalists they sampled were any more likely to seek treatment for mental health problems than the general population. Although this study was conducted some time ago and there are more independent organisations set up to support journalists as well as treatment options available to those in the media sector now, it is important to acknowledge that there are barriers to treatment for journalists.

The stigma surrounding mental health issues can have a significant effect on whether someone acknowledges their own struggle, which represents the first step in seeking treatment. For a long time, the perception was that a journalist is completely detached from their reporting and not affected by the stories they are telling to preserve a sense of impartiality. Even when dealing with emotion-laden stories, journalists tend to "outsource" the emotionality to their sources or interviewees (Wahl-Jorgensen,

2013). This can carry over into daily life, resulting in an unwillingness to display any struggle with emotion for fear of being viewed as weak (Eil, 2017).

Lee and colleagues (2018) confirmed that this viewpoint can be harmful. They found that those journalists who believed the ideal journalist must be macho and objective, perceiving emotions as a sign of weakness and considering toughness to be a requisite for the role, displayed more PTSD symptoms. This speaks to the value of breaking down the stigma around mental health in the newsroom, ensuring that perceptions of what a journalist "should" be do not affect how they deal with their own emotions at work and following difficult assignments (Lee, Ha & Pae, 2018).

Even if there is an awareness of one's own mental health, journalists may feel they cannot turn down traumatic assignments for fear of being viewed as weak by the newsroom or facing professional backlash such as demotion (Smith, Drevo & Newman, 2018). This highlights the importance of top-down culture changes and that newsroom managers must understand how best to support their employees.

Similarities to traditional emergency services are worth noting here. For a long time, there has also been a culture of "macho" attitudes among emergency service workers that the workers themselves perceive as a barrier to seeking help (Auth et al., 2022). The idea that being labelled with a mental health condition is a weakness is something that can be dismantled with more open discussion around the mental health consequences of the occupation, whether that is a police officer or reporter (Auth et al., 2022).

Maladaptive Coping Strategies

An individual may employ numerous strategies to cope with stressors in their life. Different ways of coping have differing levels of effectiveness, and this can change over time, so something that helps in the short term may not be useful in the long term. Maladaptive coping refers to strategies that actually increase stress or are counterproductive for the individual when dealing with stress (Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996).

In addition to the barriers to seeking help previously mentioned, the psychological impact of the occupation is possibly being exacerbated by maladaptive coping strategies that stop symptoms from being addressed to be able to continue to work. This goes above and beyond the lack of discussion of mental health symptoms in the newsroom. Researchers have noted several different strategies that journalists employ post-trauma exposure.

Avoidance

Avoidant coping can be defined as a concerted effort to deny, minimise, or directly avoid dealing with stressors (Cronkite & Moos, 1995). It is important to note that journalists may think that avoiding difficult feelings helps them maintain the objectivity required of them while researching and completing stories. However, if avoidance continues once the story is completed, it may mean that the trauma cannot be fully processed, leading to disruptive PTSD symptoms such as unwanted memories or nightmares (Smith, Drevo & Newman, 2017).

Numbing

Emotional numbing can be employed as a coping technique to lessen the power symptoms appear to have over you. It involves putting yourself in a state where you are unable to feel or express your emotions (Kerig et al., 2016). Sometimes, substances such as alcohol and drugs can be used to help with numbing. Buchanan and Keats (2011) found that journalists often found it easier to manage psychological stress from work by numbing painful symptoms such as flashbacks and nightmares with

the help of substances. This may help explain the inflated rates of substance use in this population (Feinstein et al., 2002).

What Can the Newsroom Do?

The psychological impact the occupation has on a journalist can be mitigated by their employer. Research has shown that there are factors at an organisational level that influence a journalist's likelihood of developing mental health conditions, such as PTSD and depression. There is scope here for newsrooms to address these issues and consequently reduce the psychological burden on their employees while maintaining coverage of traumatic events.

Ethical Dilemmas

In a work context, an ethical dilemma refers to the struggle between actions in line with one's own ethical convictions and actions needed to complete the job. Idas, Backholm and Korhonen (2019) found that journalists who had experienced ethical dilemmas in their careers experienced a significantly greater number of stress symptoms. It is important for newsrooms to understand what types of stories might cause their reporters to conflict with their personal ethical code and strive to avoid sending journalists to cover these types of news (Idas, Backholm & Korhonen, 2019).

It should be noted that ethical dilemmas can also lead to something known as moral injury. This is slightly different from PTSD, although some symptoms overlap. Moral injury is defined as psychological, behavioural, and spiritual distress following exposure to an event that challenges one's own values (Litz et al., 2009). Research has shown that journalists covering the recent refugee crisis report feelings of moral injury (Feinstein, Pavisian & Storm, 2018).

Perceived Occupational Support

The extent to which a journalist believes their organisation supports them can be a protective factor against PTSD symptoms (Drevo, 2018). Journalists who did not feel that their wellbeing was important to the organisation they work for or that the organisation was proud of the individual's work showed higher levels of PTSD symptoms as well as more occupational dysfunction (Drevo, 2018). Occupational dysfunction in the context of journalism can be defined as engaging in behaviours such as having inaccuracies in one's work or missing deadlines (Nelson, 2012). This suggests that by fostering a supportive environment in which each individual reporter feels respected, a newsroom can not only reduce rates of mental health disorders in their workers but also increase the quality of their output.

Social Acknowledgement

Journalists who feel their reporting is received in a positive manner by their supervisors and colleagues have lower depression scores than those who do not. This mattered more than support received by family members (Weidmann, Fehm & Fydrich, 2008). Although it is possible that depression symptoms do make it more difficult to accept positive feedback, the benefits of acknowledgement from supervisors to their journalists for good work should be noted by media organisations (Weidmann, Fehm & Fydrich 2008).

Peer Cohesion

How friendly and supportive journalism colleagues are to each other has also been shown to be associated with secondary traumatic stress (Dworznik, 2018). Secondary traumatic stress refers to a kind of PTSD that develops after supporting someone or listening to details from someone who has experienced trauma (Figley, 2013). This is sometimes conflated with the concept of vicarious trauma;

however, in the psychology field, vicarious trauma is defined as harmful changes to one's view of the self, others and the world as a result of exposure to graphic material (Baird & Kracen, 2006). Dworznik (2018) suggests that newsroom managers can promote peer cohesion in the workplace by encouraging self-awareness and acknowledgement of trauma to reduce these stress symptoms.

It should be noted that not all journalists work in a newsroom; 35% of journalists in the UK classify themselves as freelance/self-employed (Spilsbury, 2016). However, there may be a protective element to working for an organisation. Williams and Cartwright (2021) found that freelance journalists had a significantly higher number of PTSD symptoms than those employed by a media organisation. That is not to say that freelance journalists cannot establish their own support networks outside of organisations to help reduce mental health symptoms through social media or unions.

Individual Resilience

There are ways journalists can protect themselves from the psychological impact of work stress, even trauma. Researchers have studied individuals who do and do not show signs of mental ill-health following exposure to traumatic events to identify characteristics that may be protective. People who cope well after trauma are often described as "resilient".

Definition: Resilience

Psychological resilience can be defined as the ability to adapt and regain mental health following some kind of adversity. It refers to achieving a better-than-expected outcome after an extreme stressor. Research has shown that there are multiple ways in which we can increase the likelihood of achieving a resilient outcome, such as reaching out for and experiencing the benefits of support. Resilience is not a fixed trait but a dynamic process. Achieving a resilient outcome is something that can be achieved by responding to stressors with strategies that have been shown to be protective rather than harmful (Kalisch et al., 2017).

Wild et al. (2016) followed student paramedics for two years post-qualification to examine factors that predicted PTSD and major depression. They found that a person's thoughts about their own resilience uniquely predicted episodes of major depression. That is, paramedics who saw themselves as resilient were less likely to develop depression. Since there is overlap between the roles of a journalist and paramedic, particularly in regard to work-related trauma exposure, it would be beneficial for journalists to be aware of how they think about their own resilience, ensuring that they consider their abilities to overcome stressors in a positive way. Thinking negatively about one's own resilience with thoughts such as "When things look hopeless, I give up" or "I'm unable to adapt to changes when they occur" give clues that it will be important to use strategies that have been shown to improve coping—such as nipping dwelling in the bud, reaching out for support, and learning how to deal with unwanted memories.

There are many different aspects that might influence an individual's ability to achieve a resilient outcome. Research has looked at things that might be present in journalists in particular. Certain things found are of course fixed; for example, it is known that female journalists are more likely to experience PTSD, which reflects the gender bias in PTSD in the general population as well (Dworznik, 2018; Olff et al., 2007). However, some of the predictors of mental ill-health identified can be modified, as discussed below.

Negative Beliefs

Following exposure to a traumatic event, some journalists may start to endorse negative beliefs about themselves, others, and the world around them (Lee et al., 2018). These can include "the world is a

completely dangerous place" or "there is something wrong with me as a person" (Foa et al., 1999). These thoughts can feel hard to refute after witnessing a trauma, particularly for journalists who are repeatedly exposed to the most dangerous parts of the world. However, the stronger these cognitions are, the more likely a journalist is to experience PTSD (Lee et al., 2018). Negative beliefs can be targeted using techniques from cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and previous training programmes have seen success from training at-risk occupations to reduce these beliefs (see Wild, El-Salahi, & Degli Esposti, 2020 for review).

Guilt

A common emotion following a traumatic event is guilt. This is a sense of distress about one's own potential responsibility for an adverse outcome. It can also occur when an individual feels they did not do anything helpful for the situation (Tangney, 1996). This is especially relevant for journalists, who are often instructed not to intervene when reporting on traumatic events, leading to a heightened sense of guilt (Browne, Evangeli & Greenberg, 2012). Research has shown that journalists experiencing high levels of work-related guilt demonstrate higher levels of PTSD (Browne, Evangeli & Greenberg, 2012; Backholm & Idas, 2015). There are already established interventions that have been shown to reduce guilt symptoms in veterans, and it may be valuable to pursue similar training for the journalism sector (Norman et al., 2014).

Future Considerations

Considering journalism as the fourth emergency service means we must also consider the psychological impact the job has on journalists. Research has shown how increased trauma exposure can have negative consequences, such as the development of PTSD, major depression, or substance abuse (Feinstein et al., 2002). To help moderate this, the journalism sector would benefit from training that focuses on addressing maladaptive coping strategies that are common among the field, targets negative beliefs and helps journalists to process guilt.

Resilience training has also been shown to be effective in emergency workers in the past but has yet to be adapted specifically for journalists (Wild & Tyson, 2017).

Next Steps You Could Take…

Talking Points

- In what ways is the psychological impact of reporting on journalists similar to the impact experienced by the "traditional" emergency services? In what way is it different?
- Do you think the culture around mental health has changed in the newsroom?
- What coping strategies do you use when faced with stress? Are they helpful in both the short and long term?
- Have a think about how often you might use substances to cope with difficult feelings. If it is more often than not, are there other strategies you could employ?
- The chapter discusses many different places journalists can receive support. What support mechanisms do you have? What kind of support most benefits you? Can you do anything to improve this for yourself and others?

Tasks

- In groups or alone design a poster portraying your perception of the "ideal journalist".
- Take some time to reflect on your own resilience, your ability to overcome stress. Make a list of the things you do well in these circumstances. Are there areas you could improve?

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CHAPTER 3

Emergency Frontline Workers Offer Five Lessons for Journalist Wellbeing

Erin Smith and Alexandra Wake

Journalists work on a 24-hour frontline that poses multiple risks to wellbeing. Like other frontline responders, journalists manage intense work demands, direct and indirect (vicarious) trauma, and the impact of cumulative exposure to traumatic events. Journalists also face online trauma and abuse, misinformation, economic pressures, declining public trust, and diminishing press freedom.

Journalists are also being increasingly recognised as first responders to hazardous events, including disaster, war, terrorism, and mass violence (Osofsky et al., 2005). Often arriving at the scene ahead of first responders and working near the threat that they are reporting on (Osmann et al., 2021), they are responsible for documenting history and conveying information to the public, bearing witness to trauma and suffering.

Given these pressures, it is important to identify and implement effective strategies for supporting wellbeing from the time a journalist begins their studies and throughout their journalism career. The authors of this chapter decided to reflect on lessons learned from other frontline organisations, including emergency medical services (EMS), police, and firefighting services, to help identify five key lessons for protecting journalist wellbeing.

Lesson One

Media organisations are likely to have a range of wellbeing strategies in place to support journalists' mental health. But are they effective? Previous research exploring the efficacy of support strategies used by emergency frontline organisations suggests that they may not work as well as we think; frontline responders are more likely to be diagnosed with a mental health condition than the overall population, and they are more than twice as likely to think about suicide and three times as likely to have a suicide plan (Lawrence et al., 2018; Lawrence et al., 2021). These findings are concerning and echo many of the problems experienced by journalists reporting from the frontline.

What is more concerning is that these findings are not new. Experience from the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, Australia showed that the mental health impact on those on the frontline of major events will likely be complex and protracted. Firefighters and other frontline responders were at increased risk of developing PTSD, depression, anxiety, and complicated grief compared to the general public, and when these issues were inadequately treated, they carried an increased risk of suicide (Gibbs et al., 2020). So why, more than ten years later during yet another major bushfire event during the Australian Black Summer bushfires, were frontline responders still dealing with the same problems?

There are likely several contributing factors, but a major challenge to overcoming these persistent challenges is ineffective support for mental health and wellbeing for those on the frontline throughout their career. Journalists need to be equipped with knowledge that will enable them to recognise the signs and symptoms associated with trauma exposure. To help form protective self-care and wellbeing habits that will mitigate the impact of trauma long into their career, student journalists must have trauma literacy routinely included in the journalism curriculum, and media organisations must assist staff throughout the career by embedding trauma awareness and mental health literacy training for all staff as part of ongoing professional development.

The impact of cumulative trauma exposure must also be considered. Previous research on emergency frontline responders has identified that repeated exposure to trauma is a major risk factor for poor wellbeing and mental health (Jahnke et al., 2016; Lawrence et al., 2018; Harvey et al., 2016). As the frequency, intensity, and type of trauma exposure increases, it is likely that many of the journalists who responded to events such as the COVID-19 pandemic will be involved in subsequent coverage of traumatic events in the future, potentially increasing their risk of experiencing more serious mental health symptoms.

We also need to normalise conversations about wellbeing to ensure that journalists feel comfortable speaking openly about their mental health from the time they are students through to retirement. Frontline emergency responders have previously reported a perception that seeking help for their mental health could be either career-limiting or career-ending (Smith et al., 2021a, 2022; Lawrence et al., 2018, 2021). Contributing to this is the on-going, toxic masculine culture associated with many frontline organisations. This type of organisational culture continues to promote the belief that speaking out about mental health and wellbeing is weak and that there is a need for those on the frontline to be impervious to the impact of trauma exposure.

Newsrooms also tend to have a masculine culture (North, 2012; Geertsema-Sligh, 2020), even though female journalists now outnumber men in many parts of the world, including Australia (Dawson et al., 2021). Details of the debilitating nature of the Australian newsroom culture have been detailed in two landmark court cases where one media worker, a photographer, gave evidence that the newsroom discouraged anyone from discussing their emotional response to stories they covered. To refuse an assignment was regarded as unprofessional (Wake & Ricketson, 2022). This type of organisational culture can continue to promote the belief that speaking out about mental health and wellbeing is weak and that there is a need for those on the frontline to be impervious to the impact of trauma exposure.

Despite the clear impact on the wellbeing of frontline responders, Australian research (Smith et al., 2021a) has identified an alarming fact: over half of the emergency responders who had responded to the frontline of a major traumatic event had not sought mental health support in the twelve-month period that followed. Of those who had sought help, only 15% had asked for assistance through their place of employment, and the remainder had sought wellbeing support from a range of alternative sources, including formal and informal face-to-face and online peer support, online chat forums, general practitioners (GPs), mental health professionals, and faith-based and spiritual leaders:

> I knew I was struggling. I was having nightmares and flashbacks and I was just angry all the time. However, there was no way I was going let [the organisation] know. Why would I? So that they could tell me that I couldn't hack it?—Frontline responder. (Smith et al., 2021a)

Given the existence of a well-established evidence base highlighting the increased risk frontline responders have for poor mental health and compromised wellbeing, it is important to understand the range of appropriate and effective interventions that can be used by organisations to support wellbeing. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to understand the evidence base underpinning these programmes so that evidence-informed decisions can be made in regard to policy and practice. However, across the frontline response sector—including journalism—this evidence-base remains largely underdeveloped. As Kleim and Westphal (2011) noted in their review of mental health in first responders, "In contrast to the extensive knowledge base of risk factors known to predict onset of PTSD, there are relatively limited empirical data on factors that may serve [as] protective functions in this population. Such information is vital for the development of evidence-based prevention programs" (p. 20).

There is a similar lack of knowledge about how best to teach prevention skills to frontline responders (McCreary, 2019). Published evidence reporting on prevention programmes for frontline responders, such as what programmes exist, the objectives of the programmes, and what the programmes consist of, is sparse. Additionally, published objective evaluations of wellbeing programmes established by and for frontline organisations—including journalists—are limited. This lack of original evidence means that subsequent high-level evidence syntheses, including systematic reviews and meta-analyses on which to guide knowledge-implementation decisions, are also difficult to find. One scoping review synthesised the available evidence on supporting the wellbeing of frontline responders (Smith et al., 2021a), identifying 56 individual studies that reported a wellbeing support strategy or program for frontline responders. These studies identified that initiatives designed to support frontline responder wellbeing need to breakdown stigma and build resilience by normalising conversations on mental health. This will be integral for increasing help-seeking behaviours.

Wellbeing support programmes have been implemented by emergency frontline responder organisations to help prepare new recruits for the risks associated with their careers on the frontline (Sansbury et al., 2015). Where many current programmes fall short is the lack of on-going support throughout the career and into retirement transition. Media organisations play an integral role in creating safe environments where conversations around mental health are normalised and programmes supporting wellbeing become routine elements of core business. Organisations should also consider the implementation of pre-retirement and post-retirement support strategies to improve wellbeing as staff transition into post-career life. After all, their career may have come to an end, but the impact of cumulative trauma exposure amassed over the course of their work may not.

Lesson Two

Australian research shows that frontline responders are more likely to be diagnosed with a mental health condition than the overall Australian population; they are more than twice as likely to think about suicide and three times as likely to have a suicide plan (Lawrence et al., 2018). This paints a grim picture of the wellbeing of a population who dedicate their professional lives to helping others. It is likely that journalists experience a similar impact on their wellbeing given that they too are on the frontline, bearing witness to many of these traumatic events to share information and document history. If they are not coping, such as other frontline responders, they may develop psychological disorders, including anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and PTSD.

PTSD develops when a person struggles to recover after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Some journalists and media workers may develop symptoms while they are still covering a story. They may feel on edge but push down their feelings to get on with the job. However, it is more likely that symptoms will appear weeks, months, and even years later. PTSD is associated with significant impairment in day-to-day functioning socially and at work.

Typical signs and symptoms of PTSD can include:

- reliving the traumatic event
- avoiding reminders of what happened
- being constantly tense and jumpy, always looking out for signs of danger

Journalists in regional communities are uniquely vulnerable to trauma. They may be covering a traumatic event in their own community, facing the prospect of the story involving neighbours and friends, or dealing with personal loss, tragedy, and grief. In the case of disaster, their own homes, those of loved ones, and other important local landmarks may have been damaged or destroyed. We need to ensure that those covering stories in their local communities are first and foremost safe, that they have access to shelter, food, and water, and a range of wellbeing support options. We also need to be mindful of journalists—including students—for whom current traumatic stories will have triggered painful and disturbing memories. They may not currently be on the frontline, but they only need to turn on the television, open the newspaper, or look at social media to be taken straight back to whatever event is distressing for them.

Many existing wellbeing support programmes are largely based on what is called a "resilience model" that focuses on people "reaching out" and being encouraged to seek help when they need it. Frontline responders, including journalists, may be unlikely to take this initiative in the middle of a stressful job or when they are experiencing a mental health crisis, when it is often a struggle even to pick up the phone with a loved one, friend or colleague. Instead, we need an approach to wellbeing that removes the onus on the individual. We need to shift our thinking from a model that requires the individual to "reach out" to a model that also values others "reaching in" to identify those who may be struggling (Smith, 2020).

In Australia, Ambulance Victoria's (2019) Peer Support Dog Program, which allows staff to bring in accredited dogs to create social interactions and conversations, is a good example of how "reaching in" helps with frontline responder wellbeing. This kind of approach empowers people through social connection. While employers need to do more to facilitate "reach in" programmes, anyone can create informal support networks. Whether peer support groups, community groups, sporting groups, or something else, the underlying thread is a commitment to supporting each other's wellbeing.

Heglund (2009) and Dean (2019) write about the importance of taking a holistic approach to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of frontline responders. This model would also be of benefit to journalists. These types of programmes advocate for early intervention to assist in the prevention of mental injury, including embedding mitigative education and wellbeing strategies within the journalism curriculum. While purely clinical therapies can be useful in short-term treatment, they do not seem to provide the tools or strategies required to make the lifestyle changes needed to sustain improved mental health and wellbeing in the long term.

Lesson Three

Experience from the 2009 "Black Saturday" bushfires in Victoria, Australia demonstrated that the impact on wellbeing of those on the frontline of major trauma is often complex and protracted. We saw it again some ten years later with the "Black Summer" bushfires of 2019/2020 in Australia. Despite the clear and acknowledged risk to mental health, research conducted after the Black Summer bushfires identified that many frontline responders felt that their organisation had not provided enough of the "right type" of support, with many simply providing a link to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) (Smith et al., 2021b).

> After witnessing absolute carnage, seeing everything we saw, and doing everything we were asked to do, weeks went by before I finally received the obligatory wellbeing "check-in" from the organisation. It was a bulk email, reminding us of the number for the EAP and telling us to get in touch if we needed to. That was it. No personal check-in. No genuine interest or even a "how are you going?". It was clearly a tick-box activity so they could say they looked after us. However, we could all see it for what it was, disingenuous—Frontline responder. (Smith et al., 2021a)

An EAP is a work-based intervention programme designed to enhance the wellbeing of employees and often includes services for staff and their immediate family members. The aim of EAP services is to provide preventive and proactive interventions for the early detection, identification and resolution of both work and personal problems that may adversely affect staff performance and wellbeing (EAP). While such programmes have an important role to play, they risk being seen as tokenistic, especially when they are outsourced away from peers who share similar experiences. The duration of access can also be problematic, with frontline staff often reporting that they could only access three free counselling sessions before having to seek alternative support (Smith et al., 2021b, 2022). EAPs can also take significant time and investment, but research suggests that only 5% of employees utilise them (Agovino, 2019).

However, media organisations should not abandon EAPs—they can be a useful gateway to better support and help when needed. Instead, organisations should explore alternate options for wellbeing support that supplement the benefit of the EAP with broader methods and programmes that address employee wellbeing needs and hopefully prevent mental health injury.

These could include counselling or access to psychologists, faith-based and spiritual healing options, animal-assistance programmes, buddy systems, mentor programmes and the sharing of lived experience through peer support.

Unfortunately, having an EAP is where many organisations stop in regard to supporting wellbeing. What we encourage is for media organisations to think beyond the EAP and advocate a comprehensive and holistic approach to wellbeing support. Students and early-career journalists need to be empowered to practise self-care and maintain good mental health, and experienced journalists and leaders need to be equipped with the knowledge, tools, and skills to effectively manage mental health and wellbeing through both proactive and reactive approaches. This is critical for media organisations to successfully support staff and to mitigate the health, safety, and legal risk to organisations.

Media organisations should also introduce "trauma-informed" into the regular work vocabulary. Over the last few years, we have experienced unprecedented open-ended and cumulative trauma exposure, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine crisis.

A trauma-informed organisation understands how trauma works, sees how it can impact its staff, and works to mitigate those effects (Oakes, 2023). There is a wealth of resources for improving trauma awareness, and specific resources for journalists and media workers are available from organisations such as The Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma. Media organisations should prioritise the implementation of trauma-awareness training for all staff, providing psychosocial education that equips staff

with the ability to understand what trauma is, how they can be exposed, and the physiological impact it has on us, whether we experience it directly, indirectly, or as part of a moral injury. Perhaps most importantly, this training empowers staff to recognise the signs of trauma response in themselves and their peers, allowing them to have conversations about mental health and wellbeing.

Lesson Four

The idea of peer support is to share people's own lived experience to support others. Peer support has long been provided informally by friends and family and through community support groups and grassroots organisations. However, in recent years, we have seen lived experiences shared through more formal methods, such as clinical settings and community suicide prevention initiatives (Mind Australia, 2023). Research from the United Kingdom (UK) identified that patients supported through the sharing of lived experience were less likely to be readmitted to the hospital following acute mental health issues. The lead researcher, Sonia Johnson, professor of social and community psychiatry at University College London, UK, said, "People discharged from community crisis services are often readmitted to acute care. Not only does this impede recovery but it also consumes resources that might otherwise be dedicated to longer term improvements in functioning and quality of life" (Johnson et al., 2018).

While the evidence base supporting positive outcomes for peer support among frontline responders is in its infancy, we know that effective peer support can help responders cope, lower stigma, and build team cohesion (SAMHSA, 2023). The sharing of lived experience in these safe environments allows frontline responders to understand stressors their peers face. Peers can model healthy behaviours and share information about sources of support. Similar benefits can be found among peer support programmes for journalists who work in a demanding environment of deadline pressures, fast-paced events, and cumulative trauma exposure. To help foster a supportive and productive workplace, peer support programmes within media organisations should approach trauma and stress management by building trauma awareness across all staff and supporting employees to deal with the emotional stress of working in a realm of violence and death and by training journalist peer supporters as well as providing regular support and ongoing psychosocial education for those providing support to peers.

A key lesson from the Australian Black Summer bushfires was the need to empower both individual responders and frontline organisations to provide peer support safely and effectively. Smith et al. (2022) found that those on the frontline of the bushfires frequently highlighted that the most effective method for supporting wellbeing was sharing what they had gone through with someone who "got it". The sharing of lived experience through both formal and informal peer support was a favoured approach when it came to talking about mental health among participants:

> I spoke to both my GP and my [psychologist], and neither of them could truly understand because they hadn't been there. They hadn't seen what these fires could do, how much they could destroy. They had not been scared for their lives as that relentless heat hit and the sky turned black. They hadn't seen the death and destruction. In addition, I couldn't even talk to my family about it, they didn't need to hear about what I had seen, I didn't want to burden them. In the end, the only thing that has truly helped has been joining an online support group. I can talk openly about what I saw, and what I am feeling. In addition, they understand. They get it.—Frontline responder. (Smith et al., 2022)

Lesson Five

There is a growing research base that points to the importance of addressing self-stigmatisation as part of supporting emergency frontline responder wellbeing (Smith et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Lawrence

et al., 2021). The results from the 2018 Australian national survey of some 21,000 emergency frontline personnel (Lawrence et al., 2018) highlighted that self-stigmatisation was a recurring theme among frontline responders. Smith et al. (2021b, 2022) discussed the concept of self-stigmatisation and barriers to the utilisation of available support services with a cohort of responders who had spent time on the frontline of a major bushfire event. These responders expressed concern about how colleagues and their organisation would view them if they openly admitted they were struggling:

> What are they going to think if I say I'm not coping? They are just going to say man up. If you can't hack it, you have no business being a firefighter.—Frontline responder. (Smith et al., 2021a)

Similar perceptions have also been anecdotally witnessed by the authors among journalists, with some believing that if they say they cannot cover a particular story, it will be given to someone else who will be regarded as more reliable and capable, potentially influencing the likelihood of being offered "big" stories in the future. Seeking support can also be seen as being career-limiting or even career-ending. Both male and female responders expressed this concern. One female volunteer firefighter summed up her thoughts on this issue by saying:

> No one asks for help. [Interviewer response: "Why do you think that is?"] Because if you ask for help, you probably won't get activated again. In addition, for many of us, being a volunteer is in our blood. It's a big part of who we are, and to have that taken away, well, we just don't want to risk.—Frontline responder. (Smith et al., 2021a)

Continuing efforts to breakdown stigma and normalise conversations about mental health will go a long way towards changing this long-standing culture and perception, an important step for effectively supporting the wellbeing of all those responding on the front lines of traumatic events, including journalists and media workers.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed five key lessons for journalist wellbeing that can be gleaned from the experiences of other frontline emergency organisations. In summary, approaches to supporting journalist wellbeing must begin when journalists are still students and continue throughout their careers. Journalists should be encouraged to "reach out" when they are struggling, while media organisations should "reach in" to journalists in need. One-size does NOT fit all in regard to effective and appropriate support, and effective wellbeing support programmes need to look beyond the use of EAPs. The sharing of lived experience through well-managed peer support is an effective and valued support tool, and when shared by those in leadership positions, it can go a long way to breakdown stigma, particularly self-stigmatisation. Finally, supporting wellbeing needs to become part of the core business of all media organisations; trauma awareness training should be embedded within all journalism curricula, and discussion of mental health should be normalised throughout the journalist's career.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Tips

Read these tips from Yamiche Alcindor, a breaking news reporter from USA today, as published by the Dart Centre (2015)

- Wear comfortable layered clothing and shoes. Additionally, have all-weather gear close by. I always pack sneakers, a raincoat, and an extra shirt in case I need to change.
- Remember to be respectable and treat people fairly even if they're breaking the law or seem very angry. Some of the people who you want to speak with might be very emotional. You want to respect their anger, sadness, or other feelings.
- Have mobile charging options. I always carry portable chargers and car chargers for my computer, iPhone and iPad. I have two portable charges on me at all times and my colleague even has a solar powered backpack.
- Make sure your phone and tablet have enough space to record events. If something happens and you need to record in an emergency, make sure you have enough data to do so. Back up your phone often and have a hard drive to store photos or videos on in case your phone fills up.
- Always pack portable snacks and water! You do not think clearly when you're hungry and thirsty. It can truly affect your reporting.
- Pack light but smart. I always carry a backpack with me but I try my hardest to keep it from getting too heavy in case I end up walking truly far or running. Packing smart means having all your reporting tools but not having too much extra things.
- Use your personality to help you. The best reporters I have meant feel authentic and use their life experiences to connect with people. This does not mean you have things in common with each interview subject. However, being a real person will help you in emergency situations.
- Be on media lists and check the Twitter and Facebook pages of officials connected with your story. Before I get on a plane, I sign up for as many media distribution lists as I can find because those may be the first ways information gets out.
- Find someone to check in with in your newsroom. I emailed my editors regularly when I was in Ferguson to let them know I was safe and doing well. Doing so helped them know I was where I was not in danger.
- Keep in touch with your family and friends. It is truly important to take breaks and check in with loved ones. It keeps you balanced and allows you to vent to those close to you if you need to vent.

Tasks

- What is one strategy that you can implement now as a student journalist?
- Can you add two additional tips to this list based on your own experience as a student?
- Now let's take some time out to focus on our wellbeing! This 11-minute chair yoga session is for media practitioners working at their desks. Go to <www.dartcenter.org> and find the video under the "Further Multimedia and Online Resources You Might Find Useful" section

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CHAPTER 4

News Feature: Rachael Venables: "There is life outside the trauma"

Rachael Venables is a correspondent for Sky News. She is an investigative journalist, who worked for Global Radio for eight years, concluding her time there as Chief Correspondent for LBC. Her work focused on exposing injustice, including the Grenfell cladding crisis, people traffickers, and sex-for-rent landlords.
In 2017, she covered the Grenfell Tower disaster, a fire in a high-rise tower block that killed 74 and injured an additional 70 on 14 June.
It was declared a major incident, with 250 firefighters deployed and taking 60 hours to put out. It is considered the worst UK residential fire since World War Two. Here, she tells her story.

As Told to Lisa Bradley

"14 June 2017. My phone started to ring at 3 am. I was 24 years old, with just three years of reporting under my belt, when I was woken up to be told a fire had broken out in a tower block in West London.

"It was the year of the Westminster, Manchester and London Bridge terrorist attacks, and Finsbury Park was still to come. I'd covered them all. I was exhausted, emotional, and ready to snap. All the reporting had been tough, but it was Grenfell that would reshape my DNA.

"On the night itself, I remember a distinct feeling of autopilot detachment. Adrenalin rushing through me, live on air, all over the globe, report after report, gathering information, relaying facts. But I still didn't realise the enormity of it all. I just remember standing there watching the flames come out of the tower, thinking, *surely everyone will be ok? Everyone has to be ok?* Even when I heard they were bringing forward the breakfast programme early to start at 6 am rather than 7 am, I still didn't quite understand why. At that moment, I couldn't understand how massive this was. It was as if I had cushioned my brain in order to cope.

"A few hours after the sun had come up, I remember sitting down on the pavement, exhausted, and my phone pinged with a text from a friend who knew where I was and what I was doing. It just said *'Pimms in the garden later?'* I felt like crying with relief that she had done that for me. And that's what I tell the reporters I train up. Once your shift is over, do something entirely different. Remind yourself there is life outside the trauma.

"A few days later, I remember interviewing a woman who had lost almost her entire family. As she stood in front of me, in sheer despair, she listed the names of her missing loved ones; her brother, his wife, their children, it was as if there were two versions to me. The journalist part of my brain was thinking *this is such a good, powerful interview,* but the other one was shouting it down, *what's wrong with you? How can you think anything like that*? It's obviously not that I thought anything about the

situation was good, but I knew that this audio would be strong enough to tell this story. Yes, I had "deliver, deliver, deliver" going through my head, but at the same time I knew why I was doing this, and what mattered most was that the world understood this woman's pain, and what had been done to her family.

Figure 4.1: A woman looks at missing persons leaflets as the Notting Hill community mourned the victims and came together to help those who lost everything after the Grenfell Tower fire
Picture: Bettina Strenske. Photograph copyright Alamy.

"There's a degree of emotional intelligence for times like this that I just don't think most young reporters have yet. That goes for the trauma you are about to witness, but also the awareness of the impact your very approach and manner will have on the victims and witnesses. Will giving an interview empower, or further traumatise them? How do you know when to push for an answer, to ask them to recall a horrifying memory, and when do you take a step back and let them be? There's no right answer. It's so hard when you're under pressure to provide coverage, when you know what editors expect, to have the emotional maturity to stop and evaluate your methods and ask yourself if you're doing the right thing. I learned that the hard way once, and it's always stayed with me.

"Everyone kept asking me afterwards if I was ok, and reminding me that there was help available through work if I needed it. To be honest that just got on my nerves. It was only later I realised I should have listened.

"I did access support further down the line, when I realised I'd become overwhelmed, pressured and stressed from the culmination of all the events that year. I was always catastrophising, I couldn't go to a restaurant without checking the exit route.

"The few therapy sessions I had really helped. I say to people it's just like a massage for the brain, to release a bit of tension and help you to refocus. But I think now that the newsroom policy shouldn't be to wait for the reporter to ask. If you've covered and experienced trauma like these sorts of stories, it should come with mandatory support, like some time off work, and at least one therapy session booked in for you. Otherwise you may find yourself at breaking point without realising that's where you were heading."

SECTION I

First Hand Trauma

CHAPTER 5

News Feature: Rory Carroll: "I wasn't traumatised. It was the job and it was what I had signed up for"

Lisa Bradley

Rory Carroll (born 1972) is an Irish journalist working for The Guardian who has reported from the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Latin America and Los Angeles. He is the Ireland correspondent for The Guardian. He was famously kidnapped in the Baghdad slums, surrounded by body parts in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake, and who saw the scalp of a woman by his feet after a bombing in Afghanistan. He said it's what you sign up for as a journalist.

Rory Carroll, a foreign correspondent for *The Guardian*, made international headlines in 2005 when he was captured on his way back from interviews in Sadr City, one of the suburbs of Baghdad, by gunmen.

He was held for 36 hours in a dark, concrete hallway, with just a rug and a pillow, believing he was to be sold to the highest bidder. But he was eventually released.

But despite this first-hand trauma, he said it is other parts of the job he re-lives.

"I'm not a particularly introspective person and I don't dwell on things. Perhaps that's a defence mechanism or maybe it is just my nature, but I'm not carrying a lot of baggage with me."

Born and bred in Dublin, Rory got his first job in journalism at the Belfast-based *Irish News* around the time of the Troubles. This was in 1995–1996, and there was a ceasefire, but the aftermath and tensions were high.

He said: "Even though there were no bodies in the street as such, it was still a good training ground for covering violence. I was working in a newsroom, and it was full of support from experienced journalists. I was learning about death knocks from snappers who had done a thousand of them. Then we all went to the pub.

"That's changed now because of all the remote working and you just don't get that wealth of experience anymore. Being in that environment normalised the job, we got tips, you just got on and did it. If you were feeling like something had been nerve-wracking then you'd just make a joke, so it didn't come across like you were not up to the job.

"At the age of 26, I went to The Guardian and accidentally became the war correspondent. I went to Belgrade, Kosovo, Yemen, but there were no real issues because journalists were not targets there.

Then in 1999, I became foreign correspondent and never went back to working in a newsroom. So at that point I lost my security blanket of that environment, but I counted myself lucky that I had had that while I was training.

"I remember one incident in Kosovo where another journalist and I were at a house and there was a body of a dead soldier on the floor with a neat bullet hole in his forehead. The other journalist was really shaken up but I thought that was the cleanest you could hope to get in a war. In Afghanistan, I was in a village that had been bombed by a US plane and there were human remains everywhere, such as a scalp of a woman. It wasn't pleasant but those details are what makes compelling copy. I wrote the story then went and had a beer with another corrie and we talked about it. That's how we coped.

"But one of the worst things that stayed with me throughout, wasn't what I saw, but an interview I did in the Congo conflicts, with a 12-year-old girl who had been kidnapped and gang-raped. I was with her and her family, and she had been gone for six months before getting away.

"I asked her through a translator how her kidnappers had treated her, and her reply was, '*They all passed through me*.'

"It turns out she hadn't told her family that until I asked. And was that ok? What consequences would that have? Would she have been deemed an untouchable? I didn't know. I really struggled. What were the ethics here?

"Then in 2005, I'd been living in a hotel in Baghdad for nine months. I was 33 and we were doing what Robert Fisk, of the Independent, branded 'mouse journalism'. We were targets here, so we would scurry out to get interviews and then rush back. I went to a morgue and saw the bodies stacked up and interviewed a mum who was there identifying her daughter. The smells, the senses. To be there and experience it, filling up your notebook was like dancing in the desert when the rain comes.

"I wasn't traumatised. It was the job and it was what I had signed up for. So that was ok.

"Being kidnapped, that wasn't ok.

"Before it happened I tried not to view any beheading videos. It was so upsetting, but I was doing a story based on them being shared on social media, so I had to watch them. Those videos stayed with me and affected me for more than all the aftermath of the war.

"And then I got kidnapped and I thought it was about to happen to me. I remember speaking to my captor in Pidgin Arabic and I asked him 'If you are going to kill me, would you mind just shooting me rather than cutting my head off.' He just shrugged.

"To be honest I felt relief and joy more than anything when I was let go. I assumed I would be there for weeks, maybe months. But it was only 36 hours. I went to the Dart Centre and the guy there explained to me how adrenalin stays in the system for weeks, so told me to eat healthily, go easy on the caffeine and alcohol and to exercise. So I did. And it was excellent advice. I used to go up to the rooftops of hotels with a skipping rope every night.

"I became the most famous man in Ireland for about five minutes and I hated being the centre of attention. So I went back to Africa, and out of the spotlight it all just faded into the background.

"People do still ask me about it, but they want to hear some ghoulish details. I may run with it or not depending on my mood.

"A year after I moved to Venezuela and covered the Haiti earthquake. The sheer scale of 100,000 people dead. Bodies dumped in waste grounds. I wasn't prepared for, nor had I expected the grisliness of it. Heads and bodies were scattered everywhere.

"When I filed my copy, an editor rang me up and asked me 'Are you ok?'. I think that was the first time I'd ever been asked. I'd described exactly what I'd seen.

"I was ok. But I couldn't eat meat for a while after."

Figure 5.1: Clearing rubble Port au Prince, Haiti, Caribbean after January 2010 earthquake The Photolibrary Wales / Alamy Stock Photo.

CHAPTER 6

Writing as Balm: Humanitarian Journalism, "Body 422", and the Infliction and Transformation of Trauma

Tiania Stevens and Jamie Parr

A Warning

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes: "Whoever battles monsters should take care that he doesn't become one in the process. And if you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss looks into you, too" (Nietzsche, 2014, p. 74). This is sound advice and a sobering warning for all journalists, but it has a particular relevance to a small but important sub-group of journalists, namely "humanitarian" journalists, whose members are all too often brought into contact with both abysses and monsters. The humanitarian journalist is involved with her subject matter in ways that make it highly likely she will be altered negatively by what she witnesses and participates in. She voluntarily places herself in positions in which she must gaze into the abysses from which emerge every form of torture, cruelty, oppression and murder that humans can devise, and often that gaze rebounds on herself, as Nietzsche warned: she feels herself implicated in what she has seen and may wonder whether there is not something "monstrous" in her own self or actions.

Using the personal experience of one of us (Stevens), this chapter explores the complex negative experiences often had by humanitarian journalists. We conceive those negative experiences as examples of moral injury. (In this regard, we must here provide another kind of warning, as this chapter contains some confronting images some may find distressing.) We establish why the specifically humanitarian form of journalism has a particular vulnerability to moral injury, and discuss how the journalist also possesses a tool vital to the balming of her afflictions: the transformative and therapeutically efficacious activity of writing.

A Particular Vulnerability

The scientific study of moral injury appears with the work of Litz et al. (2009), and has largely been studied in former and serving soldiers (see Griffin et al., 2019, for a narrative review of the literature).

More recently, the conception has been explored as it affects journalists, in large measure due to the work done by Anthony Feinstein and colleagues (e.g. Feinstein, Pavisian & Storm, 2018).

While no consensus on the definition of moral injury yet exists (Griffin et al., 2019, p. 350), its principal features are clear enough. In so far as it is the result of traumatic experiences, moral injury has often been studied in relation to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), though it is generally understood that the constructs describe two distinct, if partly overlapping, conditions (Griffin et al., 2019, pp. 351–352, 356). While PTSD "is essentially a physiological disorder and regarded as a mental illness," moral injury "does not have [a] physiological underpinning and is not a mental illness, but instead is linked to a moral conflict" (Feinstein, Pavisian & Storm, 2018, p. 5; cf. Di Giovanni, 2020, p. 67).

A moral injury may occur when a person experiences an event, either as a participant or witness, the content of which is strongly at odds with that person's morals, i.e. one's core beliefs and expectations about the nature of the world, particularly regarding how other persons and oneself ought to behave. These beliefs and expectations are therefore a set of assumptions (or "schemata") about the world that serve to orient a person in life; they likely will include an assumption that, for all its injustices, the world is essentially just, and that for all their many flaws, people are essentially good. A moral injury is therefore a form of deep derangement and destabilisation of a person's fundamental means of interpreting and anticipating the content of one's own life, and the actions of oneself and others. In short, a discrepancy appears between one's experience and one's expectations regarding these basic items of one's life. The existence of this discrepancy is disorienting and distressing, and for continued psychological functioning must be integrated into a new, necessarily altered set of basic orienting schemata. This work of integration, of coming to terms with the moral ramifications of the experience, is often not only taxing, but exhausting, consuming significant "psychological and emotional resources" (Litz et al., 2009, p. 700). As one's morals have been affected, it is unsurprising that emotions with moral content are involved in the aftermath of morally injurious events: according to Osman et al. (2022, p. 1), guilt and shame are its primary emotions, and secondarily emotions such as anger, disgust, and contempt.[1]

Behaviours due to moral injury include self-harming activity, such as the misuse of alcohol and other drugs, the avoidance of positive experiences, and "emotions and cognitions such as demoralization (e.g., feelings of confusion, hopelessness, and self-hatred)" (Dursun & Watkins, 2018, p. 123).

That journalists are at elevated risk of moral injury has been noted by, e.g., Feinstein, Pavisian and Storm, who note that, as society's "contemporary historians" (2018, p. 1), journalists not only serve as witnesses to every notable negative event, including natural and human-made disasters, war, and crime, they are also professionally required to maintain as objective a stance on events as possible, and therefore not to intervene in the suffering they witness. As Feinstein and colleagues put it:

> One could plausibly argue that journalists, as opposed to other first responders, might be particularly vulnerable to moral injury given that the primary nature of their work, namely to bear witness and record events, means they are relatively more removed from providing direct help and succour to distressed people than the other professions engaged in humanitarian aid efforts. How to reconcile taking photographs or writing about people in extremis rather than putting down one's camera or pen and helping is not a new challenge for journalists. What is 'new', however, is turning the spotlight on the profession and finding that moral injury can arise as a consequence of this dilemma. (Feinstein, Pavisian & Storm, 2018, p. 6; cf. Browne, Evangeli & Greenberg, 2012, p. 207)

Finally, these remarks lead us to the case of "humanitarian" journalists, a small but important subset of the profession that has a particular vulnerability to moral injury. Humanitarian journalists practise a "hybrid" commitment to the core values of both journalism and humanitarianism (Scott, Wright & Bunce, 2023, p. 3; Stevens, 2020, pp. 201–203). Generally speaking, they are equally committed to the journalist's task of bearing witness to the newsworthy events of their time, and to the

humanitarian's efforts to prioritise and alleviate instances of human suffering, wherever it appears and whomever it affects. While in principle these two enterprises share certain underlying values, such as "independence, neutrality, and impartiality" (Scott, Wright & Bunce, 2023, p. 49), in practice this hybrid approach ensures a perpetual tension within the practitioner between her journalistic and humanitarian commitments, while also making her into an awkward, outsider figure in both professions. It has been argued that many (or most) humanitarian journalists embrace this status, seeing it as part and parcel of those practices necessary to counter both the deforming effects of the 24-hour news cycle (and mainstream media outlets' ways of prioritising and framing news), and the representation of humanitarian issues by aid agencies themselves (which are often viewed to some extent as "polluted" by their financial and other relationships to non-humanitarian actors, such as government bodies; see Scott, Wright & Bunce, 2023, pp. 20–24). Yet, in our view, this embrace (or at least, acceptance) on the part of humanitarian journalists ensures they are unavoidably prone to experience a frustrated intimacy regarding the humanitarian content of their work. Despite their voluntary operation in a liminal zone between journalism and humanitarianism, most humanitarian journalists are unwilling to act or be seen as advocates (or activists) for humanitarian causes (Scott, Wright & Bunce, 2023, pp. 49–50; Stevens, 2020, p. 203), choosing instead to maintain a grip on the journalist's commitment to impartiality, however this may be interpreted and acted by individual humanitarian journalists, and regardless of how convincing this posture is to non-humanitarian journalists. This means that humanitarian journalists are motivated by the enthusiasm (arguably, zeal) of the humanitarian, and possess a deep affective receptivity to human suffering, but, at least in principle, they continue to be restrained by their journalistic commitment not to step out of their role as journalists and interfere with the events before them.[2]

While all journalists are at risk of experiencing morally injurious events, humanitarian journalists find themselves at still greater risk, due to their powerful emotional commitment to placing themselves in situations of humanitarian importance, which are the very situations in which the kind of moral violations that are capable of producing moral injury are most likely to be found. To anticipate our later remarks, this fact (the inescapable risk of moral injury) is, in principle, no reason to abandon or avoid the humanitarian form of journalism, but it *is* reason to approach this practice, in both the field and the classroom, with a lucid awareness of its potential for moral injury, and a nuanced appreciation of what this form of journalism demands of its practitioners.

Having established a working understanding of the nature of humanitarian journalism and its relation to moral injury, we can now relate a life-changing experience had by one of us (Stevens) in 2005. Stevens visited Bosnia first in 2000 as a reporter, and returned almost yearly to the region, alongside assignments in which she was embedded with Coalition forces fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite this extensive experience of theatres of war, however, it would be her experience in 2005, in Bosnia, that would alter permanently Stevens' understanding both of herself and her profession.

A Wound on the Soul

The building is a warehouse. I look it over from outside, standing in the heat of the Bosnian summer, shielding my eyes against the glare. I see a structure of imposing size but with nothing else to distinguish it. Yet, if Hikmet is correct, this bland outward appearance is deceiving. It was his idea to come here, and he's spent the last hour or so driving us south from Kozarac, where I'd met him.[3]

Hikmet is an unusual man. It's July 2005, a decade after the end of the conflict in Bosnia, and there are few survivors of the concentration camps that appeared in Bosnia who are willing to discuss their experiences. Yet Hikmet agrees to do so. He survived the notorious camp operated by Bosnian Serb forces at Omarska, a town about 10 km south-east of Kozarac. His father and two brothers

disappeared during the war. They are presumed murdered, most likely dumped into one of the mass graves scattered around the otherwise beautiful Bosnian countryside.[4]

I'd met Hikmet in Kozarac only this morning. We'd sat together on Maršala Tita, the main thoroughfare in the town, and chatted as we shared a large watermelon I'd bought shortly before. As the traffic passed, I'd asked why he was willing to talk with me about his experiences in Omarska. "If I don't talk," he had said, a slice of watermelon in hand, "my memories will destroy me."

We had sat together in the sunshine while I listened closely to Hikmet as he spoke of horrific things.[5]

I'd asked Hikmet whether he thought it was possible for him or other survivors to heal from their experiences. After all, he was talking to me, and he himself had said that talking was a way to ease the pressure of his memories. Had he considered talking to others? Hikmet shook his head. There was no treatment available in Bosnia for men like him, he said. (It was true, especially in 2005, that psychiatric and other medical support for survivors of Bosnia's mass violence was inadequate.) And though he had just told me that he needed to talk, he then said: "If I just go and tell my story in front of the whole world, they will listen to me and I will cry. But I will not be healed."

We'd lapsed into silence for a time. Then Hikmet had turned to me. I was a reporter, wasn't I? Correct. And I was interested in the suffering of the Bosnian people? Certainly I was. I'd long since fallen in love with Bosnia and its people and took any opportunity I had to generate stories about the region, with a particular concern for those who were lost in the war, or who had survived it and now were attempting to rebuild their lives. Nodding to himself, Hikmet had then told me that, to grasp something of the enormity of the suffering in Bosnia, I had to come with him to Sanski Most, a town about 25 km south-west of Kozarac. There, he said, I would be "confronted with the reality of what living in Bosnia is like for survivors". I'd asked what was there, but he wouldn't say. It was best for me to see it in "real time," he said. And so, here we were, in the early afternoon, standing outside this large, bland-looking warehouse.

Hikmet leads me inside. And inside is not bland. Operated by the Krajina Identification Project (KIP) and incorporating anthropologists from the International Commission on Missing Persons, the warehouse, a wood processing plant before the war, is now a makeshift mortuary.[6] Hikmet's tactic of not warning me about what I was about to see proves particularly effective as I take in the sight of hundreds of bodies, or fragments of bodies, laid out on the floor. It takes me a while to understand the smell of the place, in the summer heat: not the putrid smell of rot, but a sickly sweet odour of disinfectant, mixed with the musty smell of decaying shoes and rampant mould.[7]

The number of bodies is overwhelming. I'm no forensic anthropologist, but even to my untrained eye the marks of appalling violence are plain. I can see ligatures attached to wrists and ankles; many skulls bear bullet holes or are shattered. The traces of life-ending aggression are everywhere. Many bodies have been recovered with their clothes. I can make out a red and white T-shirt laid at the feet of one body. I walk to the end of the row and look back, watching a middle-aged woman kneel slowly before the remains; a mother, I presume. I look away at whatever is closest to me, which is a metal tray holding a collection of teeth, detached from their jaws.

Several people are in the warehouse, but the space is so large and speech so little used that the atmosphere is hushed. Some who move quietly around are KIP staff; the rest appear to be family members, here to search for the remains of loved ones who vanished years ago. People like Hikmet.

I walk on—and am rendered immobile by another body. It is laid out on the floor before me, with a small white card with the handwritten number "422" at the place where the body's stomach should be.

I am staggered by the catastrophe of this body. *No*, I think, not "a body." A *person*. A man, I presume, as most of those dumped in mass graves were men or boys. He is unidentified, but nonetheless,

a man. I can see his teeth, imagine his smile. I can see brittle skin on parts of his face. The outline of his nose. Someone's son. Maybe a father, husband. And this man ends at the base of his ribcage.[8]

Figure 6.1: KIP Processing Centre, Sanski Most, Bosnia, 7 July 2005
Photograph copyright Tiania Stevens.

I have a camera, a necessary tool of my trade. I take a picture of this man. It's a great story, after all.

Once we're outside, Hikmet will tell me that he comes to this warehouse most days, hoping that his father and two brothers might be among those whose shattered remains are laid out on the floor, with a hand-written card and a number. "One day I will find my family and be able to bury them," he'll say, as we walk to his car. "Today is not the day."

It took some time for the impact of body 422 and my actions in that warehouse, before the gaze of that body, to hit me. I couldn't get the image of body 422 out of my mind. I dreamed of it, that night and thereafter. Back in the UK, where I was based, I had nightmares about it. About *him*. I had read of atrocities, of crimes against humanity and acts of genocide: of Nazi death camps, of the events that overtook Rwanda in 1994, and of course the peculiarly intimate horrors that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia. But I had never seen anything like body 422. I had never looked into its face in this way. This was a man. Part of him, at least. And with my camera and my motive to generate a "great story" I had recorded his image, not only when this man was at his most vulnerable, but when the very fabric of him was ruined. Why had I taken that photograph? Did I *need* it? In certain moods, the fact I had taken it at all struck me as almost monstrous.

Two interwoven realisations quickly overtook me and would not leave. Firstly, I realised that I had previously considered such horrendous crimes only intellectually, and that I had arrived at this insight now due to the fact of this man, laid out before me like some appalling museum piece. The second realisation was far more the nature of a deep moral intuition: I did not know *who* body 422 had been in life, but I needed to know. Whoever he was and had been, this man had reached me in an emotional and existential way. Something in me felt displaced, disordered, out of sorts in a way I couldn't yet put into words, even inadequately, but which I knew and felt with certainty was now essential to everything about my life. Di Giovanni (2020, p. 67) writes how Anthony Feinstein, a pioneer in the study of moral injury, describes the phenomenon as "a wound on the soul, an affront to your moral compass

Figure 6.2: Body 422, 7 July 2005, KIP Processing Centre, Sanski Most, Bosnia
Photograph copyright Tiania Stevens.

based on your own behaviour and the things you have failed to do". I would not read Feinstein's words for many years to come, nor for some time would I think of my own professional practice as one of specifically *humanitarian* journalism, though it is plain to me now that that is, and was, my natural mode as a journalist. Regardless, as I moved further away from those shocking events of that day in July 2005 in the warehouse in Sanski Most, I moved closer to and deeper into an experience whose only adequate description is the symptomatology of moral injury. And true to Feinstein's words, it was what I had failed to do since that day that eventually pushed me to action. I had to discover the identity of body 422. And I knew also, again at the level of an intuition, that not only must I learn the identity of this man, but that my doing so was both the proper thing to do for that man—whoever he was—and the first step in easing my own upset.

Writing as Balm

In 2020, Stevens finally discovered the identity of body 422. Zaim Hamulić—body 422—was born on 15 June 1942, in Čarakovo, a region south-west of Prijedor and immediately south of Hambarine. His

body would be exhumed 62 years later from a mass grave in Kevljani, which lies 16 kms to the east, on the other side of Lake Saničani. He vanished on 24 July 1992, aged 50.

Zaim was a father of two. A Muslim, he met his wife, a Croatian Catholic, in Zagreb in the 1960s. Zaim was in the city to study law, after which he and his wife made their home back in Bosnia. Zaim worked as a lawyer. Family life was warm; his son, in conversation with one of us (Stevens), said he was "the happiest kid on Earth" growing up in the former Yugoslavia, under the Communist regime of Josip Broz ("Tito"). (Affection for the Tito regime and the former Yugoslavia is not hard to come by in contemporary Bosnia.) Zaim loved to fish, a passion he hoped to pass to his son, though the latter cannot contemplate fishing since the loss of his father.

According to his son, Zaim was on a list of individuals to be targeted. He was taken to Keraterm camp, in Prijedor.[9] Identified by DNA analysis, he was buried in 2005, shortly after Stevens' encounter with him in the warehouse.

The identification of Zaim Hamulić was the first step. A vitally important second step was to write: for writing is balm. Each of us spontaneously creates a narrative about our life (indeed, over time, multiple narratives), to interpret and explain our experiences, both to ourselves and to others (Bruner, 1987, p. 11). From this point of view, we are beings who naturally create for ourselves a narrated world of meaning and purpose: we each "tell of" our specific experiences, and our lives overall, in the form of narratives consisting of a great many "sub-plots", e.g. our romantic partners, our families and children, our working lives, our sufferings, our victories and defeats, and so on. The work of narrating our lives lasts for the whole of our lives, and as part of this work we each return repeatedly to our prior interpretations of our experiences, often in the light of new events, in order to revise and restructure the elements of our stories (and in some cases, their overall "meanings"). It is in this way

Figure 6.3: Zaim Hamulić. Date unknown
Photograph copyright Hamulić family.

Figure 6.4: Zaim Hamulić. Date unknown
Photograph copyright Hamulić family.

that, at length, we each *become* the stories we tell (of) ourselves; our narratives "not only *describe* or reflect our lives, … they *constitute* them" (Tarragona, 2021, p. 893).

It is in terms of these and closely related claims about the nature of human experience that the "expressive writing paradigm" (Schutte et al., 2012, p. 144) has emerged in psychological research over the last several decades to examine the clinical significance of writing about meaningful experiences. Dealing predominantly with negative experiences, expressive writing has repeatedly been shown to have a positive effect both on physical markers such as blood pressure and immune functioning, and, with some qualification, psychological markers such as depressive mood and anxiety (Cummings et al., 2012, p. 379).[10] While currently it remains unclear how expressive writing achieves these effects, one model is precisely that of the creation and/or restructuring of our narratives about traumatic events (often seen in terms of our wider narratives about ourselves, etc.), and the positive effect of the cognitive processing (the re-integration of dis-integrating experiences into new, or adapted, schemata of understanding) that such creativity requires (Wilhelm & Crawford, 2018, pp. 718–719).

All of which allows the therapeutic value of writing about our experiences of moral injury to be understood. As noted, morals are core beliefs and assumptions about the nature of ourselves, the world, and how we each ought to act. Consequently, they are crucial to how we construct the narratives of our lives. In deranging these core assumptions, morally injurious events disrupt our individual narratives. In their wake, the "texts" of our lives are disordered; what previously was integrated is now dis-integrated, to some extent. What made sense before is now corrupted by non-sense. This disarray produces psychological distress, and as our morals are tied to how we act, the morally injured person is often unsure about what she might do to help herself.

Such was the case of Stevens and body 422. Up to 7 July 2005, she had not considered her actions as a journalist to implicate her in the horrific events she had witnessed. Body 422 made the atrocity human in a way she found profoundly unsettling, and the photograph she had taken of that body (her journalist's reflex to grab hold of a story), haunted her for years. Was it wrong to have taken it? Didn't she thereby dehumanise further a man whose humanity had already been abused? She carried the photograph with her, keeping it tucked into books as a disturbing bookmark, as if defying herself to forget what it showed. Body 422 deranged her assumptions about the nature of people, herself included, and according to the model that sees us each as the authors of the narrative of our lives, Stevens needed to incorporate body 422, and her own actions regarding it, into a new, updated story about herself, and about those who had murdered Zaim Hamulić.

It is here that the journalist has an advantage, for her profession is the telling of stories. The *humanitarian* journalist may be particularly vulnerable to moral injury, but she also possesses the art and craft of making narratives out of her pain, and the pain she sees in others. Indeed, if the humanitarian journalist wishes to abide by the cardinal professional precept of non-intervention in the events she witnesses, the making of stories out of those events, empathetic, powerful, urgent stories, may well be the only acceptable form of intervention open to her.[11]

Trauma and Transformation

Writing broken-hearted and in the midst of great pain, Nietzsche tells a close friend: "This last *morsel of life* was the hardest I have yet had to chew, and it is still possible that I shall *choke* on it. … Unless I discover the alchemical trick of turning this—muck into *gold*, I am lost" (Nietzsche, 1969, pp. 198–199). This "alchemy", the turning of what is base into what is precious, is one characterisation of the universal human means of *telling* the painful experiences of our lives, lives we already and inescapably interpret and articulate to ourselves, and others, through narratives.[12]

Body 422 is no longer; in its stead is Zaim Hamulić: father, husband, friend, Muslim, lawyer, fisherman. His murderers wished to blot him out of the book of life. They have failed. In the memories of his family, and in the pages of this book, he persists in life, and will long be remembered.

The practice of humanitarian journalism requires a lucidity that looks into the abysses of human experience. It also requires a belief that one is capable not only of enduring, but also transforming what one is wounded by. It is arguably the most demanding of all forms of the profession, but also the most noble, for it is closest to our ability to weave our pain into stories that inspire.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Tips

- *You are not the story*. Humanitarian journalism relies on your empathy and is driven by your passion, but you must avoid hubris at all costs. Even when you write about how a situation affected you, *you* are not the core of the story. Those whose stories you tell are the core.
- *See the sacrificial*. Humanitarian journalists can place little value on their own safety when they are passionately gripped by the need to tell the story at hand. This quasi-religious, sacrificial attitude can get you killed. Draw limits for yourself, and stick to them.
- *Pain is inevitable*. The humanitarian journalist takes a path that necessarily makes her more vulnerable to suffering from what she sees and does (or does not do). This cannot be avoided. Writing (or broadcasting, or photographing) the story is your primary way of balming those wounds.
- *Learn ethics*. While humanitarian journalism is essentially practical, you must steep yourself in ethical theories that can and ought to inform your actions. Whether those of Kant, Aristotle, Mill, or others, you must be fluent in the principles of ethical engagement.

Talking Points

- How do you think your own writing skills could be of help to you? Discuss any situations you have come across, or likely to come across, when writing might be a form of release for you?
- Discuss this phrase from the chapter, "[journalists] are also professionally required to maintain as objective a stance on events as possible, and therefore not to intervene in the suffering they witness". To what extent do you agree that journalists should not intervene in the suffering they are witnessing? Could this cause moral injury?
- What do you think the key differences are between conventional journalism and humanitarian journalism? Do you consider the trauma experienced by both to be similar or very different? How could this trauma be addressed?

Notes

1. An example of the devastating effect of morally injurious experiences had by journalists in war is given by the conflict photojournalist Ashley Gilbertson, the opening lines of whose essay, "Absences", are as follows: "On November 15, 2004, a week into an embed with a Marine company tearing through Falluja, I heard that an insurgent lay dead in a minaret from which he had been firing. No one had yet produced evidence that the insurgents were warring from mosques, which the Geneva Conventions put off-limits. I had to photograph him. The company captain assigned a squad, including Lance Corporals William Miller and Christian Dominquez, to escort me, and soon I was climbing the stairs to the minaret behind them. Moments before we reached the top, Miller was shot point-blank by an enemy fighter. I ran out as fast as I could, covered in Miller's blood, forever changed" (Gilbertson, 2014, p. 83). Gilbertson also dedicates to LCpl Miller the book he produced as a response to this life-changing experience: "For Billy Miller, who died in my place. I'm sorry" (Gilbertson, 2014, p. v).
2. This commitment to journalistic restraint and non-intervention does not mean that such journalists do not occasionally, or even frequently, act on their humanitarian impulses and intervene in the events they experience. The personal accounts of their activities written by journalists (whether self-identified as "humanitarian" or not) contain many such examples, e.g. Loyd (1999), p. 228: "I cannot understand the few journalists I have met who insist that, if confronted

by casualties, their job is merely to film, photograph or report without giving aid." This does not alter the fact that the professional requirement not to act in this manner remains, and is the source of significant professional and personal tension for those concerned.

3. Hikmet is a pseudonym.
4. For a map of known mass graves in Bosnia, see <https://massgravesmap.balkaninsight.com/map/>.
5. The crimes committed at Omarska have been extensively documented by survivors (e.g. Hukanović, 1998; Pervanić, 1999). See also Scharf (1997), whose account of the prosecution at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) of perpetrators of crimes committed during the Balkan conflicts, including those at Omarska, is highly detailed; and Karčić (2022, pp. 122–132).
6. Based in Sanski Most, the Krajina Identification Project is a forensic anthropology operation established by the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) to identify remains exhumed from mass graves and other sites in the region surrounding Sanski Most and Prijedor.
7. The bodies in this warehouse were exhumed in 2004 from a mass grave in Kevljani by representatives of the ICTY and the Bosnian Missing Persons Institute. Four hundred and fifty-six persons were recovered; 354 have been identified as of May 2023. The location of the mass grave (44°54'42.3"N, 16°52'09.4"E) is around 4 km from the Omarska concentration camp. Many of those recovered from the mass grave were detained in Omarska, Keraterm or Trnopolje concentration camps, which are all in the Prijedor region. See: <https://massgravesmap.balkaninsight.com/stari-kevljani/>.
8. As noted by Ball (2015, p. 60), Bosnian Serb forces would habitually use heavy equipment, such as bulldozers, to exhume, move, and rebury the remains of those they had murdered, in an attempt to hide the primary evidence of the crimes. A major consequence of this activity was the breaking up of many of the bodies of those killed, with remains of individuals often scattered across multiple burial locations.
9. For detail on Keraterm camp and prisoners' experiences there, see e.g. Karčić (2022, pp. 135–137).
10. Research examining a broad range of populations has generally observed a clear positive physical effect of expressive writing, and a more complex positive psychological effect. As Wilhelm and Crawford (2018, p. 712) note, "complex patterns of emotional arousal" are involved with the process of expressive writing; even when the longer term effect of such writing is psychologically positive, increases in negative mood are often observed during writing sessions themselves, particularly initially. Furthermore, while numerous studies have shown mental health benefits of expressive writing, in terms of, e.g. depression, anxiety, and stress, it must be noted that, "[w]ith a small number of exceptions … the samples used to examine improvements in these psychological symptoms have been either healthy students or people who have experienced a specific stressor or medical condition, rather than samples of participants with a diagnosed mental illness," and that most studies of expressive writing with individuals with "a severe psychiatric illness" have not demonstrated "significant benefits" (Wilhelm & Crawford, 2018, pp. 712–713). Plainly, expressive writing ought never to be considered a panacea for any kind of negative symptoms.
11. As the photojournalist Gilbertson (2014) clearly demonstrates, not all humanitarian journalists create a transformative narrative through *writing* (though Gilbertson's essay, "Absences," is a crucial element of his book). Writing is *one* means of balm open to the journalist; we do not suggest that it is the only means.
12. Nietzsche eventually performed this "alchemical trick", the result of which was the first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a book he considered the most life-affirming of his works (and, from the point of view of the material covered in this chapter, a singular example of "expressive writing").

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CHAPTER 7

Perceived Organisational Support After a Traumatic Event: A Case Study of How Slovak Newsrooms Coped with the Murder of Investigative Journalist Ján Kuciak

Marína Urbániková and Lenka Haniková

In late February 2018, Slovakia woke up to a dark morning. The whole country was shaken by the news that Slovak journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová were murdered in their home near Bratislava, the capital. Ján Kuciak (born 1990) worked as an investigative reporter for the news website Aktuality.sk, where he wrote about corruption, alleged tax frauds, and suspected scams involving European Union funds, some of which involved businessmen with ties to top Slovak politicians. It was the first murder of a journalist in the history of Slovakia since independence; it sparked the largest mass protests since the Velvet Revolution in 1989, and eventually led to a political crisis that culminated with the resignation of Prime Minister Robert Fico and his cabinet.

The double murder hit the Slovak journalistic community hard. Slovakia is a country of fewer than 5.5 million people, with a relatively limited media market and only a few media outlets producing investigative journalism. The journalistic community is rather small, heavily concentrated in Bratislava, and well-connected as many journalists are friends and ex-colleagues. This unprecedented situation was also a challenge for the leadership of news organisations, which were faced with the task of supporting the journalists through the difficult period and helping them cope with this first-hand traumatic experience. By trauma, we mean an experience that "causes intense physical and psychological stress reactions" (SAMHSA, 2014, p. xix). What organisational support did the Slovak investigative journalists receive from their news organisations to help them cope with the murder of their colleague? How did journalists perceive and evaluate this organisational support, and what type of support, if any, did they lack?

The scope, form, and adequacy of organisational support provided by news organisations has been so far examined in a number of different areas. It has been explored in cases of journalists' exposure to violent or traumatic events (Beam & Spratt, 2009; Feinstein, Pavisian & Storm, 2018; Idås, Backholm & Korhonen, 2019); in the context of emotional (Hoak, 2023) and occupational stress (Hoak, 2021; Hughes et al., 2021; Monteiro & Marques Pinto, 2017), and workplace wellbeing and emotional

challenges (Šimunjak & Menke, 2022); but also when it comes to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic (García-Avilés, 2021) and online harassment (Kantola & Harju, 2021; Nelson, 2023).

This study contributes to the existing literature by examining the organisational support provided to journalists following an event as extreme as the murder of a colleague. For several reasons, it is a unique situation in terms of the organisational support required. First, it has an enormous traumatic potential for journalists, which increases the demands and importance of the support provided. Second, such a situation requires a complex response covering different areas like physical safety, emotional support, etc. Third, unlike online harassment, occupational stress, or coverage of violent and traumatic events, the murder of a journalist is not an everyday part of journalistic work in Europe. For example, according to Reporters Without Borders, since 2000, 22 journalists have been murdered in European Union countries, of which Slovakia is a member (RSF, 2023). Therefore, the management of news organisations may have limited experience in providing organisational support to journalists in such cases. This makes it all the more important to explore how journalists evaluate the support provided by their media organisations and where they possibly see room for improvement.

Literature Review

Stress, Trauma, and Journalism

Journalism is an inherently stressful profession. In their daily work, journalists fight for exclusive stories, work under constant time pressure, and navigate a competitive environment (Monteiro & Pinto, 2017). In addition to the everyday stress, journalists also have to witness and report on dramatic events such as accidents, natural disasters, murders, executions, and wars (Feinstein, Osmann & Patel, 2018; Monteiro & Pinto, 2017). Finally, journalists not only report on traumatic events but can sometimes become part of them, for example, when they or their colleagues are attacked because of their work. One of the most extreme cases with potentially traumatic effects is the murder of a fellow journalist (Novak & Davidson, 2013)—that is what the Slovak journalistic community faced after the murder of Ján Kuciak and his fiancée.

Exposure to traumatic events can, in some cases, lead to psychological problems such as post traumatic stress disorder or depression (Feinstein, Osmann & Patel, 2018). Journalists use various strategies to cope with work-related stress and exposure to traumatic events. These strategies include denial and avoidance; talking about the traumatic experiences with family members, colleagues, and friends; focusing on work and professional duty; or, on the contrary, avoidance strategies at work; substance use; the use of black humour; physical activities; and crying (Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Englund, 2018; Novak & Davidson, 2013; Seely, 2019; Soerjoatmodjo, 2011). In the specific case of the murder of Ján Kuciak and his fiancée, the Slovak community of investigative journalists tried to cope with this traumatic event mainly by spreading the values that Ján Kuciak stood for (mostly through intensive work and cooperation with other journalists), sharing the pain with colleagues, drawing support from family members and friends, and resorting to physical activities and other hobbies (Urbániková & Haniková, 2022).

Organisational Support

If journalists encounter traumatic events as a part of their job, they should not have to deal with the consequences on their own. Their employers, the news organisations, have a moral and legal duty to support them and preserve their wellbeing. This has favourable outcomes for both journalists and the organisation.

According to the organisational support theory, "employees' commitment to the organisation is strongly influenced by their perception of the organisation's commitment to them" (Eisenberger et al.,

1986, p. 500). In this sense, perceived organisational support plays a key role, which can be defined as the extent to which employees believe that the organisation "values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger et al., 1986, p. 501).

Previous research has shown that perceived organisational support is essential in how journalists cope with stress and trauma (Beam & Spratt, 2009). If journalists feel more organisational support, they suffer less stress in general (Hoak, 2021) and less emotional stress in particular (Hoak, 2023). Higher perceived organisational support is also associated with higher job satisfaction (Beam & Spratt, 2009; Kocan & Miller, 2023; Reinardy, 2013) and a higher level of work commitment (Hoak, 2021). Conversely, lower perceived organisational support is associated with higher occupational stress (Hughes et al., 2021) and a greater level of burnout (Reinardy, 2013). Journalists who experience little support from their organisations are more likely to leave the organisation or quit journalism itself (Hughes et al. 2021; Reinardy, 2013). In addition, weak organisational support increases the risk of moral injury (i.e., the harm that may result from events that violate a person's moral or ethical code) when covering potentially traumatic events (Feinstein, Pavisian & Storm, 2018).

News organisations should provide organisational support to journalists before exposure to potentially traumatic material, but also during and after the event (Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, 2013). It can take three forms: material, logistic, and bureaucratic support; psychological support; and training (Monteiro & Marques Pinto, 2017). The first type of support refers to practical measures like assistance with vaccinations and visas, relocation to safer assignments or areas, and adopting practical safety measures (Hughes et al., 2021; Monteiro & Marques Pinto, 2017). The second type includes psychological support from superiors (including debriefing after a challenging assignment) and professional psychological support and counselling services (Hughes et al., 2021; Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Kocan & Miller, 2023; Monteiro & Marques Pinto, 2017). In particular, supervisors should create a safe space where journalists feel safe to talk about their psychological distress without feeling that it could jeopardise their careers (Beam & Spratt, 2009). The third type—training—involves, for instance, safety training, trauma education, and training in emotional literacy for both journalists and managers (Hughes et al., 2021; Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Monteiro & Marques Pinto, 2017). Previous research suggests that news organisations focus mostly on practical material support to ensure the safety of journalists (Kocan & Miller, 2023), but what journalists lack is support from their supervisors after a challenging assignment (Hughes et al., 2021; Kocan & Miller, 2023).

A murder of a fellow journalist is a unique and extreme event (Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, 2015a; Novak & Davidson, 2013) that requires specific organisational support. According to a tip sheet for managers by the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (2015b), leadership is critical in managing grief after an unexpected death in a newsroom. The tip sheet includes tips on how to break the news, set the right tone, which issues to consider in the context of a funeral or memorial service, and how to manage the mental health needs of staff. But what organisational support would be appreciated by journalists themselves, and what measures have actually proven helpful in practice?

To gain deeper insight into this particular topic, this study examines the case of the murder of the Slovak investigative journalists Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová, and asks two research questions: (1) What organisational support did the Slovak investigative journalists receive from their news organisations to help them cope with the murder of their colleague? (2) How did journalists perceive and evaluate this organisational support, and what type of support, if any, did they lack?

Data and Method

To explore the perceived organisational support provided by the news organisations to the Slovak investigative journalists after the murder of their colleague, we opted for a qualitative research strategy.

As a data collection technique, we used semi-structured interviews "in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions" (Ayres, 2008, p. 810). We interviewed 12 top Slovak investigative journalists who were engaged in producing investigative content as either reporters or editors at the time of the murders (except for one participant who was on parental leave when the murder happened).

Purposive sampling was used to recruit the participants. We entered the research field through the contacts of one of the authors with an investigative journalist from the Aktuality.sk news portal (for which Ján Kuciak worked). This journalist helped to establish contacts with other members of the newsroom. Other participants were selected based on the authors' knowledge of the Slovak media landscape. We aimed to interview all the influential personalities of the Slovak investigative journalism community, which is relatively limited in number. None of the journalists we asked for an interview declined to participate. All the participants knew Ján Kuciak personally and several were friends.

The participants work (or worked at the time of the murder) as investigative reporters (N = 9), editors in investigative teams (N = 2), or as editor-in-chief (N = 1). The length of experience of the six female and six male participants ranged from two to more than 25 years, and their ages ranged from 30 to 45. They worked for the Aktuality.sk newsroom (N = 8), the quality daily Denník N (N = 1), the quality daily SME (N = 1), and the weekly Trend (N = 2).

Since the level of organisational support may be related to the size of the media organisations and their background, it is necessary to briefly describe their ownership structure. The Aktuality.sk news portal is owned by Ringier Axel Springer Media, a large Swiss-German media house. At the time of the murder, the main owner of the daily SME and the weekly Trend was the Penta Investments group founded by local Slovak and Czech businessmen. After the Penta Investments group bought a stake in Petit Press, the media house which publishes the daily SME, the editor-in-chief and several dozen editors left in protest, and some of them went on to found Denník N. The main stake in Denník N is owned by the owners of ESET, a Slovak software company that specialises in cyber security, while the rest of the shares are owned by several dozen people, most of whom are employees of the newspaper. Thus, one of the four media outlets was owned by a foreign owner (Aktuality.sk), and three belonged to a larger media group (all except Denník N).

Before each interview, we obtained informed consent from participants. The interviews were conducted by one of the authors from November 2019 to February 2020. The interviews ranged from 45 to 180 minutes. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using the Atlas.ti software kit. Thematic analysis, "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79), was used as the data analysis method. We opted for an inductive approach (i.e., the codes are constructed from the data): we coded the interviews, developed a code structure, and then consolidated the codes into several content domains. To ensure better anonymity for the participants, the generic feminine pronoun is used throughout the text when referring to the participants.

Findings: How did journalists perceive organisational support from their news organisation?

The interviews revealed that the organisational support provided to the Slovak investigative journalists after the murder of their colleague covered five domains: security support, moral support, professional psychological support, legal support, and material support. Journalists generally expressed satisfaction with the support they received; reservations and suggestions for improvement were relatively rare. Several of them mentioned that the service from the publisher *"worked 100%"* and that *"the company did the maximum possible at that moment"*.

Security Support

When journalists were asked about the support they received from their news organisations, most of them spontaneously began to describe the security measures taken by all four newsrooms after the murder. This is hardly surprising given that from the very beginning, the police assumed that the murder was related to Ján Kuciak's profession as a journalist. In addition, it was not clear which of the cases he was working on was related to the murder. Therefore, several investigative journalists who cooperated with him on various stories felt in imminent danger.

The most active in implementing security and safety measures was the news portal Aktuality.sk. The owner, a large international media house (Ringier Axel Springer Media), sent a security expert to Slovakia, who provided training to the newsroom members and helped improve security processes. It also engaged a private security service and tightened checks on access to the newsroom. A journalist working for another media outlet was also offered the services of a private security service by the news organisation she worked for (if she was interested) but decided not to take it up.

The security measures taken by the news organisations were only an addition to the measures taken by the police. Selected investigative journalists from various newsrooms were given personal police protection (at home and at work) for a certain period, while others had police patrols reinforced in the area around their places of residence. Some journalists were also provided with a home alarm and panic button by the police.

The participants did not go into more detail about the security measures taken by the newsrooms or the police, as they had signed a confidentiality statement in this regard. In general, they welcomed these measures and described them as sufficient, such as the following journalist:

> So, I think—well, I don't know how it would be elsewhere, I don't have anything to compare it to—but I had a sense of security, and I didn't have to deal with that question. And I felt that people had a safe environment to work in here.

The journalists raised only sporadic objections to the security measures offered by their news organisations. One described that she and two other colleagues wanted to have their apartment and office searched after the murder to see if they were being bugged. However, the publishing house was unwilling to pay for such a security check, so a private donor eventually paid for it. As the following excerpt illustrates, the journalist would have preferred her employer to pay for it so that she would not be dependent on donors. Other than that, there were no further objections, suggestions, or references to lack of support.

> […] so we hired a company to do a security check of our apartments and offices, to see if there were any listening devices and so on […] But I would have preferred—from the point of view of my independence as a journalist—if the publishing house had paid for it directly, which it was not willing to do.

Moral Support

At large, the journalists also spoke positively about the moral support they received from their news organisations. They distinguished between the leadership of the newsroom (editors-in-chief and their deputies) and the publishing house; and the former seems more important for their wellbeing. Journalists from all four newsrooms appreciated their editor-in-chief's moral support, caring attitude, and genuine concern and interest. Some even cited their editors-in-chief as one of the persons who helped them the most to cope with the situation. Also, participants from three of the four media outlets (Aktuality.sk, Denník N, SME) described their newsroom, including its leadership, as a family. This suggests how important good interpersonal relations are for the functioning of a newsroom, especially in times of crisis:

> We are very much like a family company, in quotes, that we are all friends, we go out together and [the name of the editor-in-chief] is really ours, in some ways he is a part of the family, a friend, we talk to him just like everyone else, and at the same time in some ways he is like a father, he cares about us very much, he is often willing to sacrifice his own personal well-being for the people around him.

Part of an editor-in-chief's job in situations like this is to inform newsroom staff about the murder of their colleague. This was the case only at Aktuality.sk, the home newsroom of Ján Kuciak, where the editor-in-chief called an emergency morning meeting after learning the news; no special meetings were held in other newsrooms. In the meantime, however, many learned about the murder from the media and social networks. The newsroom members who were on business trips were informed by telephone. Interviews in this regard pointed to one important omission: the journalists who were on parental leave at the time of the murder were left out and learned about their colleague's murder on social media. Also, they had to face this traumatic event alone and could not draw moral support from their colleagues and superiors.

Journalists also welcomed the support of the publishing houses, especially in the case of Aktuality.sk news portal which is owned by the Ringier Axel Springer Media. Several participants appreciated that the members of the top management (including the company's CEO) showed their interest, came to Slovakia, communicated intensively with the newsroom, and offered assistance. Given that it is an international media group, journalists also appreciated that its interest helped focus the world media's attention on Slovakia and the murder. Several of them mentioned that in such a difficult situation, they were happy to work *"for a big company that knows how to take care of its people"* and that the support of *"a strong publishing house in this regard was very important"*.

Critical voices were heard only from the weekly Trend, which is owned by the Penta Investments group. In this case, the journalists described that instead of supporting them, their publisher downplayed the situation and their safety concerns:

> Our publisher was Penta, and we didn't feel any great support from Penta at that time. They didn't offer us any help but rather hinted that we shouldn't be hysterical and not be so concerned about it.

Psychological Support

The third type of support provided by news organisations was professional psychological assistance. However, this was offered only to journalists from the Aktuality.sk news portal. They had the opportunity to consult a psychologist (paid by the employer) who came directly to the newsroom. Although the participants appreciated it, no one reported having used this option. Several mentioned they considered not using the services of a psychologist as a mistake in retrospect. For example, one participant stated that even two years after the murder, she still has nightmares and that she probably should have seen a psychologist, and another described not using this option as a *"terrible mistake"*:

> I did nothing; that was my biggest mistake. The publishing house offered all the employees the opportunity to meet with a psychologist to cope with stress, and I just blew it off. […] I made a terrible mistake, you know, with all that, I didn't take advantage of that psychologist's help for example.

A frequently cited reason for not consulting a psychologist was the journalists' belief that they could handle the situation on their own. At the same time, the period immediately after the murder was very work-intensive for them, especially those from Aktuality.sk. On the one hand, intensive work and professionalism served as an important coping mechanism for journalists (Urbániková & Haniková, 2022), but on the other hand, that left less room for reflection and processing of this traumatic event,

including the use of professional help. Perhaps a direct appeal and explanation of why psychological help is important would be useful, as suggested by one of the participants:

> The extent to which we have used it [the services of a psychologist] or the extent to which someone here has tried to explain to us why it is important to use the help is debatable, but you know, we have been overwhelmed with work, we have had our normal day-to-day work, plus two hundred percent extra work to do.

Other news organisations did not offer their journalists the free services of a psychologist. Some participants mentioned that if they had been given the opportunity, they would have used it. One of them described that as a substitute for talking to a psychologist, she had intense conversations with a member of the newsroom leadership with whom she discussed the murder and its consequences at length. However, as she said, this was not professional psychological help and, moreover, she was aware that the member of newsroom leadership was giving her this time over and above her job duties, and it was not her primary task and role, so if she had been offered a consultation with a psychologist, she would have preferred it.

Legal and Material Support

A small number of journalists also mentioned practical support in the form of legal services and material help. Immediately after the journalists learned of the murder, some went to the police to testify, supported by lawyers provided by their news organisation. As one of them stated, the presence of a lawyer was also a psychological support for her. Another perceived the legal assistance as an expression of interest on the part of the news organisation and the sign that she was not left alone in dealing with the situation.

The management of the Aktuality.sk news portal also provided material support to the journalists by organising a trip to the funeral of Ján Kuciak in his home village. For some, the joint bus journey with colleagues was an important cathartic moment:

> It was very helpful that we went to the funeral together. […] the publishing house paid for the bus, every single person came on that bus, the bus was full. […] basically it was a kind of emotional cleansing, everybody was experiencing the greatest sadness at that time, and at the same time everybody didn't go alone in their car asking their conscience, but we went together, we remembered Jan, […] and it helped a lot.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, the organisational support provided to the Slovak investigative journalists after the murder of their colleague covered five domains, with most newsrooms using only some of them: security support; moral support; professional psychological support; legal support; and material support. Safety support from news organisations and moral support from the editors-in-chief appear to be the two critical areas for journalists' wellbeing. The journalists from Aktuality.sk news portal received the highest level of organisational support, which is to be expected given that this was the newsroom where Ján Kuciak worked. In this case, a strong backing of an international publishing house could also have been an advantage. The journalists generally expressed satisfaction with the support provided by their news organisations. Some sporadically expressed a few reservations and suggestions for improvement: they would have appreciated more moral support from their publishing house, better assistance with security measures, and the provision of professional psychological help paid for by the news organisation.

What is the lesson learned from this case study for news organisations, beyond the advice contained in the tip sheet for managers by the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma (2015b) and previous literature (Beam & Spratt, 2009; Hughes et al., 2021; Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Kocan & Miller, 2023; Monteiro & Marques Pinto, 2017)? Consistent with organisational theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and previous research (Hughes et al., 2021; Kocan and Miller, 2023), this study shows that supervisor support is critical to perceived organisational support. The role of the editors-in-chief proved to be particularly crucial: their empathetic and understanding approach and the friendly relationships within the newsroom were essential to the journalists' coping with the tragic event. However, the interviews pointed to a significant omission. The journalists who were on parental leave at the time of the murder were left out. They learned about their colleague's murder on social media, not at the newsroom meeting, had to face this traumatic event alone, and could not draw moral support from their colleagues. The newsroom management should also keep these employees in mind in similar situations.

While journalists expect mainly moral support from the newsroom leadership, they expect practical support from the publishing house: for example, the provision of security support, legal and material assistance, and the provision of professional psychological help. This study adds to the body of previous research that points to the reluctance of journalists to use mental health resources (Hoak, 2023; Keats & Buchanan, 2009). We suggest that expert psychological counselling should be provided by all news organisations whose journalists may have been affected by the murder of a fellow journalist, not just the one for which the murdered journalist worked. News organisations should also explain to journalists why it is important and actively encourage and motivate them to use it. It is also necessary to create space for journalists to reflect and process the traumatic event and ensure they are not overloaded with work. Last but not least, professional psychological help should be offered not only immediately after the traumatic event, but also repeatedly over a longer time frame of several months. The interviews revealed that the journalists initially thought they could cope with the murder on their own, and only after an extended period of several months or years did some of them find that they were less successful than they would have liked.

Finally, it should also be noted that the generally high level of satisfaction with the support provided by news organisations may also be to some extent a consequence of the fact that journalists often try to cope with the adverse effects of their profession on their own. Also, they may not have a complete overview of all the possible forms of assistance that can be taken. For example, previous studies mention trauma education (Hughes et al., 2021; Keats & Buchanan, 2009) and emotional literacy training for both journalists and managers (Šimunjak & Menke, 2022) as possible forms of organisational support. The fact that this type of support was not spontaneously requested by the journalists may not be due to their lack of interest but simply because these options did not occur to them.

Five years after the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová, four persons have so far been convicted. The two executors of the murder have been sentenced to 25 years in prison; a middleman (who decided to cooperate with the police and act as a witness) has been sentenced to 15 years; and the person who ordered the murder from the middleman has been sentenced to 25 years. However, the suspected mastermind, a businessman who had threatened Ján Kuciak in the past and had him followed, was acquitted by the court in May 2023. The families of the victims plan to appeal and take the case to the Supreme Court. Nevertheless, politicians, law enforcement agencies, and other actors should do everything in their power to ensure that news organisations in Slovakia and elsewhere in the world are never again faced with the need to support their journalists following the premeditated murder of their colleague.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Talking Points

- Previous research shows the reluctance of journalists to seek professional psychological help. What could be the reasons for this? And how could the situation be improved? What could media organisations and journalists' associations do to help?
- The chapter states that perceived organisational support plays a key role, which can be defined as the extent to which employees believe that the organisation "values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger et al., 1986, p. 501). Discuss whether you agree with this statement. What organisational support do you have available, or are even aware of? How could this be improved?

Tasks

- Imagine that a close colleague in your newsroom experienced a traumatic event a few weeks ago. You know her well and you see that she has not been herself since then. She does not want to talk about her experience, isolates herself from others, is irritable, looks tired and sleep deprived. What would you do? In groups or alone, devise a best model flowchart for peer support.
- Similarly, you suddenly find yourself feeling out of sorts having covered a particularly upsetting event. Map a "support chain" of people you could turn to and resources you could use. This will be useful for future events which might be triggering.

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CHAPTER 8

Covering the Climate-Induced Flooding in Pakistan: Causes, Effects, and Outcomes of Journalistic Ordeals

Firasat Jabeen, Saleem Abbas and Adeel Ahmad Aamir

This essay examines how the recent 2022 floods in Pakistan have affected journalists' emotional wellbeing; in this context, the chapter further proposes suggestions that can be helpful for journalism students or prospective media practitioners. Specifically, we investigate the first-hand trauma endured by Pakistani journalists who covered the 2022 floods; in light of our experiences, we also propose some strategies for journalism training in handling trauma. As authors, our situational circumstances—wherein all three authors are university teachers of media studies and two of us (Saleem Abbas & Adeel Aamir) have journalistic experience—are helpful for us to comment on the teaching and practice of journalism in Pakistan. In other words, the authors have used their situational and experiential circumstances to explicate the effects of trauma-induced coverage among Pakistani journalists—something known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Towards the end of this chapter, we suggest a few practices that can prepare current or prospective students of communication and media studies to deal with anxiety and depression in the aftermath of difficult journalistic assignments.

The scale of devastation caused by the 2022 floods is unprecedented in the history of Pakistan. In a report by *Aljazeera*, Chughtai (2022) described that 81 of the country's 160 districts were identified as "calamity hit". Furthermore, commenting on the severity of the matter, Zahidi (2023) argued that the recent floods affected one in seven people in Pakistan. While this natural calamity was extremely devastating, were our journalists and media persons ready and trained to confront the trauma engendered by witnessing and reporting flood victims? This is a question that we address in this chapter and attempt to entail some approaches that may ensure the readiness of journalists for the coverage of any trauma-related events.

Pakistan is a difficult country to practise journalism. According to a report by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Pakistan ranks 10th among the worst countries for journalist safety on the Global Impunity Index 2022 (CPJ, 2022, p. 5). This is partially because in the past few decades, various parts of the country have been facing turmoil in the form of conflict, terrorism, violence,

tragedy, earthquakes, and, quite recently, the worst floods in history. Thus, it is quite common for journalists to be given dangerous assignments in field reporting. Moreover, the country's political and governing landscape does not encourage deviation from the status quo. Consequently, the existing situational factors compound the overall situation. A few months before the writing of this chapter, a Pakistani journalist and television anchor, Arshad Sharif, was shot dead outside the country in mysterious circumstances. Similarly, in another incident, a female TV reporter, Sadaf Naeem, fell from a truck when she was on her reporting assignment for a political rally of *Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf* (PTI) (one of Pakistan's leading political parties). Soon after the fall, Naeem lost her life as a truck carrying the PTI chairperson ran over her. Both incidents reveal the absence of a supportive environment and safety equipment for journalists in Pakistan.

These circumstances allude to the lack of focus on journalists' physical wellbeing; in this context, the focus on journalists' emotional wellbeing seems to be a far-fetched idea. As mentioned earlier, the 2022 floods in Pakistan were a recent trauma-inducing incident. Thus, to present an all-encompassing overview of journalists' suffering, we have conducted in-depth interviews with twelve journalists who endured first-hand trauma while covering the 2022 floods; then, we describe some strategies that can be helpful for media professionals for the reporting of incidents that may engender trauma. What follows is a review of the literature on trauma reporting in Pakistan.

Before we delve into the discourse of research in the context of trauma journalism in Pakistan, it is important to discuss the overall situation of media research in the country. In terms of research and scholarship, communication and media studies are a developing field of inquiry in Pakistan. According to Khan, Zafar, and Abbasi (2009), the research in mass communication is "underdeveloped" (p. 117) and has several technical and systematic problems. Moreover, Khan, Zafar, and Abbasi (2009) outlined several reasons for the dearth of research in mass communication (pp. 116, 117). The lack of a multidisciplinary approach, the absence of a general research culture, and the lack of consideration of market-driven needs for communication theory and research are but a few to name. This explains the inadequacies of the overall research environment in Pakistan in the field of media studies. In this context, the endurance of trauma, suffering, and upheavals faced by journalists is a relatively ignored area of inquiry in Pakistan. This chapter thus adds to the scant literature on trauma reporting in the country by describing the experiences of trauma endurance by Pakistani journalists (especially in the aftermath of the 2022 floods). We also suggest some strategies that can be incorporated into journalists' training in the future.

It appears that although there is an established body of literature on coping strategies for journalists in the reporting of trauma-related incidents in countries where journalism is a developed field of education, in Pakistan, this is largely an underdeveloped area (Khan, 2019; Nasir, 2020; Shah et al., 2020; Khan, 2022). In a recent study, Shah et al. (2020) argued that in Pakistan, regional journalists (in peripheries) do not have access to training centres or materials that can prepare them for the coverage of trauma-related events. Shah et al. (2020) allude to the problem of a language barrier in journalists' access to knowledge on trauma journalism. This assertion is important because not everyone has access to the learning and acquisition of English in Pakistan. Most elites of wealth or power can buy access to learning English in Pakistan (Rahman, 2002). This means that due to the language barrier, many journalists cannot access online resources to educate themselves on handling trauma during the coverage of risky assignments.

The study by Shah et al. (2020) is important for two reasons: (a) this is the only Pakistani study conducted in the context of trauma and journalism (Bedar, 2021), and (b) this study encompasses the experiences of 216 journalists from the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)—an area that has been facing turmoil because of sharing a border with conflict-ridden Afghanistan and the influence of the Taliban in some parts of the province. It is also important to mention that in Pakistan, most journalists

in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are affected by trauma, as media persons in these areas often work on conflict-related assignments (Bedar, 2021; Jamil, 2019).

The Pakistani media landscape is diverse, multilingual, and vibrant (Yusuf, 2013); it has shown considerable progress in the past two decades since the inception of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA). Specifically, PEMRA is a federal institution that regulates electronic media in Pakistan. With this progress, Pakistani media also has numerous problems, and the lack of disciplinary training in journalism is central to that problem. According to Siddiqi (2016), 70% of journalists in Pakistan do not have journalism degrees. This implies that the majority, who are practising journalism, do not have professional training, let alone training in enduring trauma. In Pakistan's volatile circumstances owing to political instability, terrorism, poor governance, and recent climate-induced hazards (such as heatwaves, droughts, and floods), journalists often deal with misery, death, and destruction. In this context, Dart Center Asia's training in 2013 in Pakistan to help journalists learn to deal with stress and trauma was the first of its kind. This corroborates that journalists' training on trauma is a new concept in the country and began hardly a decade ago.

Regarding the history of journalists' formal training on coping strategies for trauma, a report by the University of Peshawar (2015) noted that in Pakistan, the University of Peshawar was the first to begin the Competence and Trauma Centre for Journalists (CTCJ) in 2015. The CTCJ, a collaboration of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication and the Department of Psychology, provided free counselling and psychotherapy to some severely traumatised journalists in the region of Peshawar. The CTCJ, however, was closed in 2018 for administrative reasons. However, in the same year, the Centre for Excellence in Journalism (CEJ) at the Institute of Business Administrative (IBA) in Karachi took the initiative of establishing a Wellbeing Centre for journalists wherein they began free counselling of journalists who were suffering from trauma, anxiety, and depression. The Wellbeing Centre published a three-year report in 2021 entitled "Stress and Coping in Journalists: Findings of a three-year counselling service". Bedar (2021) reported that this is a "first of its kind" study published in the country that highlights the need for and importance of this area in the field of journalism. Both the Competence and Trauma Centre for Journalists (CTCJ) and the Wellbeing Centre were established with the support and funding of the Deutsche Welle (DW) Akademie—a German media development organisation.

In the Pakistani cultural context, suffering from trauma, anxiety, or depression is a taboo topic to discuss. In a country where the profession of journalism is essentially a male-dominated domain (according to Siddiqi (2016), women make up only 5% of Pakistan's journalist community), journalists often hesitate to talk about this phenomenon because of the stigma attached to it (Hussain, 2015; Khan, 2019). A report by the Pakistan Press Foundation (2015) also attested to the fact that mental health care carries stigma in Pakistan. In addition, Reuters (2014) once reported that Pakistan, a country of 180 million people, has only 450 practising clinical psychologists. Although these figures are nearly a decade old now, there is still a dearth of practising psychotherapists in the country.

As mentioned earlier, since the inception of PEMRA in 2003, Pakistani media has shown remarkable growth. However, this progress has caused some problems as well. Essentially, in the post-PEMRA period, Pakistani media (especially television) has faced difficulties related to unhealthy competition, consequently leading to a compromise on professional standards, ethics, and safety (Walsh, 2012; Yusuf, 2013). The media expansion from "traditional broadsheet to broadcast journalism" (Bedar, 2021, p. 13) gave rise to cut-throat battles for TV programme ratings. As a result, media persons now face increased pressure to produce news stories for editors or media owners who seem to have little or no consideration for journalists' safety and wellbeing. Media owners' or editors' lack of apathy, however, is an unexamined assumption, and one of the foci of this chapter is to ascertain whether this assumption is true.

According to Siddiqua, Latif, and Muslim (2020), most journalists in Pakistan prefer not to seek professional or psychological help if they are suffering from PTSD; they further argued that due to safety concerns, Pakistani journalists have a tendency to self-censor. Similarly, according to a national newspaper (*Dawn*)'s editorial, Pakistan ranks fifth in the world ranking where press freedom is threatened (2023). Although the coverage of risky assignments is difficult, many journalists take it up because of a number of factors, such as job security, promotion, and recognition in a career (Ullah & Jan, 2021). By highlighting the challenging field of journalism in Pakistan, all these studies warrant the need for an increased focus on trauma training and trauma research in Pakistani journalism.

The review of the literature on trauma journalism training in Pakistan reveals that this is a much-needed area of study in a country such as Pakistan. This chapter thus contributes to the existing body of literature by examining the details of trauma endured by journalists in the most recent national crisis, i.e., the 2022 floods. Our focus here is to explore what kind of emotional challenges or difficulties were faced by journalists in the coverage of the floods; what sort of feelings or emotional experiences were triggered by the difficulties that journalists themselves faced or witnessed the flood victims face; what kind of institutional support (in terms of their wellbeing) was provided to journalists from their media organisations; and last, what techniques/practices helped journalists tackle the stress that was caused by their flood coverage.

To explicate the traumatic experiences of journalists, we engaged in in-depth interviews with twelve journalists; furthermore, to offer coping strategies for media studies students, we include our observations and experiences from teaching that span several years for each of us. We conducted all interviews online using the Zoom App and later transcribed them. All interviews were bilingual, with most conversations in the Urdu language. We essentially encouraged journalists to speak in Urdu (the authors of this chapter are also fluent in this language) so that they could comfortably talk about their experiences at length. All interviews were semi-structured, and they all varied in length, with the shortest interview ranging from 25 minutes 32 seconds and the longest interview ranging from 38 minutes 23 seconds. Initially, we planned to conduct fourteen interviews. However, after the tenth interview, the responses of the interviewees ceased to surprise us. Thus, we conducted twelve interviews in total. As data saturation is the primary aim in qualitative-structured interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015), twelve interviews completely met our needs.

Our first criterion to reach out to journalists for interviews included those who themselves were involved in the coverage of the 2022 floods. In other words, journalists who endured first-hand trauma during the coverage of the 2022 floods were interviewed for this study. This included mainstream media (for newspapers and TV) journalists and regional (outstation reporters) journalists. As in most cases, mainstream media journalists were dependent upon regional journalists for first-hand stories; for this reason, encompassing both kinds of journalists was indispensable to this study. Moreover, although in some cases, cameramen and photojournalists were also involved in the coverage of 2022 floods, for this study, however, our focus for interviews was only on reporters. The choice for reporters only was made for two reasons: (a) in most cases, photojournalists and cameramen accompany reporters—or sometimes both jobs (reporting and photography) are done by the same person, and (b) at times, cameramen or photojournalists do not face the same pressure of getting spot coverage (where journalists are expected to narrate the happenings of an incident) as reporters do.

Using a snowball sample, we initially approached twelve journalists through WhatsApp. After obtaining their consent, we conducted Zoom interviews. In terms of age, we had journalists between the ages of 30 and 45. Similarly, our respondents had field experience in reporting ranging from 10 to 20 years. It is also important to note that all our participants were males. As the field of reporting in Pakistan is mainly a male-dominated area, it was difficult for us to find any female reporter who

was engaged in the reporting of the 2022 floods. Although gender makes the choice of this profession difficult for females, exploring gender-related problems is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Findings and Discussion

Since the main research question that our study investigated is related to the traumatic experiences of journalists in the coverage of the 2022 floods, our questions focused on asking about short- and long-term effects of trauma reporting, whether journalists were hesitant or diffident in sharing their feelings because of the stigma attached to mental health, and whether their news organisation (TV/newspaper) provided any support to mitigate the effects of their emotional suffering. In our interviews, we also encouraged journalists to share suggestions for academics and educational programmes on how they can incorporate training on handling trauma-related events in the field. Our participants gave us permission to video record their interviews; however, we removed their identification information as per ethical requirements.

Regarding their traumatic experiences, most journalists spoke of an increased sense of uncertainty or insecurity in their daily lives. As the 2022 floods were a natural calamity that caught one-third of the country off-guard, most participants shared an overwhelming feeling of unpreparedness. With that, our participants also shared the feeling of despondency and deep empathy where one feels oneself at the place of flood victims and it is hard just to imagine going through such circumstances. Most journalists also expressed uncertainty about the future. While reporting the 2022 floods, Soomro (2022) in *Dawn* (Pakistan's largest English daily) rightly said the catastrophe was "a living nightmare". In the wake of conversations on the effects of global warming on Pakistan's climate and, more recently, the unprecedented floods, our participants shared the fear of going through the same situation again in the future.

Most participants complained that their news organisations did not provide any psychological support or help to their reporters who were working on difficult assignments. They further shared that the lack or absence of support was not specific to the coverage of floods only; generally, employers in the media organisations in Pakistan show indifference to the concern of psychological support to the journalists' community. Even a participant responded by saying, "this is the first time somebody is bringing up this conversation" (Personal Interview, February 2023). Most journalists argued that in the coverage of the 2022 floods, they worked under difficult circumstances where they neither had safety gear/equipment nor knew how to access people surrounded by water for several kilometres. Overall, it was difficult for journalists to see people dying of hunger, thirst, diseases, and injuries. Additionally, according to most participants, they felt overwhelmed after seeing people helpless, desperate, and waiting for aid.

While responding to a question related to what has worked for journalists in terms of dealing with trauma, a reporter said that the intensity of the problem increases for somebody who is new in the profession. In emergency situations, where journalists are covering unexpected events, sometimes new recruits are also sent to journalistic beats to meet the deadline pressures. In that case, a "rookie" journalist is more susceptible to trauma effects than an experienced journalist. Therefore, most respondents argued that for young journalists, it is helpful to seek help and learn from the experiences of senior journalists who have been through similar situations in their journalistic careers. In addition, some respondents also argued that taking a break from work and giving themselves some time to rejuvenate sometimes is a helpful exercise.

We asked our respondents to describe and explain the situations they were referring to in detail so that we could obtain a better understanding. For the strategies that were effective for handling stress

and anxiety related to an event's coverage, the response of an interviewee is important and, thus, needs to be quoted here at length:

> News organisations should have journalists visit the affected areas a few months after the catastrophe when the situation is improving; seeing betterment in a devastated area is somewhat relieving for a traumatic person. In my case (having depression after the coverage of the 2022 floods), seeing destroyed areas coming back to normal life has revived my feelings of hope in me and helped me offset the anxiety and improve my mental condition. Thus, now through my links, that I developed during the coverage, I get pictures and videos of those affected areas to see the progress. This has been helpful for me in lessening my anxiety. (Personal Interview, March 2023)

In the same way, many journalists shared that they felt upset, especially when they recounted their experiences with their family members and fellow colleagues. A couple of respondents suggested that during internship programmes, students should be sent to affected areas with experienced journalists. This can help young journalists become sensitised to difficult situations and be prepared for such events in the future (Personal Interview, March 2023).

Tips to Take Away

In this section, we outline some practical suggestions that can be helpful for journalism/media trainees in the future to deal with trauma-related news coverage. Our teaching experiences enable us to identify some approaches that can be viable and useful.

- As a multidisciplinary programme enriches a media studies student's learning spectrum, especially in their undergraduate degree programmes, students should be encouraged to take courses in the field of psychology, where they can familiarise themselves with psychological aspects of going through difficult situations.

- Cross-listing courses—where two or more departments (i.e., Psychology, Sociology, etc.) can collaborate on offering course content to better equip students—is a highly effective option. Unfortunately, many Pakistani universities lack this focus (Khan, Zafar, and Abbasi, 2009). However, the advent of some liberal arts universities in the past couple of decades is a welcome development in the country.

In our experience, academic events, where students can obtain the opportunity to interact and learn from in-service journalists, are very helpful for student learning. At the time of writing this chapter, the authors had the opportunity to organise and attend two separate week-long training workshops for students on the topics of "Climate Journalism" and "Safety for Journalists". In terms of teaching and curriculum, both are relatively ignored areas in the country. The latter workshop also included discussions and conversations on "Psychological safety, trauma management, and working under pressure".

As we have been conducting and organising these workshops for the past three years, each year, a new group of graduating seniors (final-year students) engages in vibrant discussions and interactive sessions with journalists and experts in the field. Students from other universities in Lahore—the country's second-largest metropolis—also participate in these workshops, allowing opportunities for a multiplicity of ideas, the sharing of perspectives, and learning from others' experiences.

Conclusion

In the study of Pakistani journalists' traumatic experiences during the coverage of the 2022 floods, we observed that difficulties faced by journalists, particularly reporters, are manifold. Most editors are

insensitive to their employees' emotional suffering. Almost all journalists lack the basic and necessary training for handling hazardous journalistic beats, let alone the psychological hazards associated with their job. Given prevalent uncertainties in Pakistan, journalists often deal with deaths and destruction that often impinge upon media persons' psychological wellbeing. There is little or no counselling support for the sufferers of anxiety on an institutional level. However, it appears that there is a growing concern about the need for this educational training in Pakistani academic circles. It is imperative for the proper functioning of mass media that journalists' narratives of emotional suffering are given voice.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Talking Points

- Discuss whether you consider the potential trauma experienced when covering natural crises is "worse" than when covering conflict. Is there a hierarchy in perceptions of trauma? How can you address this? How can you protect yourself from other people's perceptions of the trauma you have experienced?
- The chapter questions whether "a 'rookie' journalist is more susceptible to trauma effects than an experienced journalist". Discuss the relevance of this statement in various contexts

Tasks

- Draw up a checklist on how to practise self-care and prioritise mental and emotional wellbeing. Consider the following points and reflect and review the different options.
  - The importance of getting yourself to talk (how to disregard stigma attached to mental health).
  - How to seek support from colleagues, friends, and mental health professionals.
  - How might this be enhanced for journalists covering crisis- or conflict-affected areas?
- Draw up a list of resources which would be particularly useful in specific contexts, for example, according to country, according to event (natural disaster, conflict).
- As part of your health and safety, and risk assessment documents, create a template for an event-specific handbook of resources which you can then go on to adapt and add to for future assignments.

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CHAPTER 9

The Hidden Threat: Journalism and Resilience in the Age of "Information Disorder"

Karen Fowler-Watt, Julian McDougall and Jaron Murphy

Drawing on research from the fields of media literacy, trauma and journalism and our own work at the intersection of these disciplines, this chapter considers how journalists experience first-hand trauma through reporting within a media ecosystem that is toxified by mis- and disinformation.

Society needs resilient journalism—journalism that is healthy and diverse—to function effectively. Robust, effective, and accurate communication and media are fundamental to trust in institutions, to informing publics, to encouraging ethical behaviours and to mitigating risk. Hence, resilient journalism plays a vital part in sustainable societies, but in March 2020, the precarious state that journalism and journalists had occupied for some time was starkly highlighted by the onset of a global pandemic. An "info-demic" of coronavirus misinformation and conspiracy theories compounded growing distrust in the media, exacerbated by online abuse and mirroring social trends that tend towards dissonance and lack of cohesion. First Draft was set up in 2015 to develop online resources and tools to combat mis- and disinformation; as its founder, Clare Wardle (2020) explains:

> Information disorder is complex. Some of it could be described as low-level information pollution—clickbait headlines, sloppy captions or satire that fools—but some of it is sophisticated and deeply deceptive. (First Draft, 2020)

This multilayered, challenging context has a profound impact on journalists. In an international survey of journalists conducted in the first year of the pandemic (Posetti et al., 2020), an alarming 81% cited mis- and disinformation as a key stressor, triggering anxiety and liable to cause moral injury when reporting, for example, a public health crisis (Seeva & Feinstein, 2020). This moral injury can be defined as journalists experiencing a sense of helplessness as they bear witness to something that transgresses their ethics and sense of "normality" (Shale, 2020). These feelings were exacerbated by working in an increasingly polarised context: since 2016, media have been subjected to attack as "the opposition" by Trump, and his supporters and journalists have been seen as part of an elite (Snow,

2017). In 2022, the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index identified the "globalised and unregulated online information space" as an important factor contributing to polarisation "amplified by information chaos" (RSF, 2022).

Journalism inhabits a precarious space in which journalists need resilience to navigate this age of "information disorder" (Donovan & Wardle, 2020) with its often subliminal obstacles and anxiety-inducing threats. Across the world, the professional work of journalists is now conducted in unhealthy information ecosystems, and for those covering traumatic events first-hand, the impact of this difficult context should not be underestimated.

Situated in this context of precarity, our chapter investigates the interrelationship of factors that have led journalists to experience a sense of moral injury. We examine how the fragility of journalists' working and living situations combines with anxiety about a lack of trust in their work, with the aim of devising strategies and tools to build resilience when dealing with trauma, to foster responsible journalism (and healthy societies) and to engender self-care.

Through eliciting the lived experiences of journalists, we engage with two key questions:

- What is the impact of information disorder on the trauma experienced by journalists seeking to report with truth, accuracy and fairness?

- What strategies are required to combat these challenges to build resilience in journalists and journalism practice?

The chapter concludes with some tentative ideas for journalism practitioners, educators and students seeking to build trauma and resilience awareness into their practice and to strengthen their professional identities *as* journalists working in unhealthy information ecosystems.

Hidden Threats

Unhealthy Media Ecosystems

Information disorder,[1] the polluted media ecosystem discerned by the verification experts at First Draft and others, presents a hidden threat to journalists seeking to report according to the normative values of truth, accuracy and fairness and to journalism practice situated in a fractured civic society: As Michiko Kakutani notes in *The Death of Truth:* "Without truth, democracy is hobbled … those seeking democracy must recognise it" (2018, p. 173).

Trust levels in the media have sunk again during and since the pandemic. Data from the 2022 Edelman Trust Survey[2] indicated that nearly 70% of people believe that journalists intentionally mislead them. Three-quarters of survey respondents expressed anxiety about "information war".[3] This research was conducted prior to Putin's "hybrid war" strategy for the invasion of Ukraine, so we can reasonably assume that this fear has since grown.

In seeking to understand "information disorder" and how journalists are experiencing at best challenge and at worst trauma as they attempt to work in such an environment—but also how they offer the hope of a remedy—it is most useful to think of this as an information ecosystem. This information ecosystem[4] is currently unhealthy to the point of toxicity, but like the natural environment, it can be restored to better health through human agency.

For example, BBC Media Action's stated objectives for improving the health of media and information ecosystems in fragile societies and vulnerable democracies include the following:

> providing audiences with accurate, trusted and engaging information and strengthening media ecosystems by supporting the wide availability of relevant, engaging and trusted public-interest content,

> creating or supporting networks and coalitions of media and civil society organisations working to tackle information disorder and increasing the capacity of media to produce content that tackles information disorder on an ongoing basis. (2021, p. 2)

The relative health of a media and information ecosystem is contingent on the ratio of trustworthy and credible information, professionally generated journalism, pluralism and democracy. However, currently it is also an environment which is polluted, and could be made cleaner, by the media and information behaviours of publics. In a healthy ecosystem, people care more about diverse and inclusive media representation, they access public interest media more and access broader information sources, and they make healthier and safer decisions about media, online access and data. Most importantly, in functioning democracies, people *expect* to have access to a healthy media ecosystem. The most concerning feature of "information disorder" and the kinds of findings generated by Edelman is when trust reduces but the desire for a better media gives way to apathy and cynicism.

Trauma and Moral Injury

Against the backdrop of threats and challenges posed by information disorders, news organisations have made headway over the past 10 years in developing protocols to safeguard the mental health of journalists covering traumatic events (CPJ, 2022; Redfern, 2022; Wilman, 2020). However, this support remains patchy, particularly for freelancers. Since the pandemic, the onset of remote working and another swathe of budgetary cutbacks in the industry have reduced support networks further, with journalists often working alone. Moreover, many of the journalists drafted in to report the pandemic were not hardened war reporters, used to covering conflict, crisis and human suffering. Our research conducted at the heart of the coronavirus crisis, exploring the "emotional labour"[5] (Hochschild, 1983; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020) of journalists covering first-hand trauma "on their own doorstep", indicates the following:

> The psychological and emotional impacts of dealing with the COVID-19 crisis constitute the most difficult aspects of journalists' work. The pandemic is different from other stories in that switching off is almost impossible and creative approaches to coping need to be developed. (Jukes, Fowler-Watt & Rees, 2022, p. 24)

The relentlessness of covering the story, the fear of falling prey to misinformation, navigating the minefield of social media (e.g., anti-vaxxer conspiracy theories) and the imperative of assessing risk for themselves and their families presented the journalists interviewed for our study with an insurmountable set of challenges. Their "emotional labour" weighed heavily, with some mitigation offered by a heightened sense of mission and civic responsibility.

In the post-pandemic context, what, if anything, can we learn from these experiences? Currently, journalists are navigating, for example, the context of political chaos in the UK with the intensification of "culture wars" and the deepening crisis in Ukraine, with its extreme examples of the weaponisation of information. The dangers of moral injury have not dissipated, as journalists are constantly required to step outside their normal roles to cover stories of conflict, crisis and chaos (Redfern, 2022), and they continue to operate within a toxified environment.

Resilience and Self-care

Hence, equipping journalists to become more resilient and training them in self-care are now matters of urgency. Global charity, the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, recognises the role of journalists as aligned to that of first responders. Its website, packed with useful resources for journalists to access, states that:

> Like emergency workers and first responders, journalists have begun to recognise the need for safeguards and increased peer support to ensure their health, well-being and ability to do their jobs effectively. (Self-care and Peer Support section, Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma website)

Organisations such as The Rory Peck Trust also provide resources to support journalists covering difficult stories, urging "safer storytelling" and highlighting issues that journalists are often unaware of (or see as a sign of weakness to acknowledge), such as moral injury.

In the UK, the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) has identified the importance of building resilience in working journalists and for journalism students prior to entering newsroom environments. They have developed a free e-learning resource aimed at raising awareness and providing support (NCTJ, 2023).

As already noted, the context of political polarisation and low levels of trust in mainstream media have intensified the need for journalists to focus on their own self-care, as there is evidence of "a troubling trend of journalists experiencing harassment, intimidation and assault in the field" (RSF, 2022). A rise in online abuse as well as threats to the physical safety of journalists prompted the publication of a government-backed National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists in the UK in March 2021 and led to the appointment of Dr Rebecca Whittington by *Reach plc* as the industry's first online safety editor.

Delivering a university masterclass in March 2023, Angelina Fusco, Chair of Dart Centre (Europe) identified a key challenge for journalists within the online environment—the fact that they are never able to switch off, that they are often "wired" by the need to be "always on", scrolling to verify stories and/or ensure that they had not missed a lead. As we explain in the next section, this issue constituted an overwhelming theme of research that we conducted during the pandemic, where journalists felt that putting away their phone was somehow to neglect their moral responsibility to report 24/7. However, as Fusco explains, this puts journalists between a rock and a hard place, since "bad journalism can compound the trauma experience".

Journalists' Lived Experiences

This section engages with the first of our questions: What is the impact of information disorder on the trauma experienced by journalists seeking to report with truth, accuracy and fairness? It does so through sharing two of our research projects, where we elicit the lived experiences of journalists:

1. focused on the impact of "fake news" and declining trust,

2. focused on the experience of reporting "trauma on our own doorstep" in the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This section concludes with a case study: a first person account from a journalist subjected to extreme abuse as a result of disinformation, who provides a series of action points.

Journalists and "Fake news"

Pre-pandemic, we conducted a field ethnography through a series of iterative workshops funded by the US Embassy in London to investigate lived experiences of working in the era of "fake news" among journalists, educators, students and librarians (see McDougall, 2019; Fowler-Watt & McDougall, 2019). The first-person accounts that this work generated from journalists, in what now appears to be "the before times", already spoke to the hostile environment for the profession we are now accepting as the status quo. One journalist observed an "information fight" online where "you have extremely

cynical opportunistic millennials in Gen-Z who know they can culture jam". This is challenging for the young journalist, who needs "to understand you're going into a world which is pretty much constantly having its own referendum about something all of the time". Another posited that the relationship between journalism and misinformation is complex; there is "a reliance on fake news by mainstream media, both to support its discursive position but also financially, it might need it to exist?"

We also heard "it was ever thus", several accounts that highlighted the difficulties of relying on journalists resolving the crisis from within the profession, for example:

> I just have this sense of a mainstream media that is absolutely not seeing itself as a solution because they know that nobody's truly listening, for me it's a very different space that we're now in, but as a result of something that has been around since the beginning of time. (Journalist interview)

Moving onto coping mechanisms or, at least, judgement calls about how to be a journalist in this context—and a re-emphasis on the normative values of journalism:

> Since social media, it's more important to truly drill down further to the source. Shaking down a bit, down the line, the survivors from all this will be the ones who can carry trust. It's coming back down to credibility, and that is built up over many years. Accuracy, responsibility and trust what it will come down to. (Journalist interview)

When covering potentially traumatic stories, journalists (generally arriving as "first responders") often have to grapple with different versions of events circulating on social media as they strive to report what they are witnessing first-hand. This journalist covered the Grenfell Fire tragedy in the UK, in which 72 people lost their lives:[6]

> We were told by the police that there were a specific number who had died. It was clearly going to be more, but that was the number confirmed at that stage, so we reported that faithfully. However, on social media, a much higher number was being reported and instantly you are part of the conspiracy, the media, the police and the state are deliberately understating the tragedy. So here are multiple versions of events, multiple opposing "truths" and ours becomes one of them.

Grenfell exposed the inherent dangers of information-poor communities: an absence of media in the area of London where the tower block was located meant rampaging rumour and conspiracy theories impeded the reporting of journalists when they did arrive on the scene. They were also met with suspicion, attacked as elitist, absentee and uncaring (Snow, 2017).

> As we filmed, people said "Where is the media? Where has the media been?" So we are working to the rules—find sources, establish facts, but on social media those rules don't apply and we are accused of taking the side of the state, part of a conspiracy. I would say that, in my career, something is changing that means it is just so much more difficult to operate ethically as a professional journalist. (Journalist interview)

Trauma on Our Doorstep: Journalists and Moral Injury

In the heart of the pandemic, working closely with Dart Centre (Europe), we conducted research into the auto/biographical lived experiences of journalists reporting on COVID-19 (see Jukes, Fowler-Watt & Rees, 2022). This was not a "far-away" conflict with journalists parachuting in to bear witness; it was a protracted story that they were living in while reporting on—a public health crisis that presented intense challenges to their professional focus on reporting with due accuracy and to their personal resilience in the midst of information overload.

The theme of moral injury was evident in all of the journalists we interviewed, who felt helpless and guilty when faced with the grief, economic hardship and emotional fragility of those whose stories they were telling. One broadcast journalist working outside of London was concerned that:

> "*Broadcasting video of very burnt-out people*" working in the NHS was "*exposing them to social media grief*" from anti-vaxxers who might allege that they were fabricating the crisis to "*make money from the vaccine*". Here, moral injury was evident in the sense that certain members of the public are agents of moral harm and in a fear that one's own actions could be enabling it. (Jukes, Fowler-Watt & Rees, 2022, p. 17)

For broadcast journalists in particular, the unnatural experience of interviewing people at a 2-metre distance or over Zoom exacerbated the journalists' "injurious sense that they were witnessing and involved in something 'unnatural' ". They had to assess risk for themselves and their interviewees.

Another female journalist was exhausted by navigating social media and the imperative to verify information: "The day job is hard enough, but having to read everything that everyone sends you, a lot of it unsubstantiated.. it is overwhelming" (Journalist interview).

The relentless nature of the story, the moral responsibility and the sense of mission to report accurate information discussed earlier in this chapter were summarised by the broadcast journalist working in a regional bureau:

> It has also been very pressured and relentless, and it is a story like no other that affects your professional life, as well as your personal life. You're trying to get a break from the news, but the news is reminding you of the job that you're supposed to be doing. It is very difficult to switch off. (Journalist interview)

Lone working was also very challenging for journalists' mental health—this was evident in the young community journalists we interviewed, usually working from their bedrooms, who felt a sense of responsibility to the people in the community who they would normally have been able to sit with in person, after conducting their interview, and talk to over a cup of tea:

> In some cases, it has been hard because you get a story where people get emotional over the phone. Then, you just have to think on your feet … how do you help this person, away from being a journalist? (Journalist interview)

The normal job of the journalist was overlaid with:

> Extra burden[s] to the stress of working on such a fast moving and important story where your sense of responsibility here as a journalist is truly heightened because you suddenly have this responsibility to shine a light on aspects of public life that are affected by this pandemic … all of this adds to the pressure of how you cover such a story that has such an impact on everyone's day to day life. (Journalist interview)

One positive development for the journalists in our study was that they felt that journalism had earned greater respect—even if momentarily. This emphasis on the civic, public interest role of journalism mitigated to some extent the stress and trauma, bestowing meaning on their professional lives and integral to their "emotional labour".

Disinformation and Online Threats: A First-person Account of Lived Experience

A recent and notably extreme example of disinformation impacting a journalist's safety, which illustrates the remarkably high level of resilience that can be demanded of a journalist amid an incessant barrage of online abuse and threats of physical harm, is the harrowing experience of reporter Amy Fenton:

In May 2020, as chief reporter for Newsquest's South Cumbria daily *The Mail*, Fenton routinely covered the posting on Facebook of allegations by a young woman from Barrow-in-Furness, Eleanor Williams, that she had been trafficked by an Asian grooming gang. Explosively, however, the allegations went viral online, with shareability boosted by photos of injuries she claimed were inflicted as a victim of grooming, trafficking and assault. They were "shared more than 100 000 times", "sparked demonstrations in her hometown" and led to English Defence League founder Tommy Robinson "visiting the town to 'investigate' the claims" (Barlow & Hughes, 2023). In a dramatic twist to the shocking story, it subsequently emerged that Williams was lying. Her photographed injuries, including a black eye and partly severed finger, were self-inflicted using a hammer. Nearly three years later, on 3 January 2023, 22-year-old Williams was found guilty at the Preston Crown Court on "eight counts of doing acts tending and intended to pervert the course of justice", having pleaded guilty at an earlier hearing to one count of perverting the course of justice (Barlow & Hughes, 2023). The court had heard that Williams also "falsely claimed she was raped by multiple men—three of whom subsequently tried to take their own lives" (Sharman, 2023a). On 14 March 2023, Williams was sentenced to imprisonment for eight-and-a-half years.

The scale of the impact of the spread of this disinformation was elaborated in a report in *The Guardian* on the sentencing. Williams' lies had "soon spread far beyond Cumbria and sparked a global solidarity campaign, Justice for Ellie, with more than 100 000 Facebook members. It prompted rallies all over the UK, amid allegations of a police cover-up" and sparked hate crimes. The judge, Mr Justice Altham, described Williams' allegations as "complete fiction" (Pidd, 2023). The sentence was respectfully criticised as insufficient, however, by Fenton, who had, following the guilty verdict, recounted her ordeal as the original reporter of the allegations in a piece for her current employer, Reach plc, on *LancsLive*. Fenton described having had to flee her home—on police advice—with her young daughter, late on a Sunday night at the height of the first COVID lockdown. The "straw that broke the camel's back", she wrote, was the Cumbria Police being informed "that someone had vowed to rape me and make me listen to Muslim prayers while he did so". This threat had been preceded for several days by a pile-on of "countless death and rape threats" after Fenton had reported, accurately and legitimately in the public interest, on the allegations. A number of Williams' victims who denied the allegations were also in jeopardy, suffering attacks "both physically and relentlessly on social media" (Fenton, 2023).

"All hell broke loose," Fenton recalled, after Williams' claims began to crumble under police investigation, and it was reported that she had been charged with several counts of perverting the course of justice. Fenton was targeted, nevertheless, by outraged conspiracy theorists: "I was made a scapegoat. A section of society, mostly fuelled by far-right extremism and racism, accused me of being 'in cahoots' with not only the 'corrupt police' but also 'Asian grooming gangs' " (Fenton, 2023). As reported by *HoldtheFrontPage.co.uk*, this extended to abuse of her colleagues at *The Mail* by a "gang of men… after some readers wrongly claimed there was a 'conspiracy between the press and the police to cover up crimes' ". Following Williams' conviction, Fenton said it was "an enormous sense of relief to all of her victims as well as to myself". She added: "From my perspective, being targeted simply for reporting accurately and within the constraints of the laws which govern news publishers, was incredibly tough and I only hoped that justice would prevail, which it now has" (Sharman, 2023a). Following the sentencing of Williams, Fenton's traumatic experience was palpable in her response: "I didn't expect to find today so incredibly overwhelming but I did… I think of myself as being something of a tough cookie but I cried as I heard the judge refer to what happened to me." She added: "While I will always have respect for the police and appreciate the often impossible task they have faced over the last three years, I will never forget or forgive the way in which my young daughter and I were left to fend for ourselves and offered no place of sanctuary when, at the same time, the defendant was accommodated in a

safe house." Fenton also addressed the public: "I just hope that all those individuals who threatened to kill the true victims in this case will now reflect on their actions and feel utterly ashamed. In addition, perhaps they will appreciate that professionals with knowledge of the law, including the police and journalists, acted in such a way to uphold the criminal justice system" (Sharman, 2023b).

Building Resilience in Journalists and Journalism Practice

The Eleanor Williams story was, of course, just one of many hard news stories covered by Amy Fenton in her career thus far. For the purposes of this chapter and to help us address our second question:

> What strategies are required to combat these challenges to build resilience in journalists and journalism practice?

Fenton kindly provided a range of additional action points that might help trainee journalists, with the support of journalism educators, to become better prepared for the realities of first-hand trauma—in their case via disinformation and related safety threats:

Online Violence

Fenton says she is "certainly less trusting". What would she advise trainee journalists to do (or not do) in dealing with online violence?

> Acknowledge it for what it is. People act in this way because they want a reaction. In my case, I was determined to not allow these people to believe or know that I was scared or threatened by what they were saying. Nor would I allow it to prevent me from continuing to do the job I love so much.

Disinformation and Conspiracy Theorists

Fenton provided further advice for trainee journalists on dealing with disinformation:

> Talk—don't keep things to yourself. There will always be people out there who don't like you and what you do. However, I have found that in sharing experiences with other people, reporters or otherwise, you will be supported and backed up.
>
> Consider everything—whether that's a press release, tip-off or even a poster about a fundraiser, by asking what is missing. Is there something you're not being told? Is there a reason for this information being given to you? Can you trust the source?

Threat Escalation

What would Fenton advise trainee journalists to do (or not do) in situations where online violence appears to be escalating to physical danger? "Make sure you know how your employer is able to deal with situations like this," she warned.

> Remember—if this ever happens, and it's because of your job, then it's their responsibility to keep you safe.
>
> It is very rare for these types of people to actually do anything in person. Their aim is to instil fear. In any face-to-face situation, I would always advise having your phone at hand, constantly being aware of your surroundings in case you need to escape, not putting yourself in a situation where your location is publicised and you are alone.

Resilience

Fenton reflected that she "instinctively" dealt with the stressful circumstances arising from the Williams story. Her sense of mission was heightened, as she "remained resolute that in no way would I allow it to affect my commitment to reporting the truth…I refused to allow myself to be seen as a victim". She considered herself naturally quite resilient and was supported by friends, family, GP and counselling.

In terms of strategies that might help trainee journalists build resilience and cope with trauma, Fenton offers this advice:

> Know that there will come a time when you write something that will make people hate you—it's inevitable. What happened to me was the extreme, but reporters everywhere, every day, are criticised simply for doing their job. All you can do in response is remind yourself of why you are doing this job. To tell the truth—although sometimes it's not what people want to hear.

Conclusion

In this age of "information disorder", despite the clear responsibilities of news organisations to support and protect their employees, the route to building resilience appears to rest mainly with individual journalists. The testimonies we have elicited and shared within this chapter indicate that the strategies at the end of this chapter might also be useful in order to focus on self-care in retaining a healthy balance, to mitigate first-hand trauma and to ensure that the weight of "emotional labour" of journalism remains in check.

For all of the journalists interviewed, faced with the "hidden threat" of information disorder, that sense of mission is a key motivator and potential shield from distress, as Amy Fenton emphasises:

> You can make a difference, you can implement change and you can be a voice for the silenced…Never underestimate the power you have.

They all believe, passionately, that journalism can still be an agent for positive change, even in an unhealthy—often toxic, and sometimes threatening—media ecosystem. We would go further to argue that every piece of credible, trustworthy journalism makes a positive contribution to making the ecosystem less polluted. Credible journalism is *the* essential antidote.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Tips

- Switch off from social media and email when not on shift
- The sense of mission and "doing a good job" can offer a shield from distress
- Anchor self and practice in the normative values of journalism
- See yourself as an agent for positive change within the unhealthy media ecosystem
- Check in on yourself and others
- Seek support and demand it if it is not forthcoming (from employers and other agencies, such as police).

Task

- Read through the strategies above and decide which resonate with you. Either in a group or alone create a digital vision board you can keep to hand to look and reflect on during difficult moments of your professional practice. This could include images of news stories or journalists that inspire you, wellbeing reminders and tips for self protection from online abuse.

Notes

1. First Draft defines information disorder as a collective noun for false information that is shared either with or without intent. Hence, disinformation, misinformation and mal-information can be termed collectively as "information disorder" For more detail see: <https://firstdraftnews.org/long-form-article/understanding-information-disorder/>
2. In 2022, the Edelman Trust Survey: The Cycle of Distrust, sampled more than 36,000 respondents across 28 countries.
3. Information war can be defined as the use of information to achieve national objectives. According to NATO, information war can be waged to gain an information advantage over the opponent.
4. The information ecosystem is understood to be complex adaptive systems that include information infrastructure, tools, media, producers, consumers, curators, and sharers. They are complex organisations of dynamic social relationships through which information moves and transforms in flows.
5. Emotional labour is the process of managing feelings and emotions in order to be able to fulfil the emotional requirements of a job—in this case of working as a journalist.
6. On 14 June 2017 a deadly fire broke out in the Grenfell Tower, a 24 storey block of flats in one of London's wealthiest areas. Seventy-two people died, 70 were injured. It was the worst residential fire in the UK since the Second World War. The rapid spread of the fire was attributed to the building's external cladding. Residents had been campaigning for some time that the building was at risk of fire and the lack of any local journalism in the area was seen as an added impediment to their voices being heard.

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CHAPTER 10

Local Journalists and Trauma in Burkina Faso

Emma Heywood, Marie Fierens, Moumini Niaoné and Florence Le Cam

> *Trauma—the thing that happens to us that we cannot name, that we can only describe in the vaguest terms and that we hope that other people will not notice.*
>
> *Local journalist, Burkina Faso*

Much research has been conducted on trauma and foreign conflict reporting from a Western perspective, for example, PTSD in Western reporters when they travel to or are "parachuted" into another country to send reports on a crisis or conflict back to home audiences (Feinstein & Starr, 2015, Feinstein, Owen & Blair, 2002; Osman et al., 2020; Rentschler, 2009). However, this reporting is often informed by, or with the assistance of, local reporters living in the conflict-affected country, reporting on members of their own ethnic communities and are therefore emotionally close to the potentially traumatising events. Understanding the potential trauma that they suffer is essential (Al-Ghazzi, 2021; Charles, 2022).

This chapter examines trauma experienced by local journalists in the conflict-ridden West African country of Burkina Faso who report on violence and its consequences to both their own communities and populations and to international audiences. The obvious complexities that shape and trigger trauma in this context and that set Burkina Faso aside from its neighbours must be investigated and considered to avoid homogenising trauma as a single concept. Trauma experienced by local journalists in Burkina Faso is triggered by numerous factors, from inside and outside the country, which themselves are evolving, producing a continuously changing environment. This chapter discusses some of the many realities facing Burkinabe journalists as well as the difficulties of discussing this topic without falling into traps of stereotyping (Kármán & Márföldi, 2021). Understanding that not only do we all have our own perceptions of trauma that are shaped by our own contexts but that we also have our own perceptions of others, their context, and their traumas forms the basis for a better understanding of colleagues' professional on-the-ground reality. In other words, while the complexities surrounding

trauma may have an impact on journalists, they also provide valuable information about the society in which these journalists work.

The chapter discusses the case of trauma and local journalists in francophone Burkina Faso, an underreported country in anglophone countries in the West. It draws on specific examples from journalists we have worked with and from conversations with one of our authors, Dr. Moumini Niaoné, a Burkinabe medical doctor in public health and guest radio doctor, who has recently started delivering trauma training to journalists in Burkina Faso. His experiences allow us not only to better understand the way in which trauma is experienced in Burkina Faso but also how it is perceived, managed, or not managed. The chapter provides points for reflection and discussion highlighting the need to be aware of differences between perceptions of, and approaches to, trauma and the need for this to be considered in conflict reporting practices.

Burkina Faso: A Country of Growing Insecurity and Violence

The landlocked West African country of Burkina Faso comprises over 60 ethnic groups, each enjoying their own cultures, speaking many national languages and co-existing largely peacefully. At the bottom of the HDI (2023) index, over 40% of the population lives under the poverty threshold (World Bank 2023). Ninety percent of the 22 million population rely on agriculture or livestock raising, now threatened by the consequences of climate change and rural migration. Since 2014–2015, the previously peaceful environment has been shaken by threats and attacks by violent armed groups, resulting in two million internally displaced persons, a crumbling infrastructure and political instability having experienced two military coups in just 2022 (Barlow & Dobos, 2022). Anti-Western, and particularly anti-French, sentiment is also on the rise (New Humanitarian, 2023). Many regions are experiencing extreme food poverty, restricted access to water, no schooling, inadequate health provision, and blockades preventing humanitarian aid access (ReliefWeb, 2023). The country faces a high burden of infection and noncommunicable diseases, including mental health and malnutrition, resulting in a humanitarian crisis (European Commission, 2023).

Journalists' Trauma in Burkina: A Necessarily Complex Approach

Burkina Faso's growing political instability and violence, be it from armed groups or the authorities, has triggered dramatic changes in journalistic practices, especially since the conflict context is new to Burkina Faso's journalists and is a marked contrast to their former peaceful working environment. This has seriously impacted both local and international journalists' security and access to information. The associated trauma is also "new"—although trauma among journalists, particularly women journalists, has long predated 2015—and consequently there is an inability, and sometimes unwillingness, to understand it and therefore address it. Burkinabe journalists encounter violence—be it psychological or physical—as both citizens and media actors, and as such, they are highly exposed to trauma. "Exposure to aggression, massacres, the harrowing experience of displacement and the constant anxiety of insecurity all contribute to the development of mental health problems" (Humanitarian Alternatives, 2023).

Journalists may appear ignorant of the effects of what Peters (2001, p. 708) calls "the weighty baggage" of witnessing atrocities and what "it means to watch, to narrate or to be present at an event". The majority of the population, including journalists, appear ignorant of the concept of "trauma" and its risks and consequences, let alone the changes in their own behaviour. Dr Niaoné expressed his surprise following an initial training course with journalists when people started talking about their experiences. They would say, "I did not know it was like this. I did not know that's what it was. This is what we're talking about". One woman he mentioned was in a hotel when an attack occurred. She

did not recognise her subsequent nightmares and trouble sleeping as trauma. The inability to name the phenomenon is problematic in itself; after all, why seek help if the issue is not identified. As such, journalists, their hierarchy, their family and medical staff are hindered in seeking help or treating it. The reasons for their ignorance, or maybe denial, are multiple, complex and merit their own dedicated research. Nonetheless, they build on a web of complexities that are specific to the Burkinabe context and that can be approached from a tiered perspective.

Complexity 1: Policy Level

As in other sub-Saharan African countries, "policies and legislation rarely exist to establish essential mental health services" (Spittell et al., 2010, p. 1). Despite the high prevalence of mental health disorders (MHD) in Burkina Faso (Ouédraogo et al., 2017), on a policy level, benchmarks do not exist for their prevention or treatment (WHO, 2023). As a result, understanding and awareness of mental health issues and better facilitation of early intervention are not facilitated.

Referred to as the poor relation of the health sector, mental health, alongside oft-neglected tropical diseases, is underfunded despite being included in the country's National Economic and Health Development Plan, which mentions good mental health as an attainable goal, and despite there being a national mental health strategy (2019–2024). Specialists agree that there is a legal vacuum in the provision of mental health care in Burkina Faso that complicates actions to promote mental health, reduces people's awareness of mental health issues, and reduces their chances of accessing mental health services when they need them.

Complexity 2: Physical Environment

Lack of Infrastructure

The lack of specialist attention, status and top-down trauma-informed direction regarding MHD in the country results in low infrastructural organisation, which does not match the pace of the security crisis and the increasing risk of triggering trauma. "Health workers are poorly trained and unaware of the identification, referral and management of mental health problems" (Pupat et al., 2023). Moreover, the mostly private insurance services refuse to cover those working in high-risk areas (so-called red zones). Imagine, then, journalists who have to go and work in these zones, knowing that they have no insurance and that they travel at their own risk. This additional source of stress should not be overlooked.

In Burkina Faso, the limited access to care is evidenced by having only 112 mental health professionals: 11 psychiatrists, 86 nurses specialised in mental health, 5 psychologists, and 10 neurologists, all working mostly in public structures in the capital and two other large cities (Ministère de la Santé, 2019) for a population of 22 million and a growing demand for services. "Medicine" is perceived to be hospital-based, with a focus primarily on physical illnesses, rather than being holistic or community-based where the causes of MHD may be found.

In Ouagadougou, the capital, the *Institut des Sciences et Techniques de l'Information et de la Communication* (ISTIC), the *Institut Panafricain d'étude et de recherche sur les médias, l'information et la communication* (IPERMIC) and many private institutions offer journalism training. NGOs and foreign universities provide similar training, but student selection is difficult, fees are prohibitive, and the content is not always adapted to journalists' needs. Generally, Sub-Saharan African journalists from Francophone countries do not follow any dedicated professional training before practising as journalists (Frère, 2016). Dedicated trauma training for journalists is, by force of circumstance, nonexistent. Although journalism training is limited in Burkina Faso, as it adapts to the changing security crisis in

the country, a significant gap remains in the lack of trauma-informed training to aid future and existing journalists.

Lack of Institutional Support

It is widely recognised that organisational support—or support from colleagues, media hierarchy or professional organisations in the case of journalists—is more important than familial support as it promotes a feeling of self-worth and value within an institution (Beam & Spratt, 2009) and that perceived support is more important than received support (Wethington & Kessler, 1986). Journalists with little support from their organisations are more likely to leave their organisations or journalism itself (Hughes et al., 2021). Support can be in multiple forms: formalised training, workshops with journalists with similar experiences, checking up on colleagues or employees, being given time to recover or reflect amongst others, the creation of a supportive working environment in which managers can be approached, and so on. Trauma-informed training, targeting both journalists and their managers, could lead to triggering experiences being avoided or prepared for (before and after being sent to the field). Dr Niaone reported that

> We send them [journalists] out into the field to situations which they haven't been prepared for, they'll see internally displaced people who have lost so much weight that they're starving to death. In Burkina Faso, many have no idea about this, so when they're confronted with it, they come back traumatised. You can see the impact, the powerlessness they experience when faced with situations like that. As journalists, they turn up and people come up to them and talk to them in their language pleading with them, saying "help us, we're suffering". However, all they can say in reply is "we're just journalists".

Complexity 3: Social Environment and Traditional and Religious Beliefs

The challenging situation extends beyond structural inadequacies and budgetary constraints, as recognising trauma and going on to seek appropriate treatment is also influenced by multiple traditional beliefs that differ between cultures (Esan, 2019). MHD in Burkina Faso are widely stigmatised, leading to discrimination, also affecting family members and friends in support networks and hindering help-seeking action (Porfilio-Mathieu et al., 2022). Whilst the lack of understanding of MHD may be widely attributed to low levels of literacy in many sub-Saharan African countries (Spittell et al., 2010), it can also be attributed to the fact that the condition is not visible and therefore not recognised in the same way as a physical illness would be. "At the community level, mental health promotion remains underdeveloped, and the subject is even taboo" (Pupat et al., 2023). This leads to fear and anxiety and to stigmatisation and social isolation (Mavundla, 2009). Sufferers and their family support network, who are also excluded from communities, become reluctant to seek treatment, reinforcing their MHD and exacerbating the situation (Pigeon-Gagné et al., 2022). According to Spittell et al. (2010, p. 5), in sub-Saharan Africa, such stigma is widely grounded in supernatural beliefs, for example, "witchcraft", "Satanism", "evil spirits"and "punishment by God". In other words, mental illnesses and trauma are not perceived as illnesses but rather "forms of insanity" resulting in stigmatising attitudes and discrimination (Barje et al., 2911; Nsereko et al., 2011). Identifying and accepting psychological trauma as a medical illness in a context where traditional beliefs are an integral part of the culture is complex. According to Adewuya and Oguntade (2007), these attitudes are not restricted to those with poor education; medical doctors also provide spiritual explanations for MHD, something confirmed by the practice of co-author Dr Niaoné. Because MHD and trauma are not understood to be "medical" illnesses, individuals will logically not go to medical hospitals for treatment. Instead, traditional healers

in communities are extensively approached by those with mental health disorders (Botha et al., 2006; Murthy, 2002).

The challenges of identifying, let alone treating, trauma symptoms in Burkina Faso are intensified by social norms surrounding masculinity and femininity and the corresponding appropriate behaviours and emotions attached to each (Kimathe & Maubert, 2023). Hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) dominate in patriarchal societies such as Burkina Faso with gendered ideals of masculinity, confirming the subordination of women. In such systems, men—the majority of journalists in Burkina Faso—are not expected to show emotions for fear of displaying vulnerability, and according to bell hooks (2004, p. 5), "patriarchal mores teach men a form of emotional stoicism that they are more manly if they feel nothing". If one expects to control one's emotions, stay in control and not show weaknesses, it is unsurprising that the effects of trauma will not be recognised or acknowledged by men or at least perceived as being an "emotion for women". As a result, many resort to maladaptive coping mechanisms such as isolation and drug or alcohol misuse, which in turn can be stigmatising and trigger MHD (Buchanan & Keats, 2011).

Complexity 4: Individual Level and Possible Solutions at an Individual Level

Psychological trauma has a cumulative effect on individuals. Trauma from covering one incident may not be fully resolved before another incident occurs and triggers trauma once again, exacerbated by the individual's own lack of trauma recognition. The management of emotions and the way in which individuals deal with the trauma generated by their journalistic work also depends on personal factors such as their ability to deal with traumatic events, their psychological background, the way they react to violence towards others and themselves, and their temperament.

In conflict situations, these realities make those working as local journalists even more vulnerable. While trauma and stress are common and are normal physical responses to the triggering circumstances in which Burkinabe journalists now work, individuals have difficulty recognising the mental and physical aspects they are experiencing. According to Dr Niaoné, one reporter had been sent to the field to cover attacks:

> He returned to the newsroom in Ouagadougou, the capital, five days after he had been to Djibo.[1] He'd changed. He felt different, as if he was no longer the same person who had carried out the mission. He could no longer concentrate and had trouble sleeping. He would go over and over the same stories, declaring he was useless and was responsible for the suffering of the people of Djibo. He would constantly hear their voices asking him for help; he couldn't stop them. He's become increasingly depressed and irritable. However, rather than providing support, by not being aware of the trauma suffered by his journalist, his director sent him a long email, after the 72 hours set down by the regulation, reproaching him for not having filed his report on time, demanding a letter of explanation.

The story of M. is similar.

> Four years after qualifying as a journalist, M. submitted his first report on violence. He had never been near acts of vandalism or automatic gunfire and had never seen ballistic injuries before. His excellent reporting got him noticed by his organisation, and the following year, during the terrorist attack on the Cappuccino restaurant in 2015 in Ouagadougou, his editor sent him to cover the army's response. Having followed the action all night, M. witnessed, first hand, the evacuation of the injured. Some were covered in blood, calling out for help, and others were killed on the spot and were being lifted into ambulances. Then, he saw the body of one of his childhood friends, among the victims, who had got married just a few weeks before. Stunned, M. then had to file his report, in the knowledge it could have been him.

> A week later, M. started having distressing flashbacks to the terrorist attack and thoughts he could not control. He fell apart when a waitress innocently offered him a cappuccino. The memories flooded back, triggering unexpectedly strong reactions. He was suddenly dizzy and sweated profusely. From then on, he avoided anything that reminded him of the Cappuccino restaurant, and he no longer walked along Kwame N'krumah Avenue, where the terrorist attack took place.
>
> M. had increasing trouble sleeping. M., who was usually a cheerful person, became very irritable and became angry at the slightest thing. His colleagues could no longer play jokes on him because it could turn into a fight. Within a month he'd received three warnings for poor quality reports, he no longer respected deadlines. He had previously been held up as an example of quality writing and punctuality. Rather than helping him, his manager threatened to fire him for poor results, and his colleagues preferred to stay away from him because of his irritability. M. could no longer concentrate; he became increasingly isolated, rarely participating in events.

Thus, in this example, the lack of multilevel training and support affected the local journalist as an individual: the director forced him to return to work, reinforcing the lived trauma of the journalists; rather than supporting him, his manager threatened to fire him for poor, and late, results; and his colleagues preferred to stay away from him because of his irritability. This was all compounded by the fact that the reporter (nor his hierarchy and colleagues) could not recognise his own stress response.

Multiple forms of support, including awareness of specific coping skills, stress responses and detailed individual training, are mostly inadequate or absent in the Burkinabe context; therefore, local journalists receive no safeguarding as individuals. Support could be tangible, such as paying for the consultations a journalist might need in case of psychological trauma; informational or the provision of advice and guidance or formal training such as that delivered by Dr. Niaoné; emotional or the expression of comfort and caring, perhaps from colleagues, bosses, or family; and a sense of belonging through shared social activities that may strengthen connections between colleagues. Social support can thus act as a buffer for stress (Gore, 1981).

Three Ways of Experiencing Trauma as a Journalist

When working in traumatising situations, local journalists in Burkina Faso face challenges at the policy, organisational, societal and individual levels. However, as seen through the fear, powerlessness, and horror they revealed when discussing their conflict reporting, they appear to play different roles within this trauma environment, in particular, as victims of, witnesses to, or actors in the trauma.

Local Journalists as Victims of Violence

Growing anti-Western, and particularly anti-French, sentiment is increasing stress on journalists who are critical of the transition regime's methods. They become victims of propaganda and are treated as collaborators and plotters with the West aiming to destabilise the regime. This makes practising journalism extremely complex, with journalists living under permanent stress due to the way they may be treated by the regime's supporters.

The journalists would recount that, as citizens or professionals, they often found themselves to be the targets, and therefore victims, of violence. They felt that not only was their physical wellbeing under threat but also their psychological wellbeing, and yet, as Dr Niaoné said, "when people talk about trauma, they only think of violence and wars. The looming shadow of violence, physical or not, is a threat in itself". I2 spoke of this fear: "You could be kidnapped when out travelling or you could be at home and kidnapped". Such encounters with violence can lead to trauma. "Because you've lived through such a situation once, your habits change, it plays with your mind" (I1, 2022). I2 also frequently faced such risks when working in the field. In 2019, he was sent to make radio programmes

in Foubé and Barsalogho, two areas near Kaya,[2] the city where he worked. On arrival, he said, "The FDS (Forces de défenses et de sécurité) who were escorting us told us an attack was happening 2 km from us". Another time, on the way back from reporting in Kongoussi, he heard that the road had been mined and he would have to take another route. A third time was again in Barsalogho, where more than thirty civilians had just been killed.

> We heard that there were HANI (Hommes armés non identifés [Unidentified Armed Men]) positioned along the road. We were all too frightened to go back and we didn't know whether we'd be able to reach Kaya, but thank God we were able to return to our homes safe and sound.

He concluded: "These threats are not aimed at us personally but at the profession of journalism". The frequency of exposure to such violence is a fundamental criterion for understanding trauma. In conflict contexts, the repetition of experiences of violence (seen or lived) is an aggravating factor (Marais & Stuart, 2005; McMahon, 2001; Newman et al., 2003; Pyevich et al., 2003). However, the field is not the only place where violence is experienced.

The public space, whether physical or virtual, is also a hotbed of potential violence through verbal attacks, repeated assaults, harassment and even death threats. Burkinabe journalists explained that they have become extremely cautious when speaking in public spaces.

> [Journalists] no longer hang out and chat on benches in town. In addition, even when they do, they're careful what they say […]. They understand that they have to know how to hold themselves back in [these discussion spots]. (I3)

I4 agrees about the ongoing trauma of anticipating attacks.

> Once, during a programme, there was a caller who introduced himself as a jihadist. He said he was calling from Titao and that he listened to our programmes. I was so scared. I prayed that the host would not screw up.

One way of avoiding risks and the associated trauma is to prerecord what used to be interactive radio shows. Listeners would ring in and voice their opinions, but if the wrong words or topics were aired, the media and the journalists would be put in significant danger.

Local Journalists as Witnesses of Violence

Burkina Faso's local journalists are also witnesses to human suffering. The country's current insecurity levels result in them having to cover mass disasters, massacres, collective or individual atrocities, and displacement. Their profession also brings them to the crossroads of violent information flows (Feinstein et al., 2014), putting them in a situation of "lived powerlessness". The story of S. speaks volumes:

> S. is a young Burkinabe journalist. His editors had selected him to follow a military convoy to cover the supply of food and essential items to the town of Djibo in northern Burkina Faso. Djibo, which has been the site of attacks and massacres on nomadic Fulani (Fulfuldé-speaking) populations, has been under blockade by armed groups for several months, leading to extreme food shortages. S. was chosen because he is originally from that area and is a fluent Fulfuldé speaker. It was assumed that it would be easier for him to do the report as he could interact directly with the communities on the ground. It had been some time since he visited his home region, so he was happy to go. They arrived in Djibo following a long journey that had been punctuated by near miss gunfire attacks and stops to deactivate IEDs. When he arrived, S. found a population that was completely destitute; he could not hold back the tears. He was overwhelmed by the sight of sick and starving children. Community members told him of their plight, but S. felt powerless. They recounted numerous instances of abduction by HANIs and of women being raped as they ventured a few kilometres out of town in search of firewood. Some pleaded with

> him to take their children back with him, to get their families out of this open-air prison where people were slowly dying from hunger and humiliation. He felt helpless and overwhelmed with guilt. S. simply could not believe the gravity of the situation. It was worse than anything he could have imagined.

Dr Niaoné recalls one journalist from Burkina Faso who went to Kaya to report on sex-for-food:

> We know that in situations of war and trauma, the main victims are women and teenagers, and this is linked primarily to sex being used as a punishment or as a weapon of war. Their vulnerability sometimes leads them to sell themselves to gain access to food or favours from humanitarian actors. When the reporter came back from the field, she was completely devastated.

Worse still, and illustrating the extreme horror that local journalists experience to provide news, is Dr Niaoné's account of a journalist who suffered vicarious trauma by continuously viewing videos of the people—who supposedly had kidnapped his older brother—killing journalists by beheading them. "It was as if he was nurturing the psychological trauma himself because it made him feel better. As he watched, it could make him think about his brother again. In fact, he's truly the prototype of a traumatised individual."

Local Journalists as Actors of Violence

Local journalists can also be actors in this violence. Through the media coverage they produce of events, facts, and people, they exert a strong form of symbolic violence, which is felt by others with the potential to trigger trauma. Yaméogo (2018) showed that Burkinabé newspapers tend to use dramatic frames when reporting on terrorist attacks, often resorting to images of extreme violence. Journalists may contribute to traumatising certain audiences by choosing to broadcast certain images, to act as the spokesperson for certain actors, and to reproduce threats.

Conclusion: Understanding and Recognising Trauma

Because social wellbeing is a public experience rather than a private phenomenon, people are shaped by their social environment. This chapter highlights the need to pay close attention to different contexts and their cultural nuances, perspectives and beliefs about mental health and trauma. These factors define how journalists will report (traumatise) events, react to them and collaborate with you.

The complexity of the trauma encountered by local journalists in Burkina Faso is overwhelming and affects many on multiple levels, even trainers themselves. Dr Niaoné spoke of his discomfort as a doctor being unable to help those in training sessions, asking him for help that he was not trained to give. As he said:

> [The journalists] did not even know who to turn to as a specialist. Not being able to name a phenomenon is already the start of a big problem. In addition, we do not know where to turn, because we do not even know what we're suffering from. Generally, mental health is not well perceived in our country. Unfortunately, it's a reflex to respond and say everything's fine.

Trauma is a psychological state that can characterise human beings, anywhere in the world, in conflict or peaceful arenas. However, what is unique is the context where individuals—the journalists in this book—encounter trauma. These contexts shape different ways of understanding, recognising, accepting, and handling it. The context in which Burkinabe journalists work differs significantly from those discussed in other chapters of this book. Understanding the specific context in which trauma occurs allows for a better understanding of the reactions of those who are exposed to, or suffer from, trauma as well as the reality they live in. This is important in any relationship, be it professional or not. In the case of journalism, it has two advantages. First, it allows you to better report on the reality the journalists

are working in and then deliver fair and impartial information to the audience. Second, it allows you to act professionally and ethically with colleagues working in contexts that are different from your own, thus avoiding serious misunderstandings.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Tips

- Allow yourself time for reflection *with* local journalists, before going out into the field, or covering emergency situations.
- Take the time to talk to local journalists, and do not hesitate to talk about what you're feeling on the ground and what you have just experienced.
- Take decisions jointly with local journalists and listen to what they are feeling.
- Know in advance which services you and the local journalists accompanying you can turn to if you are exposed to traumatic acts, images or sensations.

Talking Points

- Discuss the fears you, and local journalists, might have if you had to cover an event in Burkina Faso or similar conflict-affected area. Once you have written down these fears collectively, imagine working with a journalist in the country. How would you perceive this person's fears? What strategies would you use to better perceive them?
- Discuss the taboo nature of trauma. How does this differ between countries and between cultures? How can you ensure that your working practices take this into account and adapt accordingly?
- To increase your awareness and understanding of trauma experienced by your colleagues discuss the various obstacles your colleagues from different countries and cultures may face (cultural, linguistic, education) when covering events and the extent to which (a) these may differ, or not, from your own and (b) what steps you could take to ensure these are taken into account.

Notes

1. Burkina Faso's northern town of Djibo is under blockade by non-state armed groups and remains largely cut off from food and aid (MSF, 2023).
2. Kaya, north-east of Ouagadougou, has experienced a massive influx of internally displaced people since 2019.

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CHAPTER 11

News Feature: Vivienne Aitken: "These things had not happened to us. Who were we to say we wanted counselling?"

Lisa Bradley

Vivienne Aitken is assistant news editor of the Daily Record in Scotland, and has had a career in news reporting spanning four decades.
The journalist who was first on the scene of the deadliest mass shooting in British history said it was an honour to tell stories of such dignity and courage.

Vivienne Aitken had been a reporter for 11 years when Thomas Hamilton shot dead 16 children, one teacher and injured 15 others at Dunblane Primary School in Scotland.

He then turned the gun on himself.

On 13 March 1996, reporters at the Daily Record were given a tip-off from the local hospital that there had been a shooting.

Vivienne said: "None of us really thought it was anything major, just some kid with an air gun perhaps. School shootings were something that happened in America.

"Our features editor had two boys at the school so our chief reporter drove him down, just in case, and I was on their tail.

"It was while we were driving we heard on the radio that six children had been killed. I remember thinking, oh no, they've said killed instead of shot, someone's going to get in serious trouble for that. Then our chief reporter put her foot down in the car in front and I thought, 'this is serious'."

Vivienne was the first reporter on the scene, and she described the scene as a swarm.

She said: "It was like a football match in the 1980s, crowds spilling onto the pitch. I was standing with my notebook at the school gates and mums were running to me, the fear on their faces, the panic, asking me what class it was, who was dead.

"I didn't want to tell them anything in case it was wrong. I just went into auto pilot. I didn't feel the trauma at all, just knew I needed to get the job done. For the next five days we were knocking on doors, interviewing, we managed to get hold of the now infamous school photo of the class and set about identifying every child and finding out if they were alive or dead. We didn't stop.

"Some families wanted to talk, they wanted their child to be remembered, they welcomed it. Others slammed the door in our faces. And that was fine. We didn't try again even though in those days you often would."

Figure 11.1: The Dunblane massacre took place at Dunblane Primary School near Stirling, Scotland, United Kingdom, on 13 March 1996, when Thomas Hamilton shot sixteen pupils and one teacher dead, and injured fifteen others, before taking his own life
Picture: Brian Harris. Photograph copyright Almany.

Figure 11.2: These tragic events remain the deadliest mass shooting in British history. Public debate about the killings centred on gun control laws, including public petitions for a ban on private ownership of handguns and an official inquiry, which produced the 1996 Cullen Report. In response to this debate, two new Firearms Acts were passed which outlawed the private ownership of most handguns within the United Kingdom
Picture: Brian Harris. Photograph copyright Almany.

Vivienne and her team were offered counselling. But none of the reporters took up the editor's offer.

She said: "We just looked at each other as if to say why would we want that? We were so focused on delivering the story, which in a way, was a coping strategy.

"I came from a generation that just wanted to get the job done. Besides, it wasn't our story. These things had not happened to us. Who were we to say we wanted counselling? It wasn't our children who had been murdered.

"I didn't realise how much it affected me until I had my daughter and I took her to school on her first day of primary. She was four years old. I looked at her face and that was the exact moment, the exact day that Dunblane hit me.

"But even then, it wasn't that I was suffering from post-traumatic stress, but more a recognition.

"I felt humbled by the dignity and courage shown, being part of the follow-ups after, the Snowdrop campaign to ban handguns in the UK, it was an honour to be a reporter that day."

SECTION II

Vicarious Trauma

CHAPTER 12

News Feature: Looking the Devil in the Eye: How Three Reporters Coped with Covering the "most harrowing trial in fifty years" of Child Serial Killer Lucy Letby

Lisa Bradley

"God saved my baby. But then the devil found her." This was just one of the quotes from the family impact statements read out in Manchester crown court on 21 August 2003, when Lucy Letby was sentenced to a whole life order for her sickening crimes.

The neo-natal nurse was found guilty of murdering seven babies in her care and attempting to kill six others between June 2015 and June 2016.

The 33-year-old injected the babies with air and insulin or overfed them with milk at the Countess of Chester Hospital, in the North West of England.

Her trial lasted ten months.

Liz Hull, from the Daily Mail, was at the court every day, covering for the newspaper, online and for the podcast sensation The Trial of Lucy Letby.

Josh Halliday from The Guardian covered the case from the moment of her arrest, and Richard Marsden, also from the Mail, was sent to cover the sentencing.

All three journalists are highly experienced and not strangers to distressing coverage of high profile stories, such as the murder of Rhys Jones, the Manchester terrorist attack and the Hillsborough inquiry.

But Halliday said it was this one that left a scar.

He said, "Having covered the Manchester terrorist attack, I thought I'd been through my fair share of trauma. I started on The Guardian trainee scheme straight out of university when I was 21, 13 years ago. Of course, you do all the NCTJ, but you don't understand what it's really like to be a journalist until you're in the newsroom. I became the North of England correspondent after a few years, and I was based in Manchester. The night of the attack on the arena, for the first time ever, I'd left my phone charging in the kitchen instead of by my bed. I woke up the next morning to a million missed calls, and my heart dropped. I had missed the biggest story in the world. I didn't feel relieved. As journalists, we race towards the scene. We are trained for it, obsessed with it. I'd just taken my hostile environment training and I was raring to go. I couldn't believe I had missed it. But then, I was there in the aftermath.

My hometown. Walking past the flowers, the vigils, every day. I lived a five-minute drive from the bomber's house. Weeks and weeks of interviewing the bereaved and the survivors, working 21-hour days, police road after police raid. The whole world's media on your doorstep.

"I have never felt exhaustion like it. Until now.

"In journalism, some days can be quiet and others feel like you've been tossed out of a ship in the middle of the night and you're just fighting to keep your head above water. I've never had any strategies in terms of coping, just going into professional mode. It works at the time. During the ten-month trial of Lucy Letby, I have to honest, I wasn't affected emotionally as I was in sitting in a criminal trial day in, day out, just listening to cold hard facts, listening out for the top line, so I could have a fresh story every day. It was as if all the horror and emotion have been sapped out. We couldn't name any victims or families due to reporting restrictions, so we lost the emotion.

"When the jury went out, it was tense. It could have gone either way—it was all medically contested, it didn't seem clear cut. We all sat, some in the main court, some in the media annexe, waiting, wondering if the trial was going to collapse. We waited 110 hours.

"And it was during that time we started reaching out to families. All the media had agreed that we would only go through the police to contact them, which suited me as I've always been squeamish about approaching grieving victims. We wrote letters to the families, and in writing those letters, trying to reach out to them, I was forced to put myself in their shoes and it was then it really hit me. What they'd been through. I thought about my own little girl, who is only two and half. The milestones she reached that their babies would never get the chance to. All of that emotion was on my mind, and we were still waiting, the tension building and building and building.

"And then the verdicts started coming in. At first it was just in dribs and drabs. We had the guilty conviction for the attempted murders, but we weren't allowed to report them yet. We were all lying to friends and family, telling them we didn't have any verdicts in…then it suddenly all came with a big bang and we were allowed to report everything for the first time. All that tension spilled over, and I remember walking home, watching the BBC News at 6 pm on my phone, and I cried for the first time. The emotional impact just hit me. Before then, your brain just copes for you. I had a job to do. I did it. But on Monday, when the impact statements were read out before the sentencing that's when it hit me like tonne of bricks. I listened to the families talk of how their baby's hair felt on their chin, what it was like to hold them for the first time. Taking the baby seat out of the car, leaving the still packed maternity bag in the nursery. All these little things I hadn't thought out. And there, in court, I started to cry. It's the first time I have ever cried in court. But looking all around me, jurors who had returned to see the sentence, police, other media, the huge expanse of pain and emotion and relief. It was the most difficult day I have ever had at work. I was offered counselling for work, the first time ever, and I have taken them up on it. In the aftermath, I realised how badly I'd been affected. I had physical symptoms of stress, my psoriasis flared up. I started having nightmares of Lucy Letby, so vivid I would wake up in the night and write them down. It was a culmination not only of the trauma that I'd heard but the high pressure and high stakes covering the country's biggest story on an hour by hour basis. It was an enormous responsibility to the families to compete with the BBC and the Mail, which had legions of reporters covering it. The pressure was so intense. I started having visions of her attacking me with a knife. I have never ever experienced anything like that. The little intrusions started creeping into my day. I was reading a recipe for something, and it said 450 grams of rice. 450 grams. The same size as one of the babies she murdered.

"It's going to take time to stop. But with stories this important, you have to fully invest yourself and to report emotional stories you have to be emotional, be invested in that emotion, and that's going to leave a scar. And that's what makes you a great journalist. We're not robots. We have personal lies. But you have to report in a way that moves people. This has been described as the most harrowing

court case in 50 years. But it was privilege to be part of it. There will be a reckoning now, an inquiry into how this could all have happened. And I've been there, on the front line of history. When you look back at your life, I want to be able to tell stories of how I have seen change, made an impact on the world and changed lives. I may not be in an operating theatre or a first responder, but I can be part of change.

"To be a good journalist, you need to be the kind of person who does not look away. It needs to be in your DNA."

Marsden agreed with Halliday that the level of emotion in the victim impact statements brought almost the entire courtroom to years. He said the atmosphere was hushed, the mood silent, sombre. And then the second it was over, the journalists leapt up, grabbed laptops, phones—and did their job.

He said: "The Letby case did feel different from others before. It was unusual in the numbers, the ages of the children, the judge even had to stop and compose himself while making his speech.

"It was the details of the victim impact statements that did it. There were 90 minutes of quotes delivered, the raw impact of the families, the feel of the baby's skin. Their smell. Just snatched away. This was a woman who helped choose the little outfits the babies were dressed in for their coffins, helped create memory boxes, and created the little hand and feet casts. Then, she took their lives. These impact statements are relatively new in court. Usually, it's the brutal graphic details and emotion is kept out of it. It is just the facts. But these statements, 90 minutes of pain. One of the quotes was 'We prayed to God to save our baby. He did…but the devil found her.'

"You have to have a pretty tough constitution to listen to all of that. It's not easy. But the empathy you have, that's the very reason you have to put it aside and think of the bigger picture. It's not your trauma. And these statements do change the way you write. To get those quotes you used to have to go and do door knocks or grab families outside courts. Now they are all read out. All that emotion and rawness.

"The only time I have ever felt close to this level was listening to the families of those killed in the Manchester bombings.

"But, this is why we do the job and there is peace to be found in the fact that you can sleep easy knowing this person has been caught, the family have seen justice. You're there to make sure everyone knows that.

"After the sentencing, a few reporters all went for drinks and dinner together, and that's a very usual thing in cases like this. You just have to talk about it rather than bottle it all up because it's going to happen again. You can't dwell on it. This is what you have to expect when you go into the industry. It's brutal, and raw and horrifying but you can't escape it.

"I do think it's important that the younger generation knows they do need to talk about it—in order to make sure they keep their mental health in check so they can carry on doing the job.

"We live in a society now where trauma isn't part of our every day, we are not of a generation where we are shipped off to fight in world wars, or on slave ships, so cruelty of this level can come as a shock.

"But it doesn't mean it doesn't exist."

Hull, a reporter for the Mail and host of the Trial of Lucy Letby podcast, had another reason to be affected by the story: her own babies were born in the Countess of Chester hospital, one just ten months after Letby started working there,

She said, "I was dispatched on the Lucy Letby story as soon as she was arrested. As the Northern correspondent for the Mail, I live in Chester. My babies had been born at that hospital. My friends' babies too. My daughter was born ten months after Lucy Letby started work on the neo-natal unit. This was a story in my community. I wanted this one.

"The idea for the podcast was unusual for court reporting. It was slow at first. It wasn't until the defence began, and Letby actually started giving her own evidence that it really took off. It was exhausting to write the scripts almost verbatim, as journalists we never actually write the entire speeches down, it would take far too long to go through the material after. We look for top lines, good quotes. At the height of it, I was writing a page lead a day and the scripts from court, sometimes five thousand words.

"I was eventually given a seat in the main crown court as I was there every single day. Press spaces were limited, and a separate media annexe had been set up in magistrates' court. But as one of the very few reporters there constantly, I was moved into crown. The families of the babies were seated right behind me.

"I have covered high profile cases and enquiries before, but this one was massive. The evidence was of course harrowing, but you just learn to put it in a box in order to cope. What really got me was hearing the dads cry.

"It was the first time I had ever cried in court—and, like most other journalists, it was the victim impact statements that got me.

"Coping strategies weren't really a thing when I first started my career more than 20 years ago. You just got on with it. People are very much more aware now, but the way we deal with it, and still do, is going to the pub with other reporters, talking about the case, the quotes, what you'd heard. It's a way of processing it, even if you're not consciously doing it.

"Everyone was invested in this story in my community. Everyone wanted to talk to me about it. Letby killed indiscriminately. There was no reason she picked certain babies. They came from all backgrounds. This was a story I had to do. Not to sell newspapers, but to hold these people to account. What the managers did or did not do will now be scrutinised—this story is far from over even though the cameras are no longer outside Manchester Crown Court. For the NHS. For the reporters. But mainly, for the families.

"And that is what can sometimes get lost.

"Society is often anti mainstream media. Social media trolling is the norm. We are portrayed badly on TV and in films, shouting through letterboxes, ridiculous things we'd never do. You need a bloody, thick skin. We do these stories because these babies did not deserve to die. They should never have been placed in harm's way. We need to make sure those responsible are held to account.

"I still wake up and think about it every day. This is a career-defining story that will come back and back again. I think to some extent, I've still kept the box locked.

"For myself and my friends and everyone I know who had given birth at the Countess of Chester, it was just for the grace of God that we walked out of those doors with our babies in the car seat. But these families never will."

CHAPTER 13

"Putting up the Bulletproof Glass": The Impact of Court Reporting on Working Journalists in the UK

Arlene Lawler

News reporters are human beings first and journalists second. Being a journalist does not mean you have special powers that protect you from getting upset about what you see and hear. However, being prepared for what you are likely to face in the job can help you manage your emotional responses. The shock of the unexpected can add significantly to the resulting trauma. As one news agency editor put it, "it is important to change your mental tack and put up the bulletproof glass before you deal with it" (Dubberley, Griffen & Bal, 2015, p. 23). Research shows that graduates and young people are especially vulnerable to strong emotional responses (Dworznik & Grubb, 2007). It is not uncommon for young and/or relatively inexperienced journalists to be sent to court to cover cases with distressing graphic detail. In the digital age, the demands of 24/7 news websites can mean that new journalists do not always have much time to adapt or prepare for the emotional requirements of the job.

An awareness of other people's suffering is an unavoidable part of news journalism, and reporting from the courts is no exception. Coverage of crime and death is not confined to frontline journalists who report from scenes of war or natural disasters, car crashes, fires, and crimes. It is also at the heart of court reporting. Graphic and distressing details of crime and tragedy are staple ingredients of the criminal and inquest courts. These details are the raw materials that journalists who report from the courts work with to produce their stories. Court reporters do not witness first-hand the graphic stories of violence, abuse and death that they report on—they hear the details second-hand in a courtroom and/or during an interview so their exposure to other people's suffering is *indirect*. This kind of exposure can result in *vicarious trauma* and *secondary traumatic stress*, both of which are indirect traumas triggered by empathy—sharing in other people's pain by engaging with the details of their suffering.

The terms vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress (STS) are sometimes used interchangeably, as people often experience both but there is a difference. Vicarious trauma includes a shift in the way the affected person views the world; it changes their fundamental beliefs about themselves and other people (Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995). For example, journalists who cover many crime and abuse stories may generally develop a more negative view of human beings. STS produces similar symptoms

to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—flashbacks, desensitisation, numbness, and a heightened response to perceived dangers—but it happens to the person hearing about the trauma rather than the person who has experienced the trauma (Jenkins & Baird, 2002).

The Role of the Court Reporter in the UK

Journalists who report on cases from the criminal and coroners' courts are key players in the UK's legal system, which is based on the principle of open justice. Lord Chief Justice Hewart's much-quoted tenet of 1924, "Justice must not only be done but be seen to be done", underlines the importance of public scrutiny of the courts. All cases heard in the UK's criminal and coroners' courts are open to journalists, and most are also open to the public. Open justice prevents random or biased decisions by judges and coroners and ensures that society knows how law-breakers are held accountable in the criminal courts and about the circumstances of unexpected deaths. It is achieved largely through media coverage of court hearings, and it is an integral part of any democratic system of government. The principle of open justice and the role of the court reporter are the same throughout the UK, but there are some differences between the legal systems and terminology of England and Wales and those of Scotland. For example, in Scotland's criminal justice system, there are Justice of the Peace Courts, Sheriff Courts, and the High Court of the Justiciary instead of Magistrates' Courts and Crown Courts. Prosecutions in Scotland are brought by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) instead of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Inquest hearings in Scotland are known as fatal accident inquiries, and they are presided over by a sheriff who produces a determination instead of a coroner who returns a verdict. In Northern Ireland, the legal terminology is similar to that of England and Wales. In this chapter, we will use the terminology of the legal system in England and Wales.

The Criminal Courts

Stories from the criminal courts form a significant part of the news agenda in the UK, and a glance at any mainstream media website in any given week is testament to their prevalence. Usually, the more shocking the court case is, the more coverage it receives because bad news is particularly newsworthy (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). Court cases about murder, rape, violence, cruelty, and sexual abuse tend to receive top bills on news websites. Shocking news sells, as all editors know, and so does death (Franklin, 2013). However, it's not simply about feeding the general public's dark curiosity; there is an enormous public interest in revealing who in society commits crime, who exploits or breaches the trust of vulnerable victims, and how the law deals with those who are guilty. Laws are rooted in ethics, and they both inform and reflect a common societal understanding of what is right and wrong. Knowing the punishments meted out by the courts is a deterrent to others who may be considering committing crimes. Knowing that offenders have been punished for their crimes gives the public a sense of safety, particularly in cases of extreme or prolific offenders. Reports from criminal courts also inform the public about the impact of crime and tragedy on victims and perpetrators and their families—they provide insight into human experiences that could affect any of us.

The Coroners' Courts (Inquests)

Unlike criminal court cases, inquest hearings do not decide who is responsible for a crime, and there is no defendant, no charges and no punishments. Inquests investigate the circumstances of sudden or unexpected deaths to determine how, when and where a person died and record a verdict that reflects the findings of the investigation. They are heard before a coroner—not a judge—who records

a verdict on how the death occurred. Inquest hearings are usually stories of great sadness and tragedy: people of all ages who have died in car crashes and other accidents, people who have committed suicide, sudden infant deaths, or people who have died unexpectedly from medical conditions they did not know about. Because inquests do not determine guilt and innocence or punish lawbreakers, the news value and public interest aspects of these hearings can vary. For example, there is a very clear and strong public interest in reporting the inquest into the deaths caused by the 1989 Hillsborough football ground disaster, but the same cannot always be said for an inquest about the tragic personal circumstances that led an individual to end their own life. When there is no clear public interest or news value in an inquest hearing, it can be difficult for journalists to justify their role there as they may feel they are intruding on other people's grief and suffering for no reason. They may find it more difficult to approach family members after an inquest than they do after a criminal case where justice is being done and there is a perpetrator to focus on. However, it can be argued that there is always a broad public interest in knowing how people die and how it affects their loved ones. Ochberg (1999) suggests that consuming stories about death and tragedy can help equip the public for the inevitable kind of preparation for what lies ahead for all of us. Journalists who report from the courts provide the public with this information.

The daily beat of reporting from the criminal and inquest courts is one of continuous human suffering, producing stories about death, suicide, and an array of violent and abusive crimes, including murder, rape, child abuse, grooming, sex trafficking and slavery. Journalists listen to the often-graphic details of police reports and witness/survivor statements (some of which are never published because they are deemed too harrowing for public consumption), and they see the distress and trauma of victims and their families. They interview survivors of crime and bereaved families, and they witness the impact of crime and tragedy and the resulting devastation of lives. In addition, then they write about it, reliving the details as they put together their stories. For journalists who report from the courts regularly, this emotionally laden experience is a constant in their working lives.

Emotion is a key news value in stories, increasing their newsworthiness and attracting readers. As Berrington and Jemphrey (2003, p. 237) note, "raw emotion makes the best copy". Trauma-based news reporting is, by its very nature, full of raw emotion, and it produces compelling stories. Conversely, emotion-free objectivity is also a key element of news journalism, and reporters are taught to set aside their feelings to find "the story" (Richards & Rees, 2011). The journalistic notion of objectivity is based on accuracy and on journalists being impartial and unemotional observers. This idea of detached objectivity is particularly prevalent in UK court reporting, where stories are required by law to be fair, accurate and contemporaneous. Both criminal and inquest court cases are based on the gathering and presentation of evidence and objective "facts". However, underneath the cold facts, courtrooms are teeming with emotion: the impact on the victims and perpetrators of crime, the impact on their families and loved ones, the motivations behind crime, and the often-tragic circumstances heard in inquests. It is the job of the court reporter to tap into these wells of emotion in their stories while also maintaining the professional requirements of objectivity. Schultz (2007) points out the contradiction in this unrealistic aim—journalists need to connect with readers through emotionally engaging stories while remaining detached and unaffected by the experiences captured in those stories.

Beyond the Courtroom

Journalists who report from the courts are often required to approach those affected by the events covered in crime and inquest about cases to ask for an interview. These people might be crime survivors or bereaved family members. This is similar to the practice of "death knocks", asking bereaved families or partners for an interview after a loved one has died. However, death knocks are carried out soon after

a person has died, whereas court case interviews can occur weeks, months or even years after the event. The legal wheels do not always move quickly, and it can take a long time for some cases to be heard in court. Therefore, court reporters are not confronted with the raw shock and unpredictability of people who have just been bereaved or traumatised. Instead, they navigate their way through interviews with people who have come to more fully realise what they have lost and how their lives have been impacted by crime and/or bereavement, arguably giving the reporter a deeper and more nuanced insight into their suffering. In stories such as the Rotherham child sexual exploitation scandal,[1] some victims were interviewed many years after their abuse when the criminal trial had concluded. The victims' realisation of the life-long consequences of the abuse is clear in the interviews, as is their pain and their understanding of how the abuse has damaged them and impacted the lives of their families (Channel 4, 2017). In-depth interviews such as this require reporters to engage significantly with a large amount of emotional information from both the court case and the victims.

How Court Reporting Can Affect Journalists

The grim details of court reporting can take their toll on journalists in different ways, and the effects are not the same for everyone. However, there are some common symptoms in how journalists have experienced vicarious trauma and STS. Research has revealed relationships between indirect trauma reporting and emotions of guilt, fear, anxiety, sadness, helplessness, and generally negative worldviews (Keats & Buchanan, 2012; McMahon, 2001). Vicarious trauma is usually a result of cumulative experiences that build up over time, and people affected by it can feel as although they have lost a sense of meaning in their lives (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). They may also experience STS with symptoms similar to PTSD (except they do not last as long)—intrusive thoughts of traumatic details, avoidance of activities or places related to the trauma, emotional numbness, feelings of detachment, and heightened responses to perceived dangers (Thieleman & Cacciatore, 2014). Repeated exposure to other people's suffering over time puts journalists at risk of STS, which can have a significant effect on their personal and professional wellbeing (Keats & Buchanan, 2009). They can experience a decline in productivity at work, increased absences from work, burnout, and ultimately, leaving the industry (Hill, Luther & Slocum, 2020). It is now widely acknowledged that indirect trauma can result in symptoms of trauma-related stress; the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V)* broadened the criteria of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) so that it now includes "repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of a traumatic event" (Pai, Suris & North, 2017, p. 3).

As Rees (2007) notes, court reporters "may spend hours listening to minutely documented accounts of abuse, where every act of cruelty, casual or premeditated, is dated and referenced" (p. 67). Court reporters also act as censors: for example, when writing up stories about children who have been murdered or subjected to repeated cruelty, they must decide which details should be withheld because they are too distressing for public consumption (Barnes, 2016). This requires court reporters to engage significantly with the graphic material, to think about the details and to assess how distressing it would be for the audience. Studies show that vicarious trauma and STS are experienced by courtroom workers—judges, jurors and legal counsel—who are regularly exposed to harrowing details (Robertson, Davies & Nettleingham, 2009; Smith, 2017). Journalists who report from the courts are exposed to the same harrowing details, so it follows that they would also be vulnerable to the same effects.

Emotional Impact: The Difficult Stories

Court cases involving child cruelty, abuse and death can be particularly challenging to report on and can prompt strong emotional responses in journalists. In these case studies, two experienced court reporters talk about covering distressing cases with young victims.

Case Study 1

This reporter describes his emotional responses to the unexpectedly graphic and distressing details that came out in a trial about the death of a young child.

> It was an awful story about a little girl, and her mother and stepfather were accused of causing her death. I did not know many details before I went to court so I came to the case a little cold. In addition, it was horrible. They lived in squalid conditions. In addition, this girl, I do not want to dredge it up… but my feeling was that she was tortured to death although I don't think they used that word in court. What I remember most vividly was a body map that was shown to the jury. A pathologist went from head to toe to describe each and every injury. As this case continued, I could feel my blood boiling. I remember looking across to the dock at the accused, and I was livid. I was feeling hatred. You know, she was only three or four. She had all her life to live. In addition, what must she have gone through in her final moments? I found this truly difficult. I was doing this case every day solid for three weeks. I felt dread every day. What am I going to hear today? Can I hear any more about how this little girl suffered? There was a lot going on in my mind…and I was struggling to be objective. I do not know whether it was me being a bloke and not wanting to show any signs of weakness….but I didn't say "I can't stand this anymore". In addition, I had a very supportive news editor so it wasn't that. Maybe I was thinking I would be committing career suicide, that if you cannot stand listening to these kind of court stories, what is your use as a court reporter? I do not know. However, I find it odd looking back now that I could have easily said "I'd like a break. Can somebody else go and do this?" However, I didn't. Court was my job and, you know, I thought you just suck it up and get on with it.

Case Study 2

This journalist remembers his shock at the depravity of the details in the case of Ian Watkins, former frontman of the Lostprophets rock band. Watkins was jailed for 29 years in 2013 after he admitted a string of sexual offences against children, including the attempted rape of an 11-month-old baby.

> It was not until I covered the court case of Ian Watkins that I truly understood how much some stories were going to affect me. I covered his arrest and prosecution, and the details read out in court were absolutely horrific, many of which could not be reported. We heard in the pretrial that a video might be shown to the jury but that counselling would be put in place for them. I remember thinking: "What about the journalists? Will we have to see it?". There would be no support in place for us.

Coping Strategies

The need to "put up the bulletproof glass" is proof of the *emotional labour* that news reporting can require. Emotional labour is the process of managing emotional responses to meet the requirements of a job (Hoschschild, 1979). Hopper and Huxford define it as "the suppression of personal, emotional identity for the sake of an ideologically driven, detached professional self" (2015, p. 38). They describe this process as a kind of cognitive loop: focusing on doing their job helps journalists to stifle their emotions, and stifling their emotions helps journalists do their job.

This cognitive loop can be seen when journalists use the mechanics of the law to distance themselves emotionally from a case. They learn the workings of media law in university courses and in NCTJ training courses, where it is a core requirement in most journalism qualifications. Court reporters must understand how it all works—particularly in criminal cases—and know what they can and

cannot publish. They must ensure that their stories are fair, accurate and contemporaneous. They must know when to identify people, when not to identify them, and when to challenge reporting restrictions. Additionally, like all news stories, court reports need to be structured around the "best angle", the one that is most likely to attract an audience. In addition, journalists can — and often do—post live tweets from court, telling the public what is happening in real time as the case unfolds. Tweets are angled around specific aspects of the case, such as the prosecution or defence arguments, the verdict, the sentence or the judge's comments. So there is a lot to think about when covering court stories, and this can provide a distraction from the distressing details of a case. A focus on the mechanical aspects of the job is one of the most common ways that journalists manage their emotional responses. Talking with partners and colleagues is another common coping strategy along with gallows humour and suppressing emotions, physical activity, and substance use (Buchanan & Keats, 2011). Some of these coping strategies are healthy, in moderation, such as talking over a harrowing day and exercising or playing a sport. Some are not so healthy—using alcohol or drugs to block traumatic details is unlikely to make you feel better and may even increase feelings of anxiety and depression. Suppressing emotions and focusing on the mechanics of the job are practical coping strategies to a point, but an overreliance on them could result in a journalist ignoring symptoms of secondary stress.

Keats and Buchanan (2009) found that many journalists in their study thought that some time out after covering a traumatic story could help them make sense of the experience, even if this was just a few free hours before going home to family life. McMahon (2001) reported that the majority of journalists in her study felt that a debriefing session would help them process their experiences of traumatic stories. It is also well documented in the STS literature that taking a break from work can help people recharge their batteries and recalibrate their emotional state (Buchanan et al., 2006). A number of academics have highlighted the need for students and young journalists to be better prepared for the traumatic material they are likely to encounter as news journalists. Additionally, they should be familiarised with positive coping strategies and encouraged to consider any personal experiences with trauma (Hill, Luther & Slocum, 2020; Seely, 2019; Brayne, 2007). They argue that preparation and education are essential to avoid journalists experiencing burnout and short careers.

Emotional Labour: Coping with the Job

Focusing on the mechanics of the job is something that court reporters do every day. In these case studies, two reporters describe how this focus helped them manage their response to the stories.

Case Study 3

This court reporter describes covering the 2016 Hillsborough inquest into the deaths of the 96 people who died in the football stadium crush in 1989. It was the longest-running inquest in English legal history—it took more than two years for the jury to hear all the evidence and deliver a verdict.

> My job was to report the evidence as it was heard in court, write up stories and live tweet it. So there was quite a lot to do and I was quite focused on "I have got to get this done and I have got to capture exactly what's being said". All the nationals were there, you know, big names in journalism, TV people, and all the families were in the room. The coroner went through the events, and I still remember it. I can still put myself back in that room and feel how I was feeling. There were people sobbing, there was the coroner, his opening statement was incredibly powerful. He almost recreated what it would have felt like to be there on that day. In addition, all the time I was listening to this, I was having to do my job as well and make sure that I got it all down accurately. I truly did not want to upset the families, you know, and get something wrong. However, I think if I'd have just gone there and sat and listened to it, and did not have a job to do, then it would have had even more of an impact on me because I wouldn't have had anything else to focus on.

Case Study 4

Understanding the public interest in reporting on death is particularly important when covering inquests, but it is not always easy to approach or even sit near grieving families while you "do your job". This reporter explains why he finds it challenging.

> Coroners' [courts] can be a bit difficult because there's no crime. I feel as although I'm intruding when I'm doing inquests even though I know I am allowed to be there. It does feel intrusive sometimes when I'm sitting three feet from a mother whose son has committed suicide, you know, that is a bit different to reporting on crime. With crime, I feel like I have a moral defence. There's a victim, and someone is in the dock for it. However, the subject of an inquest has not committed a crime. In addition, it is usually a truly sad story. It is either a car crash or hanging or something like that. In addition, the family is almost always there. In addition, I'm expected to approach them afterwards, which unsettles me. I do not like doing it, I just do not feel comfortable. However, I know what my job is, and what I'm supposed to do. So I focus on that and I do it.

The understanding that indirect trauma is a potential hazard for journalists has grown more widespread over the past decade, but relatively little has been written about how it affects court reporters. However, in 2019, the trauma of court reporting was acknowledged in a world-first court settlement when a former crime and court reporter sued her Australian newspaper employer, The Age, and won $180,000 in damages ("YZ v The Age Company", 2019). She successfully argued that she had suffered PTSD as a result of prolonged and repeated exposure to crime scenes and criminal trials. The Age newspapers had no system in place to help journalists deal with the trauma of their work and were found to have failed in their duty of care as employers. This landmark case has set a worldwide precedent by legally recognising that court reporters are potentially vulnerable to the effects of STS, which can, if left untreated, escalate into PTSD.

Not all court reporters suffer symptoms of vicarious trauma and secondary stress. The emotional impact of court reporting can depend on many factors—how long a reporter has been doing the job, their coping strategies and how well they manage their emotional responses, their own personal experiences, how well prepared they are in terms of trauma training, and what workplace support is available to them. The aim of this chapter is to help prepare young journalists for what they might face in the courtroom and how it might affect them emotionally. However, it is important not to confuse normal human responses with symptoms of vicarious trauma and STS. To feel for other people's suffering is a sign of a healthy, functioning human being. It is normal to feel upset or angry after listening to the details of another person's trauma. It just means you are human.

Although it can be upsetting at times, reporting from the courts is also a very rewarding and important job because it highlights crime and injustice and ensures that victims' stories are heard. Journalists are a generally resilient group, and the majority who suffer indirect trauma usually feel better within four to six weeks (Brayne, 2007). Knowing what to expect as a journalist and how to care for yourself (as well as the people you report on) helps build resilience and ensure a productive and fulfilling career. A mentally healthy journalist is a better journalist, which benefits both journalists themselves and the many public interests they serve.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Tips

- If you feel a case is getting on top of you, don't ignore your feelings. Talk to your news editor—or the commissioning editor if you are a freelancer. Tell them how you are feeling and, if necessary, ask if you can take a short break from the case.
- Talk to friends, partners and work colleagues—tell them you are feeling upset, don't bottle it up.
- Don't isolate yourself. Spend time with friends and family, play sports, focus on hobbies—these will all distract you from work thoughts.
- If you think you may be suffering from vicarious trauma or STS, tell your editor and access any professional support available to you. Don't suffer in silence.
- Accept that you will get upset over some of the details you hear—this is normal and it happens to all court reporters at some stage. It does not mean you are not able to do the job. It means you are human so just have a cry if you need to. Avoiding or blocking your emotional responses will not help you to deal with them. Accepting how you feel and learning to care for your emotional wellbeing helps to develop resilience.

Tasks

Read case study one

- What range of emotions is this reporter experiencing in this scenario?
- How do you think you would feel if you were covering this trial? Do you think you would be able to produce a fair and objective report?
- Do you think gender might play a part in how some journalists cope with their emotional responses?

Read case study two

- What kind of emotions do you think this reporter was experiencing when he heard about the possibility of a video being shown during the Ian Watkins case?
- How could you protect yourself emotionally if you thought a highly distressing video might be played during a case you were covering?

Read case study three

- What are this journalist's main areas of focus in this scenario? How do you think it helped her do her job?
- Imagine you are in this inquest, covering a major news event while surrounded by the victims' families. How do you think you would be feeling? What would you focus on?

Read case study four

- How could you deal with the emotions this reporter experiences when he approaches families at inquests?
- How do you think focusing on the public interest in stories could help journalists deal with some of the emotions they feel in this kind of situation?

Note

1. More than 1,400 girls in Rotherham were sexually abused and trafficked between 1997 and 2013 by an organised gang of predominantly British-Pakistani men.

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CHAPTER 14

The Death Knock as Emotional Labour—Reframing a "Rite of Passage" to Help Journalists Cope

Alysson Watson

Just as journalists covering combat, crime and catastrophe are impacted by their work, so are journalists covering "everyday" trauma. While some may experience primary trauma through witnessing events, most are at risk of secondary or "vicarious" trauma through interviewing victims, survivors and the bereaved and covering court (Barnes, 2016; Hanusch, 2010; McMahon, 2001, 2016). The process of interviewing a bereaved family is known as the "death knock" (Harcup, 2014). Death, per se, has news value, but that increases if the death is unusual, disruptive, conflictual or impactful (Castle, 1999; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Hanusch, 2008; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017; Walter et al., 1995). While it is routine, the death knock is challenging, even for experienced journalists. For early career reporters, it is a "rite of passage" that they must "grin and bear", and for students, it is daunting. Acknowledging emotional labour and the risk of "moral injury" is crucial to coping.

An Australian Case Study

This chapter reports on the author's 2021–2022 case study of Australian print and digital journalists' death knock practice. The journalists who were surveyed (100) and interviewed (10) expressed personal, professional, ethical and ideological concerns about death knocks. Most (70%) say they learned "just by doing it" with little or no training, guidance or support. They say they would have benefited from knowledge about grief (45%), training in interviewing bereaved people (48%), and advice and support from colleagues and supervisors (38%). Four in five say they have, at least possibly, been impacted psychologically, and one in 10 say they have experienced a mental or physical health condition such as anxiety, vicarious trauma, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), complex PTSD, nervous breakdown, and depression, as a result. Experienced journalists say death knocks get easier, but they are still challenging; only one in 16 say they do not find them challenging at all. These are important findings in the context of an industry recognising that journalists' work can impact their health (Wake

& Ricketson, 2022). Furthermore, journalists' increasing use of social media in death knocks (Watson, 2022) raises new ethical issues, including pressure to "steal" photographs, which warrant investigation.

Despite its impacts, most journalists in the author's study believe that the death knock has news value, is part of their job, is expected by readers, and can benefit families and communities if done ethically. This highlights a paradox that is recognised by journalists; the death knock is both an *intrusion* on personal grief and privacy and the *inclusion* of families in stories that may be written without their participation.

Australian journalists say their ethical ambitions can be derailed by factors outside their control—the news cycle, management demands and competitor pressure. Journalists have identified links between ethical breaches, "moral injury", and posttraumatic reactions (Backholm & Bjorkqvist, 2012), particularly if breaches were due to newsroom directives. Moral injury occurs when people feel driven to breach ethical and professional values, their own "moral compass" (Drescher et al., 2011; Litz et al., 2009; Litz & Kerig, 2019). This chapter argues that at least some death knock impacts should be conceived as "moral injury". A journalist's moral compass underpins their sense of professional identity (Pearson et al., 2018), and just as moral injury can damage professional identity and is a risk factor for PTSD (Drevo, 2016), adherence to professional identity can strengthen resilience and minimise posttraumatic harm (Muller, 2010). In aligning death knock impacts with moral injury theory and in highlighting the emotional labour of the practice, this chapter reframes the death knock and offers an approach to bolster journalists' capacity to report tragedy by reference to their professional identity. It does this by exploring aspects of the death knock that might cause moral injury through unpacking journalists' motivations and values.

How and Why Do Journalists Do the Death Knock?

Traditionally a knock on the front door, the death knock is now also done via telephone, email, and, increasingly, social media (Watson, 2022). The author's study found that most journalists (91%) use social media in death knocks as a *tool* to identify and locate (74%) and contact (71%) potential interviewees and as a *source* of facts, quotes ("tributes") and photographs of the deceased. Private messaging is equally preferred with the phone (by 70%) as the means to *contact* potential interviewees, but most journalists still prefer to *interview* face-to-face (87%) or via phone (84%) and only a third interview over social media. Two-thirds say they download photos of deceased people from social media with the permission of families, but most (90%) prefer families to supply photos directly. One in five (19%) say they download photos without asking permission, one in four (26%) download photos if their request to use them goes unanswered, and (3%) download photos even if permission is denied.

It is not surprising that the death knock attracts criticism (McKay, 2007; Moreham & Tinsley, 2019), including from bereaved people (Duncan & Newton, 2017; Moreham & Tinsley, 2019). Journalists approach grieving people on what may be the worst day of their life—when the death is "news" (Collings & Kemp, 2010). Codes of conduct urge journalists to respect personal privacy and grief, although this is tempered by "the public interest in freedom of expression" (Duncan, 2020, p. 187). The death knock interview results in a story about mourning (Forsberg, 2019), which has been criticised as formulaic, written to "fit a preconceived story" and with scant regard to individual mourners (Walsh, Childers et al., 2011, p. 197).

However, the death knock is good journalistic practice. In reporting news, journalists seek out the best sources (Barnes, Tupou & Harrison, 2019). While approaching grief-stricken people may seem "ghoulish or vulpine" (Sanders, 2003, p. 97), bereaved people are "fundamental to the story" (Newton & Duncan, 2012, p. 61); "raw emotion makes the best copy" (Berrington & Jemphrey, 2003, p. 237). Such stories report on highly disruptive events, giving them strong news value (Franklin,

2014; Hanusch, 2010); they are popular with audiences, imbuing them with commercial value to news organisations (Barnes, 2016). They provide audiences with emotional engagement, not just informative engagement (Duncan & Newton, 2012), and can produce powerful and effective coverage that is a catalyst for action (Duncan & Newton, 2010; Hume, 2005; Linklater, 1996). Australian journalists confirm research that most bereaved people "wanted to talk" and "wanted their stories to be told" (Dworznik-Hoak, 2020, p. 169) and welcomed the journalist's approach as a chance to speak for their loved one, raise awareness of an issue, hold authorities to account, or make a change (Duncan, 2012; Healey, 2020).

What Concerns Do Journalists Have about the Death Knock?

Although journalists report a willingness by the bereaved to talk and can justify the death knock if it is done ethically, most think of it negatively, find it stressful, feel guilty (Browne, Evangeli & Greenberg, 2012; Englund, 2008; Forsberg, 2019; Newton & Duncan, 2012) and worry about being insensitive, retraumatising victims and invading privacy (Seely, 2019). This is the paradox: journalists feel they are *intruding* on people's personal grief and privacy but also feel they are *including* them in stories and giving them some control. Journalists in the author's study echo previous research (Barnes, 2016; Duncan & Newton, 2010), describing their experiences as awkward, embarrassed, anxious, horrifying, heartbreaking and haunting. They recount threats of violence and actual violence: being grabbed, pushed, sworn at, having lit cigarettes thrown at them, having to run down the street, and staring down the barrel of a shotgun. They relate feeling intrusive, exploitative and voyeuristic and worry about causing harm to families and "feeding public interest in the macabre". They describe long-term impacts as "cumulative", citing stress, trauma, anxiety and nightmares. They confirm that coverage of suicide, children's deaths (McMahon, 2016; Seely, 2019) and funerals are the hardest assignments (Duncan, 2020) and say they sometimes avoid the death knock (Berrington & Jemphrey, 2003) by "knocking on the grass".

Research that journalists are young and inexperienced when they do their first death knock (Barnes, 2016; Johnson, 1999; Maxson, 2000; Rees, 2007; Simpson & Boggs, 1999) is echoed in the author's study: 87% were under 30 (including 5% under 20), and 93% had been in the job less than five years (including 44% less than one year). Most said they did not feel prepared professionally (86%) or psychologically (68%) and were not confident (71%). Their concerns were ethical (86%), personal (78%) and professional (53%), less so ideological (23%). In doing subsequent death knocks, they felt more prepared professionally (65%) and personally (61%) and more confident (60%). Although their concerns diminished, most (83%) believe they were warranted; only 6% say they never found death knocks challenging. The most difficult aspects are contacting interviewees (78%), justifying an interview request (65%) and the interview itself (47%). Several journalists raised the dilemma of using photographs "stolen from social media", especially if "people are really young". The author's study confirms research that journalists receive little or no training (Castle, 1999) or guidance (Barnes, Tupou & Harrison, 2016) to do death knocks. When asked what prepared them to do death knocks (they could select three from 11 options), 70% ticked "I just did it", compared with 36% who ticked "supervisor's or colleague's advice' "and 21% who ticked "observing colleagues/newsroom practice". Others relied on life experience, empathy and local knowledge.

What Impacts Does the Death Knock Have on Journalists?

Journalism is an occupation with high rates of exposure to potentially traumatic events (McMahon, 2016; Newman, Simpson & Handschuh, 2003; Pyevich, Newman & Daleiden, 2003), with between

70% and 100% of journalists reporting exposures that could cause physical, emotional or psychological injury (Anderson, 2018; Dworznik, 2006; Keats, 2012; Pyevich, Newman & Daleiden, 2003; Newman, Simpson & Handschuh, 2003). This usually occurs early in their careers (Johnson, 1999; Duncan & Newton, 2012) when they are most at risk (Maxson, 2000; Rees, 2007; Simpson & Boggs, 1999) and impacts compound with repeated exposure (Barnes 2016; Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Rees, 2007). Although some experience primary trauma by witnessing events, most trauma is secondary or vicarious, experienced through interviewing victims, survivors and bereaved (Hanusch, 2010; McMahon, 2001, 2016) and court reporting (Barnes, 2016). Although only a minority of exposures result in PTSD (McMahon, 2016), journalists still face depression (McMahon, 2016; Novak & Davison, 2013) and problems that get in the way of them leading a fulfilling life (Anderson, 2018; McMahon, 2020). One Australian journalist said:

> [I] had anxiety and recurrent nightmares. I would dream of my family members dying in car crashes or house fires or imagine my brothers getting beaten to death. Revolting mix of joy and guilt that would manifest physically.

Most Australian journalists (88%) say some death knocks affect them more than others, and 76% have one that has stayed with them. For some, it is the first; for others, it is "anything involving children", suicide, murder, tragic circumstances, violent death, "raw grief" and situations where families are "not willing" or "aggressive". Impactful accounts include "breaking the news to them", "when I had a gun pointed at my head", and "helping the undertaker move the body". One journalist gave this account:

> I literally knocked on the door of a family whose father had just shot their mother and then killed himself. It was beyond wrong that we were there. It would have been within 24 hours of the incident. The oldest child was just 17.

Death Knock Impacts as "Moral Injury"

Providing impetus for the impacts of some death knocks to be categorised as moral injury, the author's study shows the practice disrupting journalists' confidence in, and expectations about, their own and others' motivations and their capacity to behave in a just and ethical manner (Drescher et al., 2011). Many categorise the death knock as a "rite of passage"—it is routine, part of the job and an important skill, but to be dreaded, endured, and done under duress. The theme of "feeling wrong" is pervasive. One journalist said: "Sometimes it feels wrong to insert myself into someone's personal moment of grief." Another said: "Even if a death knock goes well, the emotional burden never quite leaves you. I still feel to this day like I've done something wrong by contacting someone when they're in so much pain."

Another common theme is the "enormous" pressure from superiors to get the story. One journalist said: "I knew I didn't want to do it, felt it was morally wrong, felt uncomfortable, was anxious about it, was told I had to do it." Another said: "I struggle with forcing people to talk about their loss because management thinks there's a story in it." These journalists feel they are acting in ways they find unethical; even if pressure is not explicit, they feel the weight of expectation; they exhibit moral injury. Nearly two-thirds (62%) say they have to persuade people to be interviewed, at least sometimes; the main three persuasions they use are that "the story will pay tribute", that it will prevent a future tragedy, or that it will speak for the loved one. Interviewees were split about whether journalists could say "no" to doing death knocks, but even those who thought they *could* say no doubted they *would*, commenting "it doesn't go down too well in the newsroom", "it would be silly to, it would be career-damaging" and "[it would lead to] toxic bullshit, you'll get marginalised and get shit stories". A few interviewees

say they "fought back" against editors' unreasonable demands but most say they would "knock on the grass" rather than refuse the assignment.

Despite these misgivings, two-thirds of journalists in the author's study accept the death knock as part of their job "if it is done ethically". Fifty-nine percent say their death knock experience has been professionally positive, 38% say it has been personally positive, and 62% say it has, at least possibly, advanced their career. Reactions from bereaved families have been, on balance, much more positive than negative, and most journalists believe their stories have helped the bereaved (97%) and their communities (96%) at least sometimes. While it cannot be demonstrated in the study, some research has found that journalists experienced "post-traumatic growth" following death knocks (McMahon, 2016; Cartwright & Williams, 2021).

How Do Journalists Cope with Doing the Death Knock?

Even if they are affected by reporting tragedy, journalists feel they should be able to cope (Belch, 2015) and attach stigma to being traumatised, which is viewed as a weakness in "macho" newsrooms (Novak & Davidson, 2013). A small number of journalists report colleagues leaving the profession, "going into PR" or "going on rounds where they're not exposed to it", but most say they cope with the death knock by talking about it. More than three-quarters (76%) say they have discussed death knocks with someone, mostly supervisors and colleagues (57%) or family and friends (56%). Fewer have talked to a private counsellor (12%) or workplace counsellor (4%); some do not see the need to talk about it (13%) or do not want to (7%).

Australian journalists echo the range of strategies that those who experience trauma use to cope, including "maladaptive" or destructive behaviour (alcohol and drug use, self-criticism and self-blame) and "adaptive" or constructive behaviour (sleep, diet, exercise, relaxation, socialising, and peer support) (Lee et al., 2018). Seeking peer support or "buddying up" with experienced police reporters and photographers is the main advice journalists give to new colleagues. However, many say you just have to "grin and bear it". One journalist described the need to "put up a professional wall, a kind of protective overcoat, like a shield to keep out the hurt". Some find strength in their own experiences of death, loss and grieving. Others feel better if they accommodate the needs of the bereaved, bending usually inflexible work practices to allow families to read stories before publication or "email quotes, rather than give a full-on interview".

Remembering the "higher purpose" of your job is another adaptive coping strategy (Seely, 2020), and it was common for Australian journalists to find solace in their professionalism. Most journalists say they do death knocks "sensitively", "compassionately", and "ethically", with "empathy" and "respect". One commented:

> The way I cope with the whole process is to make sure the family or loved ones are comfortable and at ease, and then I write a story that accurately reflects and celebrates the person they have lost.

Adherence to professional identity is what allows journalists to rationalise the paradox of the death knock as both *intrusion* and *inclusion*, with one journalist writing: "When you pay tribute to a person and do it well, at best you feel as if you've justified the intrusion on their loved ones." Another wrote: "Act with integrity, be honest and sincere and most of the time you will get the story in a way that can actually help these people too." One was emphatic: "If you feel you are being asked to do something wrong, seek further advice from colleagues." Just as validation is a key coping strategy, the journalist's professionalism is a crucial component of resilience, and championing professional identity can be useful in devising harm mitigation strategies.

How Can Journalists Be Better Prepared and Supported?

Recognising the impacts of reporting trauma (Anderson, 2018; Dworznik-Hoak, 2020) has led to calls for trauma journalism to be taught in university courses (Anderson & Bourke, 2020), for better care for working journalists faced with "a lack of support from within the work environment, particularly from editors" (Barnes, 2016, p. 170), including training materials, professional development, debriefings, and counselling (Seely, 2019), and for journalists to develop self-awareness and self-care techniques (Barnes, 2016; McMahon, 2020). However, any calls for journalists to do *more* must be realistic in a time-poor profession under strain, as digitisation and convergence cause ongoing budget cuts and job losses (Simons & Dickson, 2019), and professionals require more skills (Lewis, 2017).

Journalists have identified links between ethical breaches, moral injury and posttraumatic reactions (Backholm & Bjorkqvist, 2012), particularly if breaches were due to newsroom directives. They face increased stress if they are forced to sensationalise an event or pressure distressed people for an interview (Browne, Evangeli & Greenberg, 2012) and could be caught in an existential dilemma about whether to act as a journalist or "a human being" at a time of suffering (McMahon, 2016). In aligning death knock harm with moral injury theory, approaches to mitigate harm must, therefore, mitigate moral injury. To understand moral injury as it relates to death knocks, it is necessary to understand the ethical and professional values of death knock practice, the motivations of journalists in doing death knocks, and whether motivations cause (or require) unethical behaviour.

What Is an Ethical Death Knock?

When asked to define an ethical death knock, Australian journalists' comments can be distilled into five key themes: *honesty*, *respect*, *empathy,* a *personal approach*, and *a legitimate public interest.* While honesty, respect and public interest are stated in codes of ethics, empathy (also described as compassion, care, sensitivity, understanding, patience, "go softly", "go slowly") is not. In the macho newsroom, journalists do not cry (Muller, 2010), and empathy is not an essential skill. A *personal approach* (face-to-face or phone contact) is a tall order in the social media age, but although most journalists use social media to find and contact people, they still prefer face-to-face or phone interviews and for families to provide photos directly to them.

A *legitimate public interest* for a death knock is difficult to define in a shrinking and competitive media market. It is useful here to investigate motivation: Why do journalists do death knocks? Australian journalists are pragmatic in their responses, with answers such as "the stories sell and attract readers", they're told to do it, it is part of the job, readers expect it, and competitors do it, ranking well ahead of any perceived benefit to bereaved families or communities, and any personal or professional satisfaction or career advancement. However, most journalists believe that their death knocks do have benefits for families (97%) and for communities (95%), and nearly two-thirds can justify the death knock if it is done ethically.

It may be that some death knocks breach the pillars ethical journalists demand of themselves: *honesty, respect, empathy*, a *personal approach*, and *a justifiable motive*. And it may be that these pillars can be aligned with, and addressed by, the factors journalists say would help them in their death knock practice: *training*, *knowledge,* and *support/advice*. Just as their moral compass underpins their professional identity (Pearson et al., 2018) and professional identity strengthens resilience and minimises post posttraumatic harm (Muller, 2010), shoring up a journalist's professional identity regarding death knocks could shore up their resilience to harm. Through training, knowledge, support and advice, journalists could better understand the "how" and "why" of the death knock, equipping them with skills (*personal approach*) and attributes (*honesty, respect* and *empathy*) they see as ethically necessary.

Resources to Support an Ethical Death Knock

Resources to help journalists report on trauma and tragedy in an ethical, accurate and compassionate way while looking after themselves and others already exist (Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma), and more are being developed, including simulations, role play, reflective practice, mental health professional visits, and a holistic humanitarian approach to resilience training (Jukes, 2016; Murphy et al., 2020; Ogunyemi & Price, 2023). Educators believe it is important to teach students about trauma, but their approach is patchy, underdeveloped, reactive and inconsistent (Dworznik & Garvey, 2019; Wake & Ricketson, 2022). There has been strong advocacy for media organisations to take responsibility for their journalists' experience of trauma through caring teamwork (Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma, 2013), and some newsrooms offer counselling, but the lack of duty of care towards journalists has consequences, with some bringing claims against employers for occupational PTSD (Wake & Ricketson, 2022).

Editors and educators must commit to evidenced-based trauma training for journalists. Essential to this is the acknowledgement of emotional labour (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018). Despite their competitive nature and their competitive industry, journalists are collegiate. They talk to each other. Helping them develop a dialogue that accommodates *empathy* might help reduce the incidence of maladaptive coping strategies such as "the need to bottle-up our feelings or self-medicate".

Education should also address motivation. Equipping journalists with a justifiable motive (or the "why") of death knock practice is complex but necessary. Reporters' distress is not solely about intruding on grief but in "their perception of their role at this time" (Duncan & Newton, 2010, p. 444); they lack a direct helping role (Browne, Evangeli & Greenberg, 2012) that is clearly defined and socially accepted, unlike first responders such as police, ambulances and clergy (Duncan, 2005; Duncan & Newton, 2010). Understanding potential benefits, which are backed by evidence, could give journalists confidence that their "it-will-pay-tribute line" is not, as another interviewee put it: "bullshit". Journalists reporting tragedy do not have the same role as first responders, but they do have a role.

Conclusion

The author's case study confirms that the death knock is a "rite of passage" generally done by young, inexperienced journalists who have valid concerns and suffer impacts. While the majority cope well, they are affected, and one in 10 experience a physical or mental health condition they believe is a result. Journalists say they need better knowledge, training, advice and support. This chapter argues that some death knock impacts should be conceived of as moral injury and that an approach to mitigating moral injury lies in an appeal to the journalist's professional identity. If a journalist genuinely grasps the *how* and *why* of death knock practice and can acknowledge their emotional labour, they will be more resilient in reporting trauma and do a better job. They will be less likely to sustain moral injury if they are satisfied that they are acting professionally.

There is a need to reframe the death knock from a "rite of passage" that bloods young journalists and/or chores that requires "hassling people on the worst day of their lives for most weeks of your entire career", as one journalist put it, to a valid journalistic practice with news value and potential benefits. Australian journalists say an ethical death knock is done with honesty, respect, empathy, a personal approach, and a justifiable motive. With vicarious trauma proven to impact journalists reporting everyday tragedy and the real risk to interviewees of ill-informed approaches (Healey, 2022), journalists can no longer be expected to charge into death knocks unprepared and take the impacts in their stride. Equipping them with knowledge and skills and helping them acknowledge emotional labour are factors crucial to (re)aligning their moral compass.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Talking points

- Will acknowledging emotional labour help journalists cope with death knocks?
- When is it ethical for journalists to publish photographs of dead people downloaded from "public" social media accounts?

Tasks

- Part of the coping mechanisms when undertaking death knocks, either digitally or in person, is understanding and feeling as if you have conducted yourself ethically and in the matter of public interest. Essentially it is important to understand not only how to do a death knock, but why you are doing it. Thinking about the author's comments on intrusion versus inclusion, in groups or alone, find three articles in print, online or broadcast that include interviews with recently bereaved families.
- How might the story differ if the interviews were not included? What is the public interest in the story? Have the families been treated with respect?
- Compare the story treatments and see if you can identify patterns of sensitivity, compassion and empathy.

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CHAPTER 15

Teaching Reporting on Death: Thanatology and Death Education as Tools to Prepare Journalists for Vicarious Trauma

Allan Macedo de Novaes and Marcio Adriano Tonete Marcelino

Most media professionals have had to cover a traumatic event in the course of their career (murders, car accidents, natural disasters or even wars) or live with it every day. No matter how "used" someone may be to this type of situation, the emotional impact is always there.

This raises not only the question of the journalist's emotional health but also the ethical issues involved in reporting traumatic situations. The COVID-19 pandemic, which took the lives of many journalists, has further reinforced the need to prepare these professionals to deal with death and grief.

In the face of chaotic scenarios such as the one in Manaus, Brazil, where the health crisis caused by the coronavirus was marked by inhumane burials and deaths due to lack of oxygen at one of the most critical moments of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, this chapter presents a "kit" of principles and useful tools for reporting on death. With this in mind, we seek to show that thanatology (study of death) offers a repertoire—often underused and underestimated—that journalists can articulate to report on the death and trauma of others while dealing with their own fears and sense of finitude. We conclude by proposing a suggestive script for working on death education in the context of death reporting based on Martin Buber's paradigm of "I-It and I-Thou", a concept developed in the 20th century to represent the different types of relationships with people and things.

Journalism and Vicarious Trauma

The role of journalists in covering tragedies is known to all, but awareness of trauma in journalism and the academic debate on the subject is relatively new. Studies in the area have gained strength since the 1990s,[1] starting with research that initially sought to understand psychological damage in war correspondents (Feinstein, Owen & Blair, 2002; Feinstein & Nicholson, 2005; Papadopoulou, Maniou & Pandia, 2022). Later, when the scope was extended further, other aspects were studied, such as the cumulative effects of exposure to stressful everyday situations and vicarious trauma, a term

that defines secondary contact with tragedies, for example, when interviewing a survivor or hearing shocking accounts in a court case (Barnes, 2016).

These discussions gained strength in the context of media coverage of tragic events, such as school massacres and terrorist attacks in the 1990s and 2000s. Barnes (2016, pp. 41, 42) argues that one of the factors that contributed to this phenomenon was the spectacularisation of death. This type of news has become a by-product of the newsroom routine, considering that it arouses the audience's interest and, at the same time, is cheap and easy to produce.

However, there are still many gaps in the training of professionals to deal with this scenario, either due to the absence of the subject in curricula or the lack of methodological guidelines for teaching about trauma, as shown by several studies (Barnes, 2015; Specht & Tsilman, 2018; Ogunyemi & Price, 2023). This highlights the need for multidisciplinary approaches, reflective practices in the classroom and investment in specific teacher training, which brings us to the next section of this chapter, where we will outline how thanatology and death education are relevant to the discussion of vicarious trauma in journalists.

Thanatology and Death Education

The academic study of death and its causes and phenomena, also named thanatology or death studies, has a relatively recent history. Although ancient religious and philosophical literature has already addressed the problem of death, the word thanatology first appeared in 1842 in a British medical lexicon, and the studies of death advanced in a more significant way in an even later period, mainly after the publication of Sigmund Freud's essay on mourning and melancholy in 1917.

The work of the French historian Philippe Ariès is considered at least one of the most visible social histories of death available to date. In his books—*Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (1975) and *The Hour of Our Death* (1981)—Ariès described "attitudes towards death" in a fourfold typology on death in Western culture that depicts the evolution of the social meaning of passing and loss. From the Middle Ages to the present, Ariès' four phases have been described as "tamed death", "one's own death/death of the self", "thy death/death of the other" and "forbidden/invisible death".

Some researchers have proposed a dialogue with Ariès' typology, such as Jacobsen (2016), who suggests the phase of "spectacular death", referring to the concept of spectacle by the French situationist theorist Guy Debord, in which death becomes a commodity, transformed by the media into an object of entertainment and consumption.

Jacobsen (2016) understands that the "spectacular death" phase encompasses five dimensions: (1) the new mediated visibility of death (death is portrayed to a global audience, leading to a vicarious experience through the media); (2) the commercialisation of death (consumerism of burial and mourning culture); (3) the re-ritualisation of death (new forms of memorials and burials); (4) the revolution in palliative care (dignified death and dying); and (5) the issue of academic attention and specialisation (consolidation of thanatology and death studies as a field of expertise).

Directly related to the five dimensions that point to a spectacularisation of death today, particularly the mediatised experience and the commercialisation of death, experts have used the term "death anxiety" to describe the complex feelings that the thought of death can evoke. Death anxiety can encompass several feelings, including fear of premature death, fear of suffering in the dying process and fear of the death of loved ones.

One of the ways of approaching "death anxiety" and dealing with grief, loss and the trauma of death in a society that spectacularises dying and makes the end of life a commodity is death education. The main goal of death education is to prepare individuals for an inevitable event in their lives (Kearl,

1989). Derived from the death awareness movement in the 1960s, death education courses were also offered at colleges and universities in the United States and United Kingdom from this period. These proved to be a necessary introduction to the subject of the finitude of life and an antidote to the cultural and media excesses surrounding the subject.

Dying-related education may be conducted in many different settings and environments using many approaches, such as domestic, religious, public and academic ecosystems, and encompasses four central dimensions: cognitive, affective, behavioural and valuational (Corr & Corr, 2013). From a cognitive or intellectual perspective, education for death provides information about death-related experiences, helps individuals understand them and suggests new forms of organising or interpreting those data. Another aspect of death education is the affective dimension, which refers to emotions, feelings and attitudes about grief and bereavement. The behavioural and valuational dimensions explore how people act in dying scenarios, why they act that way, and which of their behaviours and values relate to such situations. Death education can provide useful and positive tools to address many of the challenges associated with death in the 21st century: war and terrorism, epidemics, famine and malnutrition, migration, capital punishment, abortion, urban violence, school shootings, natural disasters and others.

Death Education and Journalism Education: The "I-It-Thou" Framework

Academic research on the reporting of death in the context of teaching journalism is not very common, and one of the pioneers in the field is Richards (1996). Amongst the few studies of death coverage, one of the most frequently discussed topics has to do with the practice of "death knock", a term used by the press to refer to the process of "knocking on the door", i.e., contacting the bereaved in search of testimonials, photos or videos about deceased people (Duncan & Newton, 2010; Newton & Duncan, 2012). These studies suggest that journalists are ill-prepared in this area, especially in a university context.

To provide journalism professionals, teachers and students with principles and tools to address thanatological issues in their training and professional practice, we draw on the ideas of the Austrian philosopher Martin Buber (1878–1965) in his classic work *I and thou*, originally published in 1923. For Buber (2013, p. 13), in a philosophical way, being means being in relation, in dialogue; that is why he wrote: "In the beginning is the relation".

The principles I-It and I-Thou represent the twofold attitude human beings can have towards the world, and from them, Buber presents the existing forms of relationships. The term I-Thou refers to an attitude in which one encounters the Self and the other with mutual awareness, in which reciprocity, authenticity and inclusion occur; it is a meeting of equals, a two-way relationship based on dialogue (as in a marriage relationship marked by mutual respect, commitment, acceptance and understanding). In turn, the term I-It refers to a utilitarian relationship, a means to an end (such as, for example, the relationship with the taxi driver who takes us to a certain place). From the perspective of the I-It concept, relationships can become a problem the moment a human being, driven by their interests and purposes, ends up forgetting the values that led him to meet the other: responsibility, availability, openness and so on.

In the work of Scott et al. (2009), Buber's concepts are applied to medical-hospital reality in the form of a theoretical model that aims to overcome the Cartesian view of the body as a machine and medical professionals as repairers and technicians. The authors propose a philosophy of medicine focused on relationships between doctors and patients. According to this logic, the I-It relationship refers to technology and conventional medical procedures, while the I-Thou relationship dialogues with the idea of empathy and welcome in doctor-patient relationships.

Morgan and Guilherme (2010) apply Buber's ideas to the educational context and propose the I-It/I-Thou schema as an element of a dialogical educational tool to address challenges and promote peace and collaboration in interpersonal and community relationships. The authors summarise the ethical character of the I-Thou relationship as follows: "If I cease to say thou to fellow human beings then I cease to see them as persons and they become merely objects to me—they become means to an end—and in doing so I cease to ascribe rights and duties to them" (Morgan & Guilherme, 2010, p. 8).

Following the example of the approximations made by Scott et al. (2009) and Morgan and Guilherme (2010), we present below a guide that uses Buber's I-It and I-Thou paradigm to work on educating people about death in the context of death reporting. Since one of the assumptions of Buber's philosophical elaboration is directly related to his criticism of the modern project, technique and objectivity, it is important to emphasise that our guide also points to the need to think about journalistic activity beyond the utopian concepts of exemption and neutrality, although we understand that elements of these principles should somehow guide the practice of journalism. In this sense, we assume that the relationship between journalist and source, especially when reporting on death and tragedies, should evolve from the I-It to I-Thou type. We therefore propose that sources should be treated first as human beings and then as witnesses and information providers.

Just as the structure of the lead provides the professional with a basic guide for building the factual journalistic report through answers to basic questions such as what, who, where, when, why and how, we believe our guide named "It-I-Thou" is a responsible, healthy and empathetic guide to help reporting on death issues and dialoguing with bereaved people. However, unlike the lead structure, the It-I-Thou guide deals not only with technical-journalistic issues but mainly with ethical and deontological topics. This guide can provide a useful theoretical and practical basis for journalism instructors working on the issue of death. It can also be useful for beginners and experienced journalists who need to deal with the subject.

It-I-Thou proposes that the news production of issues related to death be conducted from a perspective that balances three elements: (1) the recognition of the relevance of the role of journalism and the guarantee of an accurate and respectful journalistic report, which we understand as the "It", or "the story"; (2) the journalist's knowledge of himself or herself and his or her personal and emotional claims, which we refer to as "I" or "the journalist"; and (3) the treatment of the source as an equal other, who goes through a phase of grief and emotional vulnerability that requires acceptance and empathy, which we call "Thou", or "the source".

Since the guide is an approach to educating about death, it is structured in the form of questions that the student, teacher or journalist must ask themselves to determine the goals, attitudes and actions necessary to report on death. In each of the elements—It, I or Thou—we describe a practical example of journalism and/or journalism teaching in Brazil for the application of the ideas developed.

"It": The Story

The first element of the It-I-Thou guide represents the story to be told from the perspective of the importance of the press and the technical and ethical obligation to responsible journalism. The questions the journalist/student must ask himself or herself here are: why and how should one talk about death?

With respect to why, as we saw in the section on thanatology and death education, dealing with death is delicate but also inevitable for journalistic practice. It is not just a matter of reporting the fact of a tragedy or the loss of a life; the journalist also wants to raise awareness, especially on occasions of public interest, and expose negligence or wrongdoing to ensure that someone is held accountable when necessary.

As for how, a legitimate concern of journalists is the fear of intrusion into grief. This leads many professionals not to seek out family members to tell the story of the death, often causing even more sensitive reactions from the bereaved afterwards. Death knocking is a practice that requires much sensitivity and care. Many journalists avoid this, preferring to write a story that preserves the grief of the family members. However, the family is indispensable to the construction of the journalistic account, so the journalist should not disregard it, at the risk of producing an inaccurate and incomplete story. For, as Newton and Duncan (2012, p. 61) note, the story of a loss belongs to the bereaved, not the reporters.

In addition to including family members as sources, there are also moral justifications for either death knocking, obituary or other types of journalistic coverage of death. Publishing articles with information about death can save the family the stress of having to tell the story many times in their social circle. Journalistic reports on deaths can also be important tools for memorialising the deceased. They help the bereaved to build up a "collection" of biographical information that they want to internalise and that helps them to process the grief. If they manage to overcome the stigma of the spectacularisation of death, journalistic reports can respectfully address the feelings of the bereaved and explain the consequences of a personal tragedy—which can lead to a response of comfort and welcome in the community. These and other reasons contribute to a more positive attitude with which journalism educators and editors could morally justify reporting on deaths, despite ethical concerns about interfering with grief.

Example: Inumeráveis and Em memória

The COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil was marked by successive restrictions, lockdowns and a staggering loss of life. Unfortunately, this period will also be remembered for the policy of downplaying deaths, restricting funeral rituals and quick burials. In the midst of this "war" scenario, several memorials appeared on the internet with the aim of humanising journalistic coverage to show that the lives taken by the coronavirus were not just numbers. Indirectly, they were also a way to protest government negligence in managing the health crisis. One of these was the website *inumeraveis.com.br*, run by a network of volunteer journalists and journalism students. Based on information provided by the bereaved themselves, the volunteers wrote "tribute texts" to show, with sensitivity and a poetic touch, who the people behind the statistics were.

Another proposal developed in the spirit of "collaborative" journalism was the Em Memória project (memoria.revistaadventista.com.br), launched by a hundred-year-old religious Brazilian magazine. Continuing the magazine's long tradition of publishing obituaries, the online platform made it possible for family members and friends of the fatal victims of COVID-19 to send obituaries to pay their last respects. Initiatives such as these played an important role in providing comfort and, in a way, filling the void left by the impossibility of holding in-person funerals. Telling these stories ("It") with sensitivity and focusing on the legacy left by the victims of COVID-19 was a way to humanise journalistic coverage of the pandemic in Brazil.

"I": The Journalist

The second element of the It-I-Thou guide addresses the journalist's self-knowledge and self-analysis and is directly related to aspects discussed in trauma journalism, particularly vicarious trauma. The student, the teacher or the press professional must answer the following question: how does the death of another affect me?

Reporting on issues related to death may act as an emotional trigger if the journalist has experienced similar situations (e.g., the loss of a family member). In addition, unstable and unconventional

behaviours resulting from exposure to violence and reflections on the finitude of others and oneself must be carefully analysed, as vicarious trauma studies indicate that exposure to violence—from reporting on the unfolding of a tragedy to visiting a crime scene—often leads to posttraumatic stress disorder. Therefore, self-awareness and the search for specialised professionals to monitor the mental and emotional health of the journalist are essential.

In journalism classes, teachers need to make students aware of these unhealthy and psychologically challenging situations so that future journalists can prepare for the challenges and know what measures to take and who to turn to in traumatic and vulnerable situations. The following description of posttraumatic stress disorder from the *American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology* provides a good starting point for students to recognise the symptoms of this disorder.

> [Is]a disorder that may result when an individual lives through or witnesses an event in which he or she believes that there is a threat to life or physical integrity and safety and experiences fear, terror, or helplessness. The symptoms are characterised by (a) re-experiencing the trauma in painful recollections, flashbacks, or recurrent dreams or nightmares; (b) avoidance of activities or places that recall the traumatic event, as well as diminished responsiveness (emotional anaesthesia or numbing), with disinterest in significant activities and with feelings of detachment and estrangement from others; and (c) chronic physiological arousal, leading to such symptoms as an exaggerated startle response, disturbed sleep, difficulty in concentrating or remembering, and guilt about surviving the trauma when others did not (see survivor guilt). (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2007, p. 815)

An accurate idea of the physical and emotional impact that a death report can cause should be mandatory in the training of future journalists. First, for the safety and preservation of the mental and emotional health of the professional. Second, because of the quality of the reporting itself, a journalist affected by the circumstances may stray from reality—which can lead to dehumanisation of sources—or excessive identification with the people involved—which can lead to partiality and inaccuracy. Third, the authentic, balanced and dialogic relationship creates more confidence in the source and helps demystify the myth of the journalist who does not become emotional or involved and who is only and exclusively interested in the scoop or the audience (Hanusch, 2010, pp. 79 and 80).

Example: Emotional Impact on Journalists in News Coverage of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Manaus, Brazil

With very high transmission rates and fatality rates, Manaus has become one of the most dramatic examples of the health crisis in Brazil. In a scenario of socioeconomic inequalities, the already deficient health system collapsed, culminating in the failure to provide oxygen to patients in critical condition. As a result, "while in the period from April to December 2020 (270 days) 3,380 deaths from COVID-19 were reported among Manaus residents, 2,195 deaths were reported in the month of January 2021 (31 days)" (Barreto et al., 2021, p. 1133). For this reason, refrigerated containers were placed to store bodies, and mass graves were opened to meet the demand for burials (Bega e Souza, 2021, p. 39).

Such a humanitarian crisis evidently attracted the attention of the press and had a great impact, especially on those who reported it on the ground. A reporter for a news agency in Amazonas state reported that, in 18 years in the profession, he had not seen anything like it.

> Not even apocalyptic literature would be able to produce something so perverse, so inhuman. Seeing people running through the city in search of oxygen cylinders desperately trying to save their loved ones… It was too horrible… In addition, it will never be forgotten. (Amazônia Real, 2021)

Although studies have shown that not even those who worked from home were spared emotional distress (Figaro, 2021; Reimberg, 2020, p. 12), the group that had to be on the streets was even more

vulnerable. As described in the *LatAm Journalism Review*, a publication of the Knight Center of the University of Texas (USA), photojournalists had to adopt "security and protective measures comparable to those required when covering armed conflicts" (Lubianco, 2020, online). As another Brazilian journalist pointed out in a report on *Portal Imprensa*, one of the difficulties in situations of humanitarian chaos is "understanding the limits of people's pain and avoiding sensationalism" (Portal Imprensa, 2021).

In addition to Manaus, the work of journalists during the pandemic was affected by several factors that could trigger psychological distress. Both by the chaos in the public health system and the climate of uncertainty, the fear of contagion and death, and the intensification of working hours and episodes of aggressions against journalists and freedom of the press, as happened in Manaus (during a press conference, journalists were physically and psychologically attacked when questioning a politician suspected of being involved in an overpriced purchase of respirators).

"Thou": The Source

In the third element to be considered (Thou), the teacher, the journalist or the student must ask themselves the following question: how should I approach the mourner? As mentioned earlier, the source must be treated as an equal, as a person who is going through suffering the same as the journalist has done, is doing or will do. He or she needs to listen more and talk less, knowing when to ask and what to ask.

For this reason, the advice of professionals who help the bereaved people is very useful for reporting on death. The bereaved person has his or her needs but is in a moment of despair; the journalist has goals, but he or she is insecure in front of a vulnerable person. The work of Graves (2009, p. 35) presents a 6-step framework that provides a way to keep both "on track".

The first step, "the story", begins with basic and essential information about the life of the deceased, their illness, and their death. The second step emphasises the relationship between the deceased and the bereaved person and between the deceased and other family members and friends. The third step is about honouring the life of the deceased and recording his or her achievements and his or her way of living. The fourth step is about legacy, that is, what the deceased left behind and what impact he or she had on the lives of others—how he or she will be remembered. The fifth step has to do with the strategy that the bereaved person uses to cope and process loss. The sixth and final step involves the journey the bereaved person has taken thus far to make his or her way through the unknown territory of grief and loss.

As Newton and Duncan (2012, p. 64) noted, four of Graves' six elements for structured and sensitive communication with bereaved people reproduce the obituary/death knock story construction. While steps 5 and 6 are not appropriate from the standpoint of data collection or the standpoint of the journalist taking on a counselling role during the death knock and subsequent contact, "it is legitimate to point out the parallels between the funeral eulogy, the suggestions for therapeutic interaction and the stories told by journalists on behalf of families and disseminated to the rest of the community" (Newton & Duncan, 2012, p. 64). In this way, Graves' script provides a safe and useful starting point for both the journalist and the source.

Example and Teaching Resources: Seminary "Reporting death and tragedy"

Most likely, the first formal course at a higher level of death education in Brazil was the subject "Psychology of Death" at the Institute of Psychology of the University of São Paulo in 1986. The objective of the course was to develop a proposal for death education focused on the training of

psychologists, extended to health and education professionals, with an emphasis on dealing with terminally ill patients and grieving people (Kovács, 2016).

Based on the experience of this course, the seminar "Reporting on death: Covering COVID-19 pandemics" was held by the authors of this text at the School of Communication at Adventist University of São Paulo (UNASP). Our goal was to provide the course with training in death education applied to the teaching of journalism. In the curriculum of the School of Communication at UNASP, there is no subject that addresses the reporting on death, and in the more than 20 years of existence of the programme, there is no record of any training, event or even lecture on the subject. Our intent was to present the "It-I-Thou" script described in this text to guide students on a frequent topic in the news during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the actions and strategies we adopted in the seminar are described in the form of teaching aids and suggestions at the end of this chapter.

Final Considerations

Considering the relevance and necessity of thanatology for managing situations of grief, death and vicarious trauma, as well as the ethical relevance of knowing how to handle sources in death reporting situations, the elements and methods of thanatology and death education should be integrated into journalism teaching and communication tools for students and professionals, especially those who are or will be exposed to traumatic situations and experiences related to death. Although some educators demonstrate a willingness to deeply address the issue, research indicates that a number of institutional factors, such as lack of training, time and resources, make this task difficult. As noted in this chapter, there is a lack of clarity in most journalism schools as to what content, approaches and methodologies to use.

Based on the recognition that creating conditions that allow these professionals to develop resilience in the face of trauma is a common challenge for journalistic companies and journalism courses, we proposed to design a basic "kit" with tools and examples that can guide journalistic work in situations of tragedy, death and mourning. The attempt to bring together Martin Buber's paradigm of "I-It and I-Thou" and the issue of vicarious trauma in journalism allowed us to outline the objectives and actions required for death reporting. This "toolkit", which we refer to as the "It-I-Thou" guide, takes into account at least three factors that must be balanced: (1) accuracy, sensitivity and respect when telling the story, (2) perception and analysis by the professional of how this reality affects him or her, and (3) a humanised way of approaching the bereaved.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Talking points

- Discuss whether it is possible to align the needs of a bereaved person with the goals of a reporter. What are the moral implications?
- Discuss whether other people (sources) should be considered as fellow human beings or would perceiving them as objects help your own trauma when reporting on death?
- Discuss the various relationships in this chapter. What happens when the relationship develops from I-It (object) to I-Thou (human being)? What effect would this have on your reporting and own trauma?
- Discuss the moral issues surrounding the "spectacularisation" death. Does journalism's part in this contribute to increasing the trauma experienced by all involved?

Tasks

- In groups, discuss and share your feelings and thoughts when confronted with the term "death". If comfortable, share personal experiences related to death in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic (this is related to the "I" dimension).
- Write your own obituary (or choose one of your classmates) to discuss aspects such as the importance of the presence of the family as a source and the role of obituaries as a record of memory and legacy of the deceased. This relates to the "It" and "Thou" dimensions.
- Choose a detective series, TV crime drama or film inspired by journalistic coverage of tragedies, or a True Crime podcast. Can you identify the depictions of grief, posttraumatic stress and journalists' relationship with sources?
- Consider learning from professionals who help bereaved persons in order to help you report on death.

Note

1. Several manuals emerged from this period, such as that produced by the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma (Columbia University), entitled *Trauma & Journalism: A Guide For Journalists, Editors & Managers* (2007), and another produced by Unesco, entitled *Safety Of Journalists Covering Trauma And Distress* (2022).

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CHAPTER 16

Don't Be a Jerk: Guidelines for Ethical and Sustainable Collaboration among Reporters, Fixers, and Local Producers Covering Warzones

Johana Kotišová

Media professionals' mental wellbeing and ill health are often discussed as subjects of psychology or psychiatry. This chapter shifts the attention to the fundamentally sociological, social, organisational, and work-related character of the problem of journalists' mental wellbeing or ill-health (Kotišová, 2019) while focusing on conflict reporting.

If you are a journalism student or a media professional planning to cover conflicts and wars across the world, you might need to work with local producers, fixers, or translators—or you might find yourself in the role of a fixer or a producer. This chapter provides a series of research-based tips[1] for foreign and local reporters, fixers, and producers covering conflicts and explaining the best—psychosocially sensitive and sustainable—practices of collaboration within transnational teams covering conflict zones. The tips and questions to address before going to a warzone should help you avoid unintended harm to your (local) collaborators and yourself, make your work more ethical and transparent, and maintain good long-term relationships with the conflict reporting community.

Beyond the Myth of the Cool Lone Wolves

The prospect of covering conflicts motivates many young people to study journalism and many early-career journalists to choose the path of a war reporter. You witness history as it unfolds, you can shape audiences' perception of key affairs of your time, you see and experience dramatic events that reveal the best and the worst in people, and you step out of your comfort zone. In short, you get to know what bare life is about. Much of this appeal is based on the myth of war reporters as autonomous, neutral, brave, adventurous, cool individuals who travel to a remote war and bring home the truth (see, e.g. Hallin, 1986; Pedelty, 2022; Peters, 2011). As Daniel Hallin writes in his seminal book on the Vietnam War, this "myth" is not a mere lie or an illusion; it is a "deeply held system of consciousness that profoundly affects both the structure of the news organisation and the day-to-day practice of journalism"

(Hallin, 1986, p. 23). This myth, however, also conceals some parts of the reality of conflict reporting and lies at the core of some of the aspects of conflict reporting that need changing:

- the taboo and stigma surrounding trauma in war reporting,
- the lack of organisational support for reporters' (including freelancers' and local collaborators') mental wellbeing,
- the neglect of journalists' bodies and embodied knowledge,
- the negligence of the vital role of local media professionals in the role of fixers or local producers, their trauma and wellbeing.

In turn, stigmatising and neglecting the parts of war reporting that do not fit into the myth—local media professionals, all the media professionals' bodies of knowledge, and psychosocial struggles—can make war reporting unethical and exploitative (Kotišová, 2019). This chapter looks beyond this neglect and stigma.

Conflict Reporting Ecology and the Duty of Care

The conceptual background of this chapter thus consists of, first, the notion of networked *conflict reporting ecology* formed by a complex and dense net of information gatherers, producers, disseminators (i.e., reporters, photographers, fixers, camera persons, producers, news assistants, etc.) and media organisations/teams in the role of nodes (Ford & Hoskins, 2022; Heinrich, 2011). This theoretical focus on interactions and environments stresses the fundamentally social, organisational, and work-related character of emotional experiences and mental wellbeing and implies that mental ill-health is clearly an *individualised* (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) rather than an individual problem, as might seem from the practice of diagnosing and treating media professionals with PTSD or depression *as individuals* (i.e., without curing the system of conflict reporting).

Second, relatedly, I argue that those who inhabit the conflict reporting ecosystem have the duty to care for each other, practically and emotionally. The tips listed below are based on an extrapolated, *ethical* understanding of the *duty of care*. The legal version of the duty of care, a legal obligation governing the responsibilities owed by employers to employees, has been criticised for being too limited in the context of conflict reporting. The critical debate has been evolving around how far the duty of care provided by "Western" organisations extends to freelancers and locally hired media professionals in the current conflict newsmaking ecosystems in the Global South (e.g., Creech, 2018; Pendry, 2015). As foreign and conflict reporting has undergone dramatic changes over the last decades and media organisations outsource much of the work to freelancers, stringers, and local collaborators (Murrell, 2010; Palmer & Fontan, 2007), the expectations of what duty of care should entail and what care needs to be provided have also changed. Some authors currently understand the duty of care as a duty, on the part of media organisations, to provide adequate resources for training and protection and create as safe as possible working conditions for *all* employees and collaborators, from correspondent to fixer (see Filer, 2010). The idea has been articulated and advocated by organisations such as the International Federation of Journalists, the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma, Reporters Without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and the International News Safety Institute (Filer, 2010) and has been adopted by some media organisations, but it has not been universally accepted within the industry.

In this chapter, I claim that those actors who find themselves higher in the hierarchy of conflict reporting and related hierarchy of safety, such as media organisations based in the Global North (Creech, 2018), should extend their duty of care obligations to all (news)workers who take part in conflict reporting and attempt to offer all their collaborators, including freelancers and local collaborators, respect, peer support, counselling, and psychological assistance.

Local and locally-based media professionals who are at home in conflict zones are particularly vulnerable. These locals face the doubled emotional toll of covering violence in their community (Al-Ghazzi, 2023): participating in what they are covering. At the same time, foreign "parachute" reporters often outsource empathy to these local collaborators, who soften insensitive questions and behaviour towards local survivors and thus act as "buffers" or "filters" (Kotišová, 2023). With empathy, foreign reporters outsource many mental health risks. Mental health and wellbeing risks add to the local media professionals' precarity and present a severe issue in conflict-reporting ecosystems. Thus, media industries must significantly improve their capacity to prepare all—freelancers, local collaborators, and reporters—for emotionally difficult assignments and overcome work-related psychological injuries. While this may be difficult to imagine in countries where trauma is stigmatised and not recognised, there is a globally growing awareness of the need for trauma-informed education and mental health care that needs to be carefully adjusted to the context (Røren et al., 2019).

The tips below deal primarily with collaboration and support between or among individual media professionals on the spot, such as "foreign" reporters, typically from the Global North, and "local" fixers/producers, who are at home in conflict zones. The idea behind this bottom-up focus is that much of the equalisation of conflict-reporting ecosystems can be carried out on the spot by enacting mutual respect, mutual support, and caring for others.

Methodological Note

This chapter is based on a research project that studies the distribution of risks and emotions in conflict reporting. The project draws from forty interviews with media professionals covering the Russo-Ukrainian War and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict conducted between May 2021 and February 2023 online or offline in Kyiv, Lviv, Amsterdam, Brussels, and Prague. The interviews revolved around collaboration between reporters and fixers, mental wellbeing, and support—insurance, contracts, equipment, and training—offered to the media professionals by media companies. In addition, the project draws from online ethnography, namely, following online materials, discussions, testimonies, and interactions related to transnational collaborations in covering the Russo-Ukrainian War. The tips listed and explained in the rest of the chapter build on parts of the data speaking to the best and worst practices of collaboration within the conflict reporting ecosystems and (missing) support from media organisations.

I address three groups of people inhabiting the conflict reporting ecosystems: (1) reporters "foreign" to the conflict zone, (2) "local" and locally based fixers and producers who are at home in the conflict zone, (3) and implicitly also media organisations, typically "Western," for which these two groups of media practitioners work and who co-shape the rules of the collaboration. The dichotomic language of "local" and "foreign," "fixer" and "reporter," but also "Western" and "non-Western" (or similar categories) is inadequately schematic. Given the various proximities to a conflict (Ahva & Pantti, 2014), few people are pure foreigners or pure locals who only work as fixers, and any dichotomic constructions do not hold in the current world. I stick to these categories for a lack of more nuanced language; see their criticism by Kotišová and Deuze (2022), Plaut and Klein (2019), and Shome and Hegde (2002).

Tips for Media Professionals Covering Conflicts

Find a Legitimate Motivation

First, think twice about why you want to go there and/or cover the war. Be honest with yourself. Will your eyewitness testimony about others' suffering help anything or anyone? Or are you driven by the urge to see and experience the war yourself? Does the desire involve your adrenaline levels or your career cupidity?

Witnessing others' suffering comes with responsibilities linked to your professional identity (the fact that you are a journalist/fixer/producer) and/or the fact that you are a human being. As a journalist, you provide service to the public while inherently acting on values historically linked to liberal democracy (Zelizer et al., 2022), such as human rights. Some argue that as a human witness of others' suffering, you are morally obliged to act by speaking about others' suffering and sharing what you witness so that others know and can act too (Boltanski, 1999). It may sound banal, but many journalists go into conflict as war tourists because they want to see the war for themselves and feel what it is like to be in a warzone. Some more experienced journalists admit their "adrenaline addiction". *Politico's* senior writer Jack Shafer (2022) recently summarised why journalists "love" war: war sells, exploits journalism's negativity bias, advances careers, gives you meaning, and triggers the "do something" response in reporters. Additionally, in a way, war reporting is easy. However, most of these reasons are egocentric, and none legitimise going to a warzone vis-à-vis journalistic norms and principles, however revolutionary. Therefore, keep questioning your steps. For example, what's the purpose of going closer to the frontline: is the louder sound of shelling worth the increased risk?

Knowing that you do a good, ethical job is inherent to resilience (Miller, 2021). On the contrary, based on a recent meta-analysis of responses from 4,558 journalists globally, feelings of guilt have a more powerful impact on journalists' mental ill-health than the length of exposure to distressing content (Flannery, 2022). Having a legitimate motivation to report on a conflict is thus the first small step to avoiding unethical practices, feelings of guilt, and related mental health issues.

Get Ready

Do you know how to behave under shelling? Do you know basic first-aid procedures? Do you know how you react to the smell of corpses, the sound of shooting and bombs? Are you ready to deal with images of suffering, destruction, and death? Have you ever had a panic attack? Are you going to hinder anybody?

You cannot prepare for everything, but going to a conflict zone as tabula rasa is not a good idea. Many guides and training programmes can help you prepare for practical tasks and get to know your reactions. Hostile environment training, organised by different NGOs, sometimes specifically for freelancers, often includes first aid training,[2] risk assessment, digital security workshops, and a stress test, which can help you assess whether you are a suitable candidate for a conflict reporter. Some of these courses can be pricey (and the cost can be covered by a media organisation at which you work), but there are also pro bono courses for freelancers and/or local fixers, such as the annual course "Reporting Safely in Crisis Zones" co-organised by the ACOS Alliance, Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, and James W. Foley Foundation (see the book's *Further Multimedia and Online Resources You Might Find Useful*). While many of these pieces of training focus on your physical reactions to stress and physical risks, they sometimes—and increasingly often—also include forms of emotional self-care and trauma awareness training. Additionally, reading and thinking through resources provided by the Dart Center, International Journalists' Network, Committee to Protect Journalists, and other organisations (see the *Further Multimedia and Online Resources You Might Find Useful*) can help you think through what parts of the story will be difficult for you, what helped you when you were in a similar situation before, and how to best tackle the upcoming conflict assignment.

Define Mutual Expectations—and Try to Deliver What You Promised

Not getting the material that one counts on—and not being able to meet deadlines—is an enormous source of stress, especially for freelance reporters who build their reputation based on being able to complete assignments well and on time. Not getting paid is also a source of negative emotions such as anger and frustration (Borri, 2013). Thus, it is important to sit down with your team and define—and write—*realistic* mutual expectations regarding tasks (including deadlines), money, safety, content, and credit. Some of my research participants suggested such an explicit and perhaps even formal contract—reporters, fixers, and local producers—as a tool that could help avoid many misunderstandings and sources of wrong, frustration, and stress.

Tasks. If you are a local fixer or producer, make sure to deliver the appointments, interviews, visual material, and logistical assistance (including access to locations) that you promised or their equivalents. Agree on plans B and C (and perhaps D). If you are a reporter who hires a local collaborator, be realistic in what types of contacts and material you can demand and what your collaborator can manage to do in a day with a reasonable workload.

Money. If you hire a local collaborator, find a consensus on all money-related issues in advance: amount, forms of payment, insurance, compensation for logistics-related expenses, and ideally also liability issues: what happens if something happens. Freelance reporters who hire local collaborators on their own often do not have the resources to pay for others' insurance or compensate the local collaborators for injuries or worse; therefore, if possible, these discussions should involve the target media organisation—if there is one (see point 7).

Safety. Discuss each other's limits of risk they are willing to take. Respect others' limits and worries. Draw a team red line. This red line can be geographical (for example, defined by distance to a frontline) and situational (for example, the type of people you are willing to meet for an interview). As people are in different life and family situations and have others to care for and diverse past experiences, this red line should ideally be consulted with a security advisor and adjusted to the most cautious member of the team (that is, you should go only as far as they want to go). In this way, no one will take risks beyond what they are willing to take. This is not only about respect for each other's feelings but also about hard security: feeling in danger can lead to panic attacks and/or behaviour that increases rather than decreases the risks. If the redlines of team members are too different and you cannot answer the question of "how far you can go" as a team, it is legitimate to split the group up, either temporarily or for good. If you wish to sleep on the frontline, do so, but do not force your local collaborators to stay with you.

Content. Discuss who has the final word about the story, who bears responsibility for its content, and who gets the credit.

Respect for Other Team Members' Knowledge

If you are coming to a conflict zone as a foreigner and plan to work with local producers, photographers, journalists, fixers, translators, and drivers, keep reminding yourself that many of your local collaborators are more knowledgeable about the context and history than you are. They have lived through the history of the conflict, and their everyday life has been affected by it. They might have lost a loved one to the war, come from an occupied area, their families still live there, or have been displaced.

So, be humble. Respect your collaborators' knowledge and learn from it. Ask them. Be curious what they think about the guy whose answers they just translated, about his accent and his words. Be interested in how to approach local citizens. Let your collaborators decide when it is the right moment to start filming. Discuss your stories, angles, and ready texts with them before releasing them. Make sure they agree that the final piece is accurate.

Do not automatically presuppose that your local collaborators are "biased". Their "bias" does not necessarily mean that they will distort the information they give you or arrange interviews with only one type of source. Rather, they will not recommend people who speak blatant untruths and will not slip into the false balance where voices based on available knowledge are given the same space and legitimacy as misleading voices that distort information.

Vice versa, if you are a local media professional in the role of a fixer, try to take a step back and look at your work through the lens of your foreign collaborator's audience and media organisation. They might need a certain level of simplification, yet, like your compatriots, they deserve to have all the available verified information—even if the truth is not convenient for your cause.

Some local media professionals experience the lack of credibility assigned to them because they are locals and, therefore, "too emotional" to be trusted, as epistemic injustice (Arjomand, 2022; Fricker, 2007). In my recent research, I show that, as opposed to the frequently reproduced common-sense link between emotionality and bias/lack of credibility, locals' emotional links to their communities can contribute to the accuracy and detail of reporting and journalism ethics (Kotišová, 2023). Moreover, combining local news workers' embeddedness and experience with international teams often leads to a critical perspective on their context (Budivska & Orlova, 2017). They want the context to become better—that is why they are usually very skilled at critical thinking. Sometimes foreign journalists come to a conflict zone equipped with stereotypical story ideas and ready-made opinions. That is, with bias. These reporters are then criticised by local media professionals for "fast food journalism" (see, e.g. Hoxha & Andresen, 2019; Paterson et al., 2012).

In turn, this epistemologically lazy and superficial form of reporting can go hand in hand with outsourcing empathy to local media professionals. When there is a team consisting of a reporter who is foreign to the context and local media professionals, the locals, while translating interviews, often act as a "filter" or "shield" that protects the local sources/survivors from insensitive, too direct questions posed by the reporter (see Dovzhyk, 2022). Thus, this linguistic translation not only involves cultural mediation, which is far from being a straightforward and unproblematic conversion (e.g., Amich, 2013) but also interpersonal mediation. At the same time, however, local media professionals often value foreign reporters' bird's eye perspective, which helps them notice potential blind spots. Moreover, foreign reporters know their audiences and editors' needs and values. This type of knowledge is also crucial in conflict reporting, where each individual piece must be understandable and relevant for audiences who are not immersed in the context and justifiable, given the limited media space and the current attention economy. Therefore, you can value your colleagues' views and see objectivity as collaborative.

Be Careful about Linguistics

Do not call your local collaborators automatically "fixers". If you do not know how they advertise their services, ask them how they want you to call their job. Local producer? Associate producer? News assistant? Fixer? Journalist? Very often, these "fixers"—connotating plumbers or unskilled workers—have university degrees from elite universities and speak multiple languages. You may well work with someone bright and wise, even if they speak English or French with an accent. They are sometimes experienced journalists, producers, or photographers. Their work is by no means simple: they mediate between cultures. In addition, to do this, they need to be sensitive and have other special skills.

Recent research confirms that some local media professionals find the term "fixer" imprecise or even offending and shows that in practice, the categories of fixers and journalists very often overlap, to the extent that approximately 20% of people working in foreign reporting self-identify as "fixer-journalists" (Baloch & Andresen, 2020; Plaut & Klein, 2019).

Needless to say that the need to be sensitive and accurate about linguistic issues applies to any other term that you encounter on the ground and use in your stories. For example, there are very important

semantic differences between "killing," "murdering," and "executing" someone and between "war," "occupation," and "conflict". There are also relatively precise definitions of "war crimes" or "human rights violations". Educate yourself about these definitions to be able to call a spade a spade. Make sure that everyone on the team understands the terms in the same way—especially as direct translations can be culturally or linguistically problematic.

Never Sexually Harass Anyone

If your local collaborator attracts you romantically or sexually, never exhibit your feelings in unwanted ways.

Sexual harassment and sexualised violence in conflict reporting, like everywhere, come in many shapes and forms and are tightly linked to sexism, which can be informal or institutionalised, disguised as jokes, deliberate or unintended, subtle or blatant. Much of sexism is also institutionalised and entrenched in the structure of society, including newsrooms, such as giving preference to men when choosing long-term correspondents and parachute reporters for conflict zones and dangerous areas and considering women physically and emotionally too fragile. Throughout my research on emotions in conflict reporting, I have heard stories about many forms of sexism, sexual harassment, and violence, ranging from an obsessive offering of sweets and cakes to a woman stringer to the worst form of sexual violence experienced while on assignment. Importantly, the size of a comfort zone varies, as people have different boundaries; even hugging someone (or hugging them longer than they want) or shaking hands can be experienced as transgressive based on personal boundaries and/or cultural norms. Research also increasingly looks into online harassment, such as trolling, defaming, doxing, and bullying, that disproportionately affects women and minorities and is not without mental health consequences for journalists (Kantola & Harju, 2023; Lewis et al., 2020, Posetti et al., 2020). Each media professional is responsible for creating an environment where people do not feel uncomfortable or traumatised.

Advocate for Equal Protection and Support Your Colleagues

As a reporter coming to a conflict zone, you might be equipped with a flak jacket, helmet, war zone insurance, money, and the symbolic capital of being a journalist from the US, UK, Canada, Germany, or France. While local journalists and producers often do have access to the former, getting war insurance to work in their own country is much more difficult, if not impossible. As locals, they do not have the symbolic capital that journalists from so-called elite nations have. They did not choose to be at war; it is just a card they must play with. Thus, if you are on an assignment or work trip, try to persuade your medium to provide your collaborators with the same protection as you have. It is fair to be at the same level. None of the forms of protection taken individually—helmets, vests, insurance, training—will probably keep you alive. But as a whole, they matter.

Also, support each other emotionally. Building supportive communities and giving emotional support is another way of building resilience (Miller, 2021).

Indeed, conflict reporting is still marked by a hierarchy of risk and safety where staff correspondents working in large Western media companies enjoy different levels of protection—and therefore are exposed to different levels of risk and stress—than freelancers and locally hired media professionals in conflict zones (Creech, 2018). While this hierarchy of safety and stress could be best fixed by the media industry, you may have the power to promote the change.

Acknowledge the Team Members

If your medium allows that and your local collaborators agree, be transparent about how the news piece came into existence. Give your collaborators a byline. If you write a long read or a more extended news report, you can even describe their role in the newsmaking process.

(Not) being acknowledged can become a source of stress or frustration, depending on how much the local collaborator contributed and whether it is safe to expose their name to the public. In many contexts, local media professionals working with foreign media prefer staying behind the scenes because it is too dangerous to have their authorship exposed (Murrell, 2010, 2019). Therefore, communicating about the potential credit and its form is vital (see point 3).

Don't Forget about Those Whom You Leave Behind

You will most likely get home safely. Your collaborators will stay. Keep it in mind during your trip and after that. Once you are at home, ask them how they are, if they need anything, and be ready to help. Also take good care of yourself. Having a few debriefing sessions with a therapist is never a shame, and there might be a lot to process. Your employer or client should pay for it and offer the same support to your local collaborators. While this may sound bold, some media organisations already do that, so it is realistic. Additionally, by asking your employer or client for this kind of support, you will let them know about your and your collaborators' needs and clear the ground for a wider sensitisation of the industry to the emotional difficulty of your job.

In research, we call leaving the scene well "exiting ethics" (Tracy, 2010): leaving our sources and research partners in a state of mind where they do not feel abused or exploited. The same can be done in journalism. Make sure that your engagement with the context and the team does not leave the team members with a bitter aftertaste. You should also pay attention to your own postassignment emotional state (see the books in the section: With Further Multimedia and Online Resources You Might Find Useful).

Next Steps You Could Take…

Tips

- Find a legitimate motivation
- Get ready: take a HEFAT training, read about trauma and emotional self-care
- Define mutual expectations—and deliver what you promised
- Respect other team members' knowledge
- Be careful about linguistics
- Never sexually harass anyone
- Advocate for equal protection and support your colleagues
- Acknowledge other team members
- Don't forget about those whom you leave behind

Talking Points

- Consider how your approach might impact those you are working with? How could you take their feelings, emotions, knowledge, into account more?
- What could be the benefits to you, and to your work, of working more collaboratively with fixers?
- Discuss the role of a "fixers" and the dangers of being dismissive of their role.
- Try to design a strategy for after you have left a conflict zone. What coping strategies can you use yourself, what support or resources can you request from your organisation, and what is in place for your colleagues you have left behind?

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Notes

1. The chapter is partly based on a blog post "Are you a journalist going to Ukraine? Don't be a jerk" (Kotišová 2022) written right before the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
2. The usual abbreviation, HEFAT training: hostile environment and first aid training.

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CHAPTER 17

News Feature: David Ward: "I hang onto my belief in human kindness"

After deciding he no longer wanted to report on child murders, The Guardian journalist David Ward swapped the newsroom for theatre, where the only killings were pretend ones. Here, he explains why.

As told to Lisa Bradley

"In September 2007, I watched as a small coffin, painted in the blue of Everton FC, was carried the length of the nave of Liverpool's Anglican cathedral. The coffin bore the body of Rhys Jones, an 11-year-old boy who had been shot dead by a 17-year-old member of a local gang as he returned home from football practice.

"Rhys's death was one of several child murders that I covered for The Guardian. It was also the last. I decided that September that I didn't want to report on any more and I left the paper the following March; I walked out of the office on a Friday and the following Monday joined Theatre by the Lake in Keswick, where the only murders were pretend ones.

"I covered the murder of two-year-old James Bulger in 1990 and retraced on foot his final grim journey when two boys, both aged ten, abducted him from a shopping centre and walked him more than two miles to the railway line where he was subjected to a series of brutal attacks and left to die. Two years later I wrote at length about the murder of Suzanne Capper, a Manchester teenager who was held captive for a week and then set alight in a wood near Stockport. The subsequent trial was under-reported because it coincided with the trial of James Bulger's killers.

"There were other child murders: a young girl abducted from a tent in her uncle's garden, raped and then killed in Llandudno; two boys murdered while on a fishing trip near their home on the Wirral; a girl taken from a hostel in Chester, raped, strangled and then thrown in the River Dee.

"As a journalist, I got on with the job of reporting these cases and suffered no obvious ill-effects. But always at the back of my mind was a question eventually articulated by a detective investigating the Capper case: 'I kept asking myself how one human being could do this to another.'

"I worked often with The Guardian photographer Don McPhee and, as we drove back together from working on such deeply disturbing stories, we would listen to The Archers to escape the horrors

Figure 17.1: Owen Jones, right, the brother of murdered schoolboy Rhys Jones, left, and their father Stephen, left, both wearing Everton soccer shirts, carry his Everton-coloured coffin into Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral before the funeral in Liverpool, North West England, Thursday 6 September 2007
Picture: Lefteris Pitarakis. Photograph copyright Alamy.

Figure 17.2: Rhys Jones' Mother Melanie with the coffin of her son at Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral for the funeral of the murdered 11-year-old schoolboy
Picture: John Giles. Photograph copyright Alamy.

of the day. I would go home to my wife and children and the cat, and try to deal with everything I'd seen by engaging with life in the suburbs.

"Looking back, I think I used to search for signs of basic humanity, simple kindness, among the malevolence. With James Bulger, it was the huge pile of flowers by the railway line where he died and the heartfelt messages that were with them. With Suzanne Capper, it was the concern shown by local

bin men and a married couple who did everything they could to help her when she emerged on a road naked and cruelly burnt.

"And with Rhys Jones, it was that funeral in that huge cathedral where, following his family's request, his friends and fellow footballers and many others in the 2000-strong congregation wore bright colours and football strips from around the world. We all sang Abide With Me and, as I wrote at the time, we may have been prompted by the line 'the darkness deepens' to wonder why an 11-year-old should be murdered so close to his own home on a balmy August night. But I'm hanging on, sometimes with difficulty, to my belief in human kindness."

SECTION III

Cyber Environment and Abuse

CHAPTER 18

News Feature: Leona O'Neill: "I am not the same person anymore"

Lisa Bradley

Leona O' Neill is Head of Undergraduate Journalism at Ulster University and previously a high profile international news reporter. In 2019 Leona was subjected to a tsunami of online abuse after witnessing the murder of fellow reporter Lyra Mckee in the Derry Riots.
On 10 March 2023, two men were charged with McKee's murder. At the time of publishing, they are awaiting trial.

On the night of 18 April 2019, journalist Leona O'Neill was reporting live on the riots in the Creggan area of Derry in Northern Ireland.

Against the scorching, oppressive backdrop of petrol bombings, Leona was filming the chaos on her phone next to fellow journalist Lyra McKee near armoured police, when gunfire rang out.

Lyra had been shot in the head and later died in hospital.

And yet, Leona's eyewitness account was challenged by conspiracy theorists online and social media trolls baying for her blood.

After the story broke, weeks of torrential online abuse followed. Leona was told to kill herself, accused of murdering Lyra herself, warned her throat would be slit, and that her children would be harmed.

A fundraising page was set up to crowdfund for cash for weapons to murder her in her own home.

She was shouted at in the street.

Her name was sprayed on the walls of the city.

The once fearless journalist became a shell of the woman she once was and eventually was diagnosed with PTSD, a direct result of witnessing Lyra's murder and the reign of hate that followed.

She said, "Online abuse wasn't new to me. I'd been a journalist for 24 years mainly for the Belfast Telegraph and Irish News, but worked in both radio and print. I had a social media following of 28k.

"The night Lyra was killed, I was at the riots on a housing estate in Derry. There were petrol bombs, police attacks, and I was standing, filming on my phone, when the bullet hit her. I stopped straight away and called for the ambulance, but there were others, still filming, still posting. The screaming, the chaos, the gunshots ringing. It was sheer trauma. I worked until 3 am and had driven home but couldn't even get out of my car. I was parked on the drive, trying to process everything, and I saw the police had tweeted that Lyra had died from her injuries. I retweeted it, saying I'd been standing next to her, and God bless her. It wasn't until a day or two later I looked at the notifications on my social

Figure 18.1: Northern Ireland, 24th April 2019—The coffin of Lyra McKee is carried into St Anne's Cathedral, Donegall Street, Belfast
Picture: Paul McErlane. Photograph copyright Alamy.

media. It had been a 24 hour tsunami of abuse and hate. I was being accused of being an actor, lying, that the killing hadn't even happened. Direct messages and public posts saying I'd killed her, that I was in the illuminati, that I'd kidnapped her and was holding her captive, that I'd murdered her as a sacrifice to American politician Nancy Pelosi, who I had interviewed earlier that day. I was in a daze. It was so brutal. And yet I carried on trying to work. I hadn't slept in four days. I was delirious. And then the blogs started. Saying I was complicit. Threatening to slit my throat.

"There was even a fundraising page set up to buy weapons to come and attack me in my home. It reached £236. People were donating to buy hammers to come and kill me. And Twitter did nothing.

"Everywhere I looked there was hate. And nobody would help me.

"But then they threatened my children. If you're trying to break people and they aren't breaking the way you want them to, they'll go for your weak spot. Your kids. What happened that night impacted everyone in my family and still does.

"And in that moment I realised I would never find peace on the streets of this country, this city, again.

"My income suffered. There were threats from local people saying if I turned up in their area to cover a story they would slit my throat. I was a freelance and a mother of four, and afraid every minute. I'd always be so calm and resilient, but I stopped being able to cope. I didn't sleep properly for a year and when I did I would wake up screaming or shouting 'watch out.' People started shouting at me on the street. Spraying abuse and threats on the walls of the city, accusing me of being an informer.

"And still I carried on with the job. I didn't stop. I couldn't stop. If I stopped, the flashbacks would start. The noise. Lyra McKee's face. I started to see her everywhere. Shopping. At night. It was as if my memories had become stuck and my brain could no longer work it all out.

"And then I got Covid, and I was forced to stop. And that's when it all came crashing down and I broke.

"But I sought help from a journalism charity, I got counselling and was told I had PTSD. I was still getting up, still working, I had to keep swimming. I had to keep us afloat. But it was different now. I was afraid. Loud noises made me jump and I once cursed on air as the sound of a controlled

explosion on a security alert story. I would cover funerals and sit, sobbing, over the death of a person I didn't know. I carried it.

"I once was fearless and I had become afraid.

"It started to badger my soul. I loved the news but I had been destroyed. I had burned my career, the career I'd always wanted to ever since I watched Kate Adie on TV as a little girl, to the ground.

"I felt hated by the world. Every person was a threat, every stranger meant danger. I saw no light in humanity.

"Until I started teaching.

"One day I sent my students out to do some filming and I had the windows open. And as they left, I could hear them laughing. Enjoying themselves. And I thought, this is beautiful. This is what journalism is. Truth seeking. Storytelling.

"Now I am dedicated to training in resilience. To teach our next generation how to protect themselves.

"I am not the same person anymore.

"But in the corridors of this university I fell back in love of journalism again—and found my peace."

CHAPTER 19

"An Emotional Flak Jacket": Helping Journalism Students to Stay Resilient and Safe Online[1]

Jenny Kean and Abbey Maclure

You are working for a national news publisher and have just finished covering a particularly difficult trial involving sexual abuse and grooming; your story is written and published online and you're looking forward to switching off at home after a harrowing couple of weeks. You relax on your sofa, open up Twitter—to find that you have been bombarded with vile comments and threats, all for simply reporting the facts of the case.

Or perhaps you are a reporter working for a regional publisher and your editor sends you out to do a live Facebook video from the scene of a protest. As you report to camera, probably alone, you have to face comments coming up live on your screen telling you how ugly you look, criticising the job you are doing and questioning your abilities as a journalist.

Sadly, this is a reality that more and more journalists are facing as they go about their job. With the move to digital and online, they face more pressure to have an online presence and to interact with their audiences. "This is identified by media owners as a way of engaging more 'eyeballs' and potentially driving up profits" (Wolfe, 2019 p. 11).

As journalists have been forced more into the public eye, so too have they become more a target of abuse online (Amnesty International, 2018; Index on Censorship, 2019; Chen et al., 2020; NUJ, 2020). UNESCO's report, *The Chilling*, pulled no punches when it termed the abuse "online violence" (UNESCO, 2022). The backlash against the media after the death of TV presenter Caroline Flack in 2020[2] was just one example, with publisher Reach plc offering guidance to its reporters as a result. Other examples have included reporters having to deal with "abhorrent, disgusting and racist comments" in response to coverage of the Black Lives Matter protests (Behind Local News, 2020) or Sarah Smith, the BBC's former Scotland editor, speaking of enduring years of "vitriolic" and "misogynistic" abuse whilst covering Scottish politics (Reuters Institute, 2022).

This all means that as journalism educators, we have a duty to prepare our students for this reality as part of their training for entering industry. But how and what exactly should we be advising our

students? What *is* the best way to deal with such abuse? We set out to ask a number of UK journalists and editors for their input in order to come up with a definitive checklist that tutors and students alike could use.

Our interviewees spanned journalists at different stages of their careers from more recently qualified reporters to experienced editors, providing a range of perspectives on the issue from all the big organisations including the BBC, ITV, Reach plc, Newsquest and National World. The majority of the respondents worked in regional journalism, and we believe this is reflective of the fact that local journalists are expected to engage more closely with their communities on social media as part of their job—for example, through Facebook Live. The results of our research are shared here. But first, let's look at the facts around the online abuse and harassment of journalists.

The Context

The Amount of Abuse against Journalists

The rise in online abuse and violence against journalists has been increasingly well documented. UNESCO's comprehensive report, *The Chilling: Global Trends in Online Violence against Women Journalists* in 2022 was based on a global survey of 901 journalists from 125 countries; it found that nearly three quarters (73%) of women respondents had experienced online violence (UNESCO, 2022). Two years earlier in the UK, around half of journalists (51%) surveyed by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ, 2020) said they experienced online abuse at some point in the previous year. Seventy-eight percent said abuse and harassment had become normalised and seen as part of the job.

Four out of five UK regional journalists say the problem has got "significantly worse" since they began their careers (Behind Local News, 2020). A large majority of respondents to this survey of local journalists said they encountered general abuse online every day, with 40% spending more than an hour each week reading and dealing with it: "Examples from this week alone would be: 'bottom-feeder', 'bloodthirsty journalist', 'total piece of sh*t', 'f***ing c**t', 'so-called journalist, so-called human', 'scum', 'dirty scum', 'leech'" (Behind Local News, 2020).

The Nature of the Abuse

There is evidence that women journalists are more likely to be the target of abuse than men (Kean & Maclure, 2021). A survey of 597 women journalists and media workers by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) and Troll-Busters.com in 2018 found that nearly 2 out of 3 respondents had been threatened or harassed online at least once (IWMF, 2018). Group publisher for National World Publishing and former Yorkshire Evening Post editor, Laura Collins, has highlighted how female journalists face the brunt of this abuse, describing social media as "a modern-day equivalent of the Wild West" (Sharman, 2020).

The abuse is more likely to be personal in nature when aimed at women, with threats and harassment often focusing on the woman's character or body parts (OSCE, 2016). Indeed, a lot of the language used against women journalists is highly sexualised. Amnesty International has labelled Twitter a "toxic place for women" (2018, chapter 1), saying online threats can include privacy violations such as sharing sexual or intimate images of a woman without her consent. It also describes female journalists and bloggers being "inundated" with threats of murder, rape, physical violence and graphic imagery: "Male journalists are also targeted with online abuse, however, the severity, in terms of both sheer amount and content of abuse, including sexist and misogynistic vitriol, is much more extreme for female journalists" (Amnesty International, 2018, chapter 2).

The abuse against journalists, then, may often be gender-based but it is also racially motivated with religion and sexual identity playing a part as well. Research into comments left on The Guardian site

(Gardiner et al., 2016) and Amnesty's Toxic Twitter report both highlight the "intersectional nature" of online abuse, targeting women from ethnic or religious minorities, LGBTQ women and women with disabilities (Amnesty International, 2018).

Much of the abuse is highly sexualised, abusive, racial and misogynistic but at its worst, journalists' lives can be threatened. Amy Fenton, chief reporter for the Mail, Barrow's daily newspaper in Cumbria, was forced into hiding after threats to her life and that of her five-year-old daughter following her reporting of a court case (Pidd, 2020). Stephanie Finnegan, the court reporter for Yorkshire Live, had a similar experience after she was targeted with rape and death threats by supporters of the far-right leader, Tommy Robinson, in the wake of her coverage of his contempt of court case (Sharman, 2018).

The Impact of the Abuse

Journalists who experience this kind of abuse may be badly affected in terms of their emotional and physical health (Kean & Maclure, 2021). One survey (Behind Local News, 2020) revealed that some had been diagnosed with anxiety and depression, been forced to move home and had even left the profession. UNESCO's *The Chilling* reports some of the women journalists they surveyed were suffering from PTSD and needing therapy as a result of online violence (UNESCO, 2022). In the most serious cases, journalists have contemplated suicide (Behind Local News, 2020).

But the impact of the abuse also affects journalists professionally. UNESCO (2022) found that 30% of women journalists had responded to online violence by self-censoring on social media and 20% had withdrawn from any online interaction. This has been reinforced by findings in other surveys (Chen et al., 2020; IWMF, 2018; Council of Europe, 2017).

The OSCE calls for a recognition that "threats and other forms of online abuse of female journalists and media actors is a direct attack on freedom of expression and freedom of the media" (2016, p. 6). Both the IWMF (2018) and Amnesty International (2018) agree that the aim is to silence women and create a hostile environment.

The Beginnings of Action

As the spotlight has been increasingly shone on the issue of abuse against journalists, action has started to be taken to look at how this can be dealt with—in terms of employers, social media platforms, legislation and journalists themselves. But as Chen et al. (2020) note:

> Our research demonstrated quite strongly that journalism schools and media outlets must pay more attention to this issue because the women in our sample overwhelmingly wanted more training to handle harassment and for their news organizations to protect them from abuse. To answer their request, student journalists should be trained how to handle the online harassment that comes with the job. (p. 891)

This reinforced our belief that a resource aimed at journalism educators was badly needed.

Our Findings

What Should Journalism Students Be Prepared For?

To establish what journalism students should be prepared for when they enter the industry, we asked our interviewees to explain the nature of the online abuse they had faced in their careers.

The abuse ranged from scathing criticism of their journalistic credibility to death and rape threats, where police action was taken. Several respondents used a similar analogy to explain the intrusive nature of online abuse, highlighting that it would not be acceptable in any other profession:

> If somebody walked into a doctors' receptionist and started saying that stuff to them, there'd be consequences, but for some reason because it's online and because you're in an industry which wades around in public opinion, somehow you're just supposed to bite your tongue. [Int 4]

The editors and journalists had received abuse across all types of stories, from court reports to lighthearted reviews, and across all social media platforms—although Twitter and Facebook were specifically highlighted with the latter described as a "misogynistic place" [Int 3].

Most journalists agreed that Facebook Live video broadcasts pose the most worrying threat to trainee journalists. They said these broadcasts, which are filmed live to thousands of viewers, attracted the most "personal" remarks [Int 6] and "disgusting" abuse [Int 11]. One respondent was targeted with "nasty" comments on her appearance while filming a broadcast at a crime scene, where she was expected to film to thousands of viewers with little information on the incident:

> Most of [the Facebook Lives] I've done have been completely riddled with abuse. Seeing [the abuse] on the screen is like going onto a stage and enacting a scene where you have to make the lines up as you go along, with thousands of people jeering at you and yelling insults. [Int 11]

The respondents echoed other research findings, stressing that while men and women journalists experience online abuse, it is women who face the most personal and targeted attacks. One male journalist believes abuse is "far worse" for female reporters [Int 8] while editors agreed that trolls tend to target trainee female journalists who are "thrown in at the deep end" [Int 3]. One editor explained:

> We do have abuse at our male journalists, but it is nowhere near the same level and it's nowhere near the same personal level. So it might be insulting them as a professional, but it's not doing things like going and finding their partner or posting old pictures. [Int 3]

Furthermore, the respondents echoed findings (Behind Local News, 2020) that suggest racist abuse has worsened, particularly following coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement. One local reporter had cut down her use of Facebook due to racism on the platform following coverage of the movement [Int 5]. Another broadcaster said:

> It's brutal. You feel an attack personally as well as professionally. You see how people engage and how people don't see you as someone who is deserving of equal rights, or they don't feel like your voice should be heard… When you're black and then you happen to be a journalist, it's like a double whammy. [Int 8]

The Impact of Abuse on Working Journalists

A recurring theme that emerged from the interviews was that journalists are expected to grow a "thick skin" [Int 3] to cope with criticism and abuse. The three male journalists we interviewed said that, for the most part, they were able to "brush it off" [Int 9] and had developed a "superiority complex" [Int 10] to cope with insults against their journalistic credibility. However, the female participants had experienced more personal and severe abuse and this had a profound impact in both a personal and professional context. It is perhaps interesting to note that whilst reference to the "thick skin" traditionally associated with journalists was highlighted mainly by more senior journalists (Int 2, 3, 11, 12), all respondents were in agreement that abuse and harassment were not acceptable and should not be seen as part of the job.

The online nature of abuse meant it was difficult for the journalists to escape it. One participant said it was like trolls "coming into your personal environment and abusing you" [Int 2] which could

cause real anxiety for reporters [Int 1] and particularly for those working in local journalism who can be closer to their audiences and therefore more vulnerable to abuse [Int 7].

This relentless and intrusive abuse had a severe personal impact on some of the journalists we spoke to. Respondents reported suffering mental health problems which they directly attributed to the job, or they said the abuse had triggered existing depression or anxiety, echoing the findings of the Behind Local News survey (2020) and *The Chilling* (UNESCO, 2022). One respondent said a "hidden aspect" of abuse was the impact that it could have on journalists' family and friends, which could be "very upsetting" for them [Int 2]. In the words of another interviewee:

> Sometimes I come home and hug my husband and just cry, because it's just difficult now. There are days where I am just broken and I can't remove myself from it. There are days where you just see that everyone is against you, because you're not in the right state of mind at that time, because you're downtrodden and you've been beaten up emotionally. [Int 8]

Our findings reinforce others' research (UNESCO, 2022; Gardiner, 2018) showing that the level of abuse and the personal impact on journalists from ethnic minority backgrounds is particularly severe. One black reporter said reading racist comments on her title's Facebook page was "triggering" for her anxiety [Int 5]. This suggests the students and trainees most vulnerable to online abuse may need tailored, individual support—both during their training and in the newsroom.

On a professional level, the impact of online abuse on the participants was concerning. For some reporters, it caused them to suffer a level of imposter syndrome and doubt their ability—particularly at the beginning of their career. One BBC radio editor said her young team can feel "frustrated" and "upset" when a story they are proud of is "hijacked" with anti-BBC abuse [Int 4]. She explained that attacks on their work could have more of an impact than personal abuse from trolls:

> In some ways, it probably affects them more than if somebody's just making personal comments about whether they're fat or ugly. Because you know you can write those off, you don't need to reply to those… but they feel they need to get drawn into these discussions with people who challenge the quality of their journalism. [Int 4]

While all the respondents said they would not change the type of stories they wrote to avoid abuse, it did make some of them reluctant to promote their work on social media, reflecting previous research (UNESCO, 2022). One broadcaster said she deliberately censored what she shared online to avoid abuse [Int 12] while another interviewee said she avoided social media after witnessing the abuse that other reporters with an active online presence had received [Int 5].

For one broadcaster [Int 12], the growing hostility and division on social media, and her experiences of online abuse, have had such an acute impact that she took the decision to leave the industry altogether—and at least one of our interviewees has since followed suit:

> People say "oh you need a thick skin" – well I definitely haven't got a thick skin. The other thing people say…is that as a broadcaster, you put your head above the parapet, so it goes with the territory that you are going to receive abuse. I'm sorry but no, that is not ok in my book. There's nowhere where it says as a broadcaster, it is ok for people to send you personal abuse. [Int 12]

Actions by Employers

The employers we interviewed had begun to roll out sessions on online abuse, which are delivered to new trainees during induction. One editor at Newsquest [Int 1] said the sessions make it clear that online abuse "shouldn't be part of your job and it's not acceptable". The importance of having an open conversation about abuse was stressed by many of the respondents.

> It's about coaching and helping to rebuild that confidence, because, quite understandably, some of the reporters will feel like they've had a bit of a knock. You shouldn't have to say to somebody "grow a thick skin" – that just doesn't feel like the right thing to do. [Int 3]

In addition to offering support to staff, the editors were making changes on their titles' social media pages. Editors were clear they had a zero-tolerance policy for blocking and banning the worst offending trolls, letting the "hatred stay with them" [Int 1]—which they said made their journalists "feel a lot better" [Int 2]. One newspaper had filtered around 200 words and phrases from their Facebook page, preventing many abusive comments from appearing in comment sections [Int 3]. Editors had launched campaigns to invite other readers to help them call out abuse [Int 2, Int 3]. But the editors felt they were limited in what they could do and were lobbying social media platforms for support in "keeping their house in order" [Int 3].

The four employers recognised that not enough had been done to support journalists with the issue in the past and were taking active steps to change that. One editor said:

> For so long, it feels like it's been one of those things that's been swept under the carpet. And it's been "oh well, It's just part of the day job". Actually no, it's not part of the day job, and nobody should have to put up with this. [Int 3]

Recommended Practical Actions

While the respondents stressed that journalists should not have to put up with social media abuse, they urged students to be prepared (Kean & Maclure, 2021). One editor said that although she makes it clear to her employees that abuse is not acceptable, "the genie is out the bottle" [Int 4]. It is vitally important, therefore, that students are equipped with the tools they need to cope with online abuse, making them aware of the abuse that journalists often face and how to reach out for support.

On a practical level, several tips on using social media emerged from the interviews. Students were advised to keep work and personal accounts separate and to keep personal profiles "locked as tightly as they can" [Int 10]. Having strict privacy settings on Twitter enabled one reporter to "filter comments from bots and trolls" [Int 5], preventing her from seeing much of the abuse aimed at her or her title. Hannah Storm, founder of the Headlines Network for journalists' mental health, echoed this, urging students to "lockdown their personal stuff" on Facebook to protect them from doxing, when trolls find and publish personal information without consent (Kean & Maclure, 2021).

Many of the respondents said it was important to switch off from work outside office hours and to avoid looking at work social media accounts—although they recognised this is "very difficult" [Int 1]. One editor said that while journalists are told to switch off, it is not a solution to online abuse:

> You can tell people, maybe it's best if you don't use [social media] when you're not at work, but…telling people not to do things that most other normal people can do freely without fear – that's not great, that's not a solution. [Int 2]

Another of our interviewees, Hannah Storm—former Ethical Journalism Network director & CEO, and now an internationally recognised journalism mental health campaigner—told us more support was needed from employers to recognise the true ramifications of expecting journalists to share personal information online. She also recommended the practice of "swarming", where a group of people step in to positively amplify a journalist's work, "shouting louder" to "drown out the abuse" [Hannah Storm].

There was a mixed response when we asked if it was helpful for journalists to respond to negative comments. While the participants stressed that personal attacks should never be tolerated, they

highlighted that it was sometimes difficult to differentiate between criticism, insults and abuse. One newspaper reporter said he tended to respond if abuse was emailed to him directly [Int 10]. Other journalists had responded to comments which called the accuracy of their work into question [Int 6, Int 3]. Another journalist said she had responded to serious abuse on "a few occasions" but was unsure if she would recommend this to students [Int 7]. She mentioned a recent occasion when she had responded to abuse:

> I said, look, I'm somebody's daughter, I'm someone's girlfriend, I'm someone's sister. How would you like it if someone spoke to your family members like that? And the guy actually apologised in the end. But I don't really know what the solution is, because I think they like it when you respond. And if you respond, they just go back and forth. [Int 7]

For the most serious and relentless trolls, the respondents agreed the best solution was to delete the comments, block the perpetrator on Facebook or mute them on Twitter. Respondents advised against getting into a "slanging match" [Int 6] or trying to win over trolls, as they said this could rile them up and make them angry. One broadcaster said: "I took action this year [2020] and unfollowed a lot of people, I muted several people and I am not afraid to block people if they are persistently offensive. And that's made a massive difference" [Int 12].

Trainees were advised to talk about the abuse with colleagues and editors and to be confident in using the reporting processes available. Respondents urged young journalists to mention abuse in the morning meeting, "shining a light" on their experiences and "taking the heat out of it by not making it a secret thing" [Int 4]. As one editor commented: "Don't think it has to be huge to tell somebody, you never know how much that has happened to other people" [Int 4].

Recommended Actions for Emotional Support

In addition to these practical measures, the respondents offered tips for students to help them to cope with the emotional impact of online abuse. They reiterated the need to switch off and have down-time after work. They also stressed the importance of speaking out about the abuse, not only to colleagues but also to family and friends. They recommended teaching students that any abuse they may experience is rarely about something they have said or written:

> Whenever people are trolling or abusing—they're never actually thinking about you. They are just thinking about how they can have the sharpest, wittiest, shittiest thing to say, because it's like a kind of sport. And so very rarely is it about anything that you have said or done—and any other journalist publishing the same thing would have got the same. [Int 4]

A newspaper journalist, who had a level of "imposter syndrome" when she started her career, urged trainees to stand strong in their ability:

> Just see past it and think, wow, what a miserable person and what a miserable life this person probably leads. I think it's really important to not let it impact your capabilities, but also your knowledge of your capabilities, your self-efficacy, because you got this job for a reason. Don't let a person who doesn't have an absolute clue on the internet tell you otherwise. [Int 11]

However, the respondents emphasised that despite an expectation for journalists to be "this really tough cookie" [Int 7], "there will be times when you get really upset" [Int 5]. They called for the normalisation of vulnerability among journalists and urged trainees to know they are not alone if they are affected by abuse. Two reporters had taken time off when suffering from mental health issues and they recommended that journalists take time away from social media if they are struggling.

While our respondents were keen to highlight that journalism was a "fantastic career" and wanted to avoid putting students off the industry altogether, they stressed that practical and emotional preparation was vital. One editor said:

> I think journalism is a fantastic job. I love it. And I never want to say something in an interview which might make that career sound less appealing. But in the last year, I felt it was important to raise it with people before they even start, to say unfortunately this is something that you can expect, tell them what we would do to support them, but also ask how they would feel about that. And it's really, really sad and not something that I wanted to do. But how can you not? [Int 2]

Conclusion and a Checklist for Journalism Trainees

Although it is unsettling that we have to prepare journalism students for a world of online abuse, our findings show it is necessary. The respondents felt that abuse was becoming more commonplace, more vile and more serious—which could have a profound effect on trainees' emotional wellbeing and cause them to doubt their ability. We have identified the recommendations for students found at the end of this chapter from our own (Kean & Maclure, 2021) and wider research reviewed in this chapter, which we hope can assist journalism educators in training on the issue.

While our research paints a stark picture of the current climate of online abuse against journalists, respondents urged students not to be deterred from the industry and Storm echoed this in what may be seen as something of a rallying cry to our students:

> Go into journalism with your eyes open. Just as if you were going to a warzone and wearing a physical flak jacket, I would say there needs to be more work done to understand the emotional flak jacket you need to steel yourself for this. It's not always pretty. You may incur some difficulties. You may incur some attacks, you may incur some abuse. But it's not your fault as a journalist. As long as you toe the kind of ethical principled line of journalism and you don't do anything unethical and egregious, then it's somebody else's choice to hurt you. And that's not right. It may not feel great to hear this, but chances are that you're not alone in this. And actually it's almost in a way proving the point that we need your voice, if somebody is out there to try to take you down because they're intimidated by you. [Hannah Storm]

Opening up conversation during journalism training is therefore vital to prepare students for what they might face. But we do hope that one day, this training will not be necessary at all.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Tips

The three golden rules

- *Remember abuse is never about your ability*: It is rarely about something you have said or written.
- *Always remind yourself that abuse is never acceptable and is not part of the job*: You should not just have to put up with it.
- *It is okay to be upset*: Even the most experienced journalists and editors can be affected.

Reach out for help

- *Ask your editors for guidance*: They can help you to distinguish between abuse, genuine criticism and a criminal offence.
- *Speak about the impact of abuse with colleagues*: "Take the heat off" the abuse by raising it in the morning meeting.
- *Build a support network and confide in family and friends*: Share your feelings with people who will allow you to be upset.
- *Take time away from social media if your mental health is suffering*: Ask your editors to support you with this.

When to respond, mute, block, report

- *Know that you have the right to respond*: If the accuracy of your story is being called into question and you choose to respond, remain factual—but don't expect to have the last word, as you can never win a "Twitter spat".
- *Differentiate between attacks and criticism*: Identify those criticising your work on journalistic grounds and those making personal attacks.
- *For personal attacks—block, ignore and mute*: Use these tools liberally.
- *Document any threats or abuse*: Make a note of the number of threats and the details (including screenshots).
- *Report abuse to management*: Use the processes in place to report abuse and threats—editors should support you in approaching the police if necessary.

Protect yourself and others

- *Separate accounts and secure your settings*: Lock personal accounts and use strict settings on work accounts to filter out trolls.
- *Switch off outside office hours*: Avoid reading comments or looking at work social media accounts outside the job. Find something to enjoy that takes your mind off work.
- *Practise "swarming"*: Positively amplify the work of your colleagues who may be facing abuse.

Tasks

- Research the case that was successfully brought against a woman who sent abuse to reporter Anna Riley, who at the time worked for Hull Live.
- Why do you think this case came to court? Which points from our checklist will have been particularly relevant here, do you think? Are there any other recent cases that you can find where successful legal action has been taken regarding online threats against journalists?
- Read the following scenario and using our checklist as a guide, develop your response to the available options:

You have a relatively new job working for a regional news publisher and you have published a story quoting an important local community leader who is critical of the government's coronavirus vaccine programme. Your story included a statement from the Department of Health giving the official line about the programme.

You wake up the next morning to find your Twitter timeline full of abuse, including comments from a government minister who accuses you of disinformation, making up claims and chasing clicks. The minister has directly tagged you into their tweets. Posts from other users label you as "ignorant", "incompetent", "clearly biased" and they call for you to be sacked.

You are working from home, so you follow all the advice about how to deal with a Twitter pile-on. But you feel your professional reputation has been badly dented and you are feeling very bruised and alone. What do you do?

a. Mute your notifications, stay off social media for a while but don't let on to your editor or colleagues how upset you are feeling. You feel you're fairly new to the company and you don't want people to think you can't cope with a bit of aggro.
b. Speak to your family and friends to get some support from them and just wait for the storm to blow over.
c. Contact your editor to talk about what's happened and raise it at your morning editorial conference.
d. Respond to the minister's tweets, pointing out that the story was factual and balanced.

Scenario feedback

a. Feedback: It's certainly good to hit the mute button and protect yourself as much as you can. But all the advice from journalists facing this is that you should talk about it openly with your editor and your colleagues. They will help you to pick through the comments and decide what—if anything—needs a response in terms of the facts you have reported.
b. Feedback: It is true that more often than not, these Twitter storms do blow over fairly quickly. But that won't take away the feeling you're left with that your journalistic abilities have been questioned so publicly. Friends and family will certainly help support you, but it's really important to talk to your editor and your work colleagues; they may have experienced similar things and can help you. If it's your professional reputation that's at stake, you need to talk to a fellow professional.
c. Feedback: Yes, this is what journalists we've spoken to recommend. Shining a spotlight on it can help take the heat out of the situation. And ask your colleagues to publicly support you on Twitter and reinforce the good journalism that you do. This idea of "swarming" can really help.
d. Feedback: If you feel your professional reputation and accuracy as a journalist is being questioned, you have the right to respond. But keep your response factual and do not get involved in an ongoing debate on Twitter—perhaps respond once and then leave it. You may want to mute any further replies to help with this. However, you might want to just ignore all the responses and mute them without responding; it's important to protect yourself and your wellbeing however you feel is best.

Have a look at the 2021 case study on a similar topic involving journalist Nadine White and Kemi Badenoch, at the time serving as a government minister. Notice how White's editor, Jess Brammar, weighed in to reinforce the good journalism practice she had used in her approach, and to very publicly defend her.

Notes

1. A previous version of this chapter was first published in Issue 10.1 of the Journalism Education Journal (2021).
2. The former *Love Island* presenter was found dead at her flat in London as she was about to face trial for assaulting her boyfriend. A coroner ruled that her death was suicide with the inquest hearing claims that the press had "hounded" her. Her death sparked anger against tabloid newspapers in particular, with some perceiving that the coverage of the abuse allegations contributed to her taking her own life. Hollyoaks actress Stephanie Davis claimed the media had "blood on their hands" (Press Gazette, 2020).

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Appendix

List of interviewees with in-text reference

Reference	**Title**
Hannah Storm	Former Ethical Journalism Network director & CEO, now global consultant on mental health in journalism and founder of Headlines Network
Int 1	Newsquest editor
Int 2	Reach plc digital editor
Int 3	National World Publishing editor
Int 4	BBC local radio editor
Int 5	Regional reporter, Reach plc
Int 6	Regional reporter, Reach plc
Int 7	Regional journalist, ITV
Int 8	Broadcast journalist
Int 9	Investigative reporter, Reach plc
Int 10	Reporter at a daily newspaper
Int 11	Senior reporter, National World Publishing
Int 12	BBC local radio presenter

CHAPTER 20

Building Resilience against SLAPPs: Protecting Investigative Journalists and Students from Traumatic Legal Threats

Barbara Longo-Flint and John Price

> *I think there will always be investigative or in-depth reporting. Clearly, the newspapers are going through a convulsion now. It may last a long time, but young people are going to develop new business models. Everyone, all age groups, realise that it is important to have good data, good information about what government does.*
>
> *Bob Woodward, Tips on Investigative Journalism, 2009*

This chapter discusses attempts to prevent investigative journalists from doing their work and examines how they can build resilience against such threats and interference. Often called watchdogs, one of the key functions of an investigative journalist is to hold power to account by unveiling what is kept secret. Original, systematic, in-depth investigations can last for months, sometimes years, and the story can only be published once every piece of information has been verified. Nevertheless, powerful people and organisations prefer to keep their secrets well hidden, sometimes weaponising the law to silence journalists if necessary. Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) are a form of expensive and vexatious lawsuit designed to silence reporters. This legal bullying can last for years, causing journalists psychological, physical, and financial distress.

This chapter is based on new, empirical research examining the trauma caused by these lawsuits and assessing the impact on journalists' ability to conduct public interest investigations (self-censorship). It takes a comparative approach, comprising an online survey with investigative journalists in the UK and Italy. Among other questions, journalists were asked why they chose to become investigative journalists, if they had ever been targeted with legal intimidation, if they received support from their publishers and if abuse and intimidation had an impact on their mental health. The findings have been used in this chapter to produce a toolkit of advice and resources to help support and protect investigative journalists and for use by journalism students to conduct investigations during their courses and future careers.

The Role of Investigative Journalism

What is investigative journalism? Adopting Hunter's definition:

> Investigative journalism involves exposing to the public matters that are concealed–either deliberately by someone in a position of power, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances that obscure understanding. It requires using both secret and open sources and documents. (Hunter, 2011)

Hunter's manual Story-Based Inquiry—published by UNESCO and available as open access—reiterates how investigative journalism contributes to freedom of expression and is indispensable for democracy.

Also defined as watchdog or reform journalism, muckraking or exposure reporting, the fourth estate, detective reporting, adversarial journalism, advocacy reporting, public interest journalism, and campaign journalism (Carson, 2020), investigative journalism is still embedded somewhere between myth and reality (Borins & Herst, 2020). The Watergate scandal in the 1970s is perhaps the best known example, when the Washington Post journalists Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward reported on a simple burglary that led to President Nixon's resignation. The Watergate scandal became the Oscar-winning movie *All the President's Men*, while Woodward and Bernstein inspired a generation of investigative journalists. More recently, the film *Spotlight* told the story of the Boston Globe's lengthy investigation of the widespread sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests and the associated coverage by the Catholic Church. As O'Neill (2011) suggests, investigative journalists have also used their skills in cases involving alleged miscarriage of justice, producing podcasts such as the American *Serial* or the Italian *Veleno.*

In recent years, Woodward has talked about how he gets up in the morning, wondering what powerful people are hiding. That is what keeps investigative journalists going. Without journalists constantly questioning, digging, and trying to determine what is happening behind closed doors, democracies would be weaker.

However, investigative journalists have increasingly become the object of scholarly discussion. McQuail (2013, p. 104) considers their activity to be "most active" in the continuum of initiative in contrast to "transmission function only" reporting. For Harcup (2021), investigative journalism is more an attitude than a genre, using the same skills as "ordinary" journalism but with more time available. Harcup (2021, p. 96) also argues that investigative journalism can be interpreted as the culmination of the dichotomy "of good versus evil" but poses the question: "who decides what is worthy of investigation and on what basis?". For Ettema & Glasser (1998), investigative reporting is associated with more independent and rigorous processes of justification due to the moral implication of the stories published. It is Hunter who reminds us what journalists should consider before starting any investigation:

> In the course of your career, you are going to be the best and the worst thing that ever happens to some other people. Be careful about which role you play, and for whom, and why. Take a good look at your own motives before you investigate others. If the story is not more important for others than it is for you, you probably shouldn't be doing it. (Hunter, 2011)

While some scholars address them as "a breed apart" (Lanosga et al., 2017), others refer to investigative journalism as "normal journalism" (Cancela et al., 2021). Hunter (2011) defines the main differences between conventional and investigative journalism. While in ordinary journalism, for example, information is gathered and reported daily, weekly or monthly, investigative journalists cannot publish any information until its "coherence and completeness are assured" (Hunter 2011, p. 9).

Matt Carroll was one of the investigative journalists of the *Spotlight* team. At the time of the investigation, Carroll had four children aged 8–14. While cross-referencing documents and addresses, he discovered that he lived in the same neighbourhood as the abuser priest. However, he could not share

it with anybody to not compromise the investigation. He printed a photo of the priest, attached it to his fridge, and told his kids: "If you see this man, run" (Carroll, 2016).

Investigative journalists traditionally work in the shadows and often obtain information that could never be divulged until publication, sometimes months later. From a practical point of view, investigative work should be original, systematic, and in-depth reporting in the public interest. It generally focuses on social justice and accountability but not necessarily on crime and corruption. Medical malpractice, health, education, and human rights are often investigated topics. Usually, based on a hypothesis, investigative work involves analysing a large amount of digital and paper data and verifying with human resources. The journalist should abandon the investigation if fact verification does not support the original hypothesis. As Hunter (2011, p. 9) remarks, "errors expose the reporter to formal and informal sanctions and can destroy the credibility of the reporter and the media".

Investigative Journalism Today

While in some ways investigative reporting is living a new "golden age" with data journalism seen as a new method of investigating and telling stories, changes in news production since the beginning of the 2000s, including a drastic reduction in the workforce, have had negative impacts on investigative journalism (Price, 2017). News organisations worldwide closed investigative teams as they became economically unsustainable. News organisations had to cover the same number of stories with half the number of reporters. Moreover, investigative journalism was an expensive and lengthy process that could end without a story to publish or with a lawsuit. The line between conventional journalism and investigative journalism became finer than ever. Was that the end of investigative journalism?

In this context, investigative journalism had to find new forms to conduct public interest investigations. These years witnessed a shift from "single newsroom" investigations to international collaborations, such as the Panama Papers investigation, with 300 International Consortium for Investigative Journalism members breaking the story of global tax evasion exposing politicians, celebrities, and financiers (Carson & Farhall, 2018).

This was also the period (2010–2012) that recorded the highest number of global investigative journalism start-ups (Price, 2017). Among these new projects are The Centre for Investigative Journalism, The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, Open Democracy, and Ferret Scotland. While they can all be considered an answer to the worrying decline of investigative reporting, according to Price (2017), the world of digital journalism start-ups is "fragile" from an economic point of view, mainly due to the lack of strong publishers' support or sufficient funding allocated to media defence. With legal fees that can quickly amount to hundreds of thousands of pounds, one libel lawsuit could expose small media organisations or freelance investigative journalists to the risk of bankruptcy. However, the reality is, as Leigh (2019, p. 78) suggests, that investigative journalists must be prepared to face "endless attempts of legal bullying" rather than actual lawsuits. The following section will look in more detail at these legal threats.

SLAPPs as Legal Bullying

This section discusses the nature of SLAPPs and their impacts on investigative journalism, drawing on survey responses from journalists who have faced these legal threats.

When Maltese freelance journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia[1] was murdered in 2017, she faced 47 SLAPPs—Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation—in various jurisdictions. Some of these vexatious lawsuits were filed by UK law firms in the London High Court. SLAPPs are costly legal battles filed by powerful individuals or corporations aimed at silencing investigative media organisations and journalists.

The general public's awareness of SLAPPs was largely limited until the beginning of the war in Ukraine, when the implementation of sanctions against Russian oligarchs brought attention to the issue. Only a few knew that investigative journalists had been subjected to vexatious lawsuits for years and that, in many cases, those lawsuits were filed not only against British journalists but also against European reporters—with no links to the UK—in the High Court of London. However, the claimant's aim in a SLAPP is never to obtain financial gain but to stop investigations by targeting reporters personally and threatening them with expensive lawsuit fees that can easily reach thousands of pounds. As Leigh (2019, p. 80) suggests, these lawsuits are usually announced by intimidating letters. "SLAPPs tend to be effective in the pre-litigious phase wherein the claimant exerts sufficient pressure to coerce the respondent to comply with their demands without resorting to courts" (Borg-Barthet et al., 2021).

These lawsuits—often based on meritless or exaggerated claims—are a form of intimidation against media freedom and freedom of expression, with battles that can last for years, causing psychological and physical distress to the victims. In some European countries, defamation is a criminal offence; therefore, some journalists also fear criminal charges and detention. Journalists talk about the trauma of receiving these intimidating letters addressed personally rather than to their media organisations and a sense of despair at the thought of losing their reputation, job, and house.

While defamation laws are an essential tool in protecting people from false statements that damage their reputation, such laws can be used against journalists, exposing them to the risk of doing their job in fear (Brogi et al., 2020) and ultimately stopping journalists from pursuing public interest investigations for fear of being sued (leading to self-censorship). As investigative journalist Tom Burgis explained during his oral evidence in front of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the psychological pressure of these letters can be unbearable for some reporters.

> The letters are often written in a tone of righteous indignation, where the journalist has behaved appallingly and in bad faith […] I have spent quite a long time trying to realise why so many journalists—even truly courageous ones—will recoil and walk away from a story when a letter from one of these firms comes in. It is because you risk humiliation in the public square. The letters go to your editors, publishers, and lawyers, and you are cast as the most monstrous, scheming and corrupt version of yourself. That is how it works, quite apart from the massive threat of costs. (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2022)

Many journalists—mainly freelancers—are unprepared to deal with SLAPPs, often deployed with the sole intent of shaming them, discrediting them, and eventually silencing them. In addition, SLAPPed journalists are often subjected to organised online hate campaigns (pile-on) orchestrated to reinforce the strategy of discrediting them professionally and personally (Posetti et al., 2021).

While the EU has recently approved a proposal to adopt Anti-SLAPPs legislation, the UK does not currently have legislation to protect journalists from these vexatious lawsuits. The Ministry of Justice published a Call for Evidence in March 2022 following the invasion of Ukraine. Many NGOs reported that Russian oligarchs were generally the main deployers of SLAPPs, asking the government to address the issue within the imposition of sanctions. The UK Anti-SLAPPs coalition has campaigned for legislation to contain at least three fundamental conditions: the early dismissal of SLAPPs; minimum costs of legal fees for SLAPPs cases; indemnity and damages for the time and psychological harm caused to the defendant.

An Investigation into Investigative Journalists

To understand the implications of online and legal threats to investigative journalism, we surveyed 52 investigative reporters in the UK and Italy. Analysing how journalists in different cultures relate to their

employers and how journalism principles and practice differ can help us understand whether different approaches could be explored and adopted. It can also highlight the different social and emotional responses to abuse and intimidation within two legal frameworks. While the Italian journalistic culture is typical of Mediterranean countries, with weaker professionalisation, there is a stronger sense of professionalisation in the UK (Hallin & Mancini, 2000). Italy has a written Constitution that defines and protects freedom of expression (Art 21), while in the UK, freedom of expression is protected by Art 10 of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and requires a balance with Art 8 ECHR (right to privacy). Moreover, while in the UK, defamation is a civil tort, in Italy, defamation is still a criminal offence, with reporters risking detention.

The survey comprised multiple choice and open questions to allow journalists to express themselves on particular questions and assess their vision of the trade by asking, for example, why they chose to be investigative journalists. Responses included:

> To expose malpractice and make things better (freelancer).
>
> To inform the readers and allow them to understand real facts (employed).
>
> To hold people in power to account for their actions and behaviour and help to maintain the public's faith in authority figures and big business (freelancer).
>
> Working in a niche sport and industry, I felt that important issues were being ignored by journalists building their careers on being friendly and "in" with those they write about. I wanted to go deep into certain issues to determine what the truth was behind them – good or bad (freelancer).
>
> Because our government and institutions simply cannot be trusted (employed).

Respondents were asked how often they receive online abuse, with 12% admitting to receiving abuse weekly and 28% once or twice a month. Taking into consideration that for the nature of their work, investigative journalists do not publish stories daily, this is in line with other studies on online abuse (Binns, 2017). We also inquired about the types of abuse experienced by respondents (allowing them to select multiple options). The survey revealed that respondents reported various forms of abuse: attacks targeting their profession as journalists (81%), personal attacks (54%), threats of violence (17%), and instances of sexism (14%).

The majority of participants (75%) reported having been targeted with legal intimidation. Over half of investigative journalists (52%) said that abuse and intimidation have a negative impact on their mental health and feel that publishers do not offer enough support. In fact, the impact of abuse had been so severe that 42% of respondents admitted to having thought of leaving the profession as a consequence. For example, respondent comments included the following:

> I left the profession after two incidents of feeling very vulnerable to physical violence and/or threats being made (employed).
>
> I find there is zero mental health support in this industry and it is vitally needed when covering investigations due to the nature of the work (employed).

As investigative journalism is also defined as "journalism of outrage", with journalists seeing themselves as "on the side of the angels" (Leigh, 2019, p. 59), being legally bullied into not publishing a story can have concerning emotional effects and ultimately induce them to leave the profession. We asked respondents if they had ever redacted or abandoned "accurate" public interest stories as a consequence of abuse and intimidation. We specified "accurate" as the research aims to also analyse the traumatic effects on journalists forced to abandon or redact stories conducted with due diligence. While 57% of

UK journalists reported having redacted stories and 48% have ultimately abandoned them, 32% of the Italian respondents had redacted stories and 23% abandoned them. The difference can be read as a reflection of the more "publish and worry later" practice of the Italian press, with the right to reply generally offered after publication, as prescribed by the law.

However, if sued individually, 57% of the freelance participants would not know how to find the resources to pay the legal fees, and only 9% would have insurance, as public liability and professional indemnity covers can be prohibitively expensive. While being part of the union is not obligatory, the data show a notable difference between the UK and Italy. Specifically, while 30% of the UK sample would seek the Union's assistance, only 8% of Italians would do so.

These findings indicate that watchdogs must "watch their backs" not only from online abuse but also from legal intimidation. As Konow-Lund and Høiby (2021) observe, investigative journalists must generate counter strategies to fight abuse and intimidation and hold power to account.

Know the Law to Build Resilience

As Leigh (2019) argues, the nature of investigative journalism is to uncover wrongdoing that some people want to keep hidden. Because many laws help power to keep secrets, investigative journalists can find themselves accused of breaking the law. Consequently, to survive, investigative journalists must know the law, as they will often need to challenge it.

The most common cause of defamation is a journalist's failure to apply professional standards of accuracy and fairness (Harrison & Hanna, 2022). To be prepared to face any legal hurdle, journalists should have applied due diligence at every stage of their investigation.

Journalists should know the available defences against defamation and, in the case of the Public Interest defence—the most difficult to demonstrate in court—they should also keep audit trails for how belief was established.

SLAPPs are not a cover-up for journalists' mistakes. If the lawsuit is found to be meritorious, it could cost journalists their job, career, and home. SLAPPs are not always based on defamation law; they can be on the grounds of privacy law or GDPR. In some cases, claimants exploit alleged data protection infringements by journalists, enabling a longer statute of limitations. While defamation claims typically have a 12-month limitation period, GDPR-related cases can extend up to six years. Targeted journalists are also intentionally isolated; for example, a reporter could be sued (personally) for a post on Twitter rather than for the published story. Journalists should also remember that a retweet is comparable to the repetition of a defamatory allegation, so they should always check what they retweet.

Recognising when a letter can be dismissed without causing further emotional stress to journalists is also essential. Pressed by media organisations and NGOs, the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) has recently issued a warning notice to all law firms involved in writing threatening letters for their clients.

Lawyers have been warned of the risks of making "aggressive and intimidating threats", discouraging recipients from seeking independent legal advice. The SRA has also warned law firms about sending an excessive and disproportionate number of letters.

The SRA has also reminded law firms to send correspondence with restrictive labels "not for publication", "strictly private and confidential" and/or "without prejudice" when the conditions for using those terms are not fulfilled: "Such markings cannot unilaterally impose a duty of privacy or confidentiality where one does not already exist. Clients should be advised of this and warned of the risks that a recipient might properly publish correspondence which is not subject to a pre-existing duty of confidence or privacy" (SRA, 2022).

Lawyers can only send correspondence with restrictive labels if the individual must disclose private and confidential information to disprove facts intended for publication.

Defamation laws are different in every country, but due to the nature of globalised journalism, reporters could be sued in a country different from where they reside, exposing them to risks associated with transnational jurisdictional battles—law and language barriers and the surge in legal fees.

Although in some countries, the burden of proof can fall on either the claimant or the defendant (as in the UK), journalists should always keep evidence of all their work, as failure to produce easily accessible notes could affect their defence.

Ultimately, as Leigh (2019) remarks, investigative journalists do not have a list of boxes to tick, but they always need to consider a suitable strategy to justify the public interest of the investigation in case of legal trouble. In this context, they should apply a series of activities to protect themselves:

– Affidavit signed by a witness with the date of the statement;

– When possible, work as a team. Reporters bring different skills that can be fundamental in complex investigations;

– Permission for recording audio/video even if the law in the country of residence does not prescribe it;

– No need to ask permission to record phone calls in the UK, but always check if the same law applies before recording someone in another country;

– Keep a dated diary with every single activity;

– Never make any assumptions; always fact-check everything;

– Protect sources and defend their anonymity at all costs if requested;

– GDPR could be used as a form of SLAPP, so every document and video/audio recording should be kept in accordance with data protection;

– Opinion should always be clearly recognisable to the average reader;

– When every single piece of evidence is verified and coherent and the story is written, recheck with a media lawyer or an experienced editor to make sure there are no words or expressions that can be found defamatory;

– Consider sending a libel letter with a set deadline to offer the right to reply;

– Always say the truth—and nothing but the truth—to your editor and lawyer;

– Lawsuits are time-consuming and expensive. Journalists should have liability coverage and consider professional indemnity or liability insurance, mainly if they are freelancers;

– Check the wording of the legal letter to verify if the law firm has been instructed to initiate a lawsuit or if it is a case of legal bullying;

– In case of danger, ask for help. Many NGOs (Media Defence; Index on Censorship; RSF; Art19; ECPMF; CPJ) have professionals available to support journalists targeted with SLAPPs.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed attempts to prevent investigative journalists from doing their work via online and legal threats. It has presented new findings about how journalists and their work are being impacted by these threats and provided some practical tips on how reporters might build resilience into their response. Ultimately, this discussion is about the role of investigative journalism in a healthy and functional democracy. As Bradshaw remarks, in a world of information overload, investigative journalism's role is to make what is hidden visible. Young journalists should learn that "new" is not a synonym for today; original news "can be hidden in what is happening tomorrow or 30 years ago" (Bradshaw, 2011, p. 254).

Ultimately, as Leigh (2019, p. 82) argues, "The brute fact is that very few worthwhile stories are entirely risk-free". However, rehearsal activities (Maxson, 2000) with possible scenarios such as the one below and workshops with investigative journalists are some of the actions to prepare students for the future. Young reporters should nevertheless follow good journalistic principles; they should always be accurate and fair; carefully attribute quotes; be cognisant of media law; and feel they can ask for support when needed.

It may look grim and dangerous, but many investigative journalists worldwide wake up every morning looking for the next secret to be revealed.

Further Reading

Investigative Journalism (Hugo de Burgh and Paul Lashmar, 2021, Routledge)
Journalism, Power and Investigation (Stuart Price, 2019, Routledge)
Lawfare (Geoffrey Robertson KC, 2023, TLS Books)

Next Steps You Could Take…

Task

You are a reporter for a local news organisation. You usually cover council meetings and have a good relationship with councillor Mark Smith. Thus far, he has always provided you with good tips, and you have managed to publish good stories. Before a council meeting, Smith stops you outside and tells you that today they will approve the acquisition of a residential complex that will be used to house care leavers. Councillor John Brown, a well-respected member of the community, has proposed the acquisition. Brown has lived in care since the age of 7 and wants to solve the problem of 16-year-olds leaving the care system without having somewhere to go. The operation will cost the council 24 million pounds. Smith tells you that an offshore company owns the complex and Brown has financial interests in the operation. He does not know anything more but tells you he trusts his source and neither of the two would go on the records. When you return to the newsroom, you talk to your editor, who is very dismissive and tells you to find evidence. You start asking questions about the allegations and a week later you receive a letter from a law firm in London on behalf of the offshore company. The letter says NOT FOR PUBLICATION and goes on about your allegations concerning the council's operation, and how your article is likely to cause the company a serious financial loss. Furthermore, it ends by saying, "unless you stop with your investigation, then we shall seek further legal remedies". As a small local newspaper, there's no in-house media lawyer, so the editor advises you to abandon the investigation. You object and say you've heard about SLAPPs and think that, rather than having a sound legal case, they just want to intimidate and silence you. However, while the editor refuses to change their mind, you now feel obsessed with the story. You still have the blog you opened when you were a journalism student. Would you publish or not?

Talking Points

- How can SLAPPs trigger trauma and psychological pressure? Why are they considered to be legal bullying? Why would investigative journalists be particularly targeted?
- What steps can you take to protect yourself against SLAPPs or legal trouble? Consider how you could cover yourself in relation to sources. What about video or audio recordings? How can you use the law to protect yourself?
- Discuss, and become aware of, possible organisations who have professionals available to support journalists faced with SLAPPs.
- Are you aware of professional liability or indemnity insurance? Why would this be particularly important for freelancers?

Notes

1. Daphne Caruana Galizia was an influential Maltese investigative journalist known for her fearless pursuit of truth and exposing corruption. Caruana Galizia rose to prominence through her widely read blog, "Running Commentary," where she fearlessly exposed wrongdoing in Malta's political and business spheres. Her relentless investigations into high-profile corruption earned her both admirers and enemies. She faced threats, lawsuits, and intimidation but remained undeterred in her mission to shed light on the truth.
   Tragically, on 16 October 2017, Caruana Galizia was assassinated in a car bombing near her home, shocking the nation and the international community. Her death sent shockwaves through the journalism community, sparking outrage and demands for justice. The case drew attention to the crucial role of investigative journalism in safeguarding democracy and holding power accountable.
   Daphne Caruana Galizia's legacy lives on through the work of the foundation established in her memory, inspiring journalists worldwide to pursue truth fearlessly and reminding us of the immense value of a free and independent press in any society. Her unwavering determination to uncover corruption and protect the public interest serves as a powerful reminder of the risks journalists often face in their pursuit of justice.

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CHAPTER 21

Creating a Safe Workplace Culture

Rebecca Whittington

Journalism's New Battle Ground

When Donald Trump stood at the podium for his first press conference following his inauguration on 20 January 2017, he outlined his next battle. He had won the bid for presidency, and the next challenge was to beat his most powerful critics—the mainstream media. In the speech that followed, Trump said he had an ongoing "war" with the media, adding "they [the media] are among the most dishonest human beings on earth" (BBC, 2017).

This chapter seeks to explore the impact that events both prior to and following Trump's presidency had on the safety of journalists working in the West. It will first unpack how the legitimisation of online harm against people working in the media saw an exponential increase in reports of online violence, abuse and harassment. It will then examine the traumatic impact of online harm on the individual and industry. It will highlight the activity taking place internationally to combat the event and impact of online harm against journalists before moving on to how journalists, their managers and media organisations can take back some control by implementing a Safe Workplace Culture that prioritises physical, online and psychological safety. Ultimately, the Safe Workplace Culture Model discussed in detail at the end of this chapter demonstrates the steps needed to prevent harm and associated trauma. It also examines how to manage online harm by responding to the psychological and physical needs of the individual involved.

"Fake news" and the Mainstream Media

The rhetoric against mainstream media—or MSM—was a hallmark of Trump's four years in office. During that time, he popularised the term "fake news" to the point where the phrase was named "word of the year" (Collins, 2017). His disdain for MSM was not only captured by, ironically, MSM coverage of his presidency but was also a regular feature in his messaging on Twitter. By the time he was banned

from the social media platform in January 2021 for "encouraging and inspiring" violence at the US Capitol (Twitter, 2021), he had more than 88 million followers (Mak, 2021). While Trump's voice was silenced significantly at that point, the four years of his repeated accusations of journalists lying and MSM reporting disinformation had made its mark. The public perception of trust in journalists has taken a nose-dive across the US, UK and Europe (Toff, 2020).

Trump was clearly partly responsible, but there were other factors that were also culpable for the rise in mistrust of MSM. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was increasing scepticism in "experts"; science and politicians and journalists who reported news about lockdowns, vaccinations and control measures faced the brunt of public anger, fear and mistrust (Tobitt, 2021a). In the UK, there was also the fall-out from Brexit, an event that had polarised the nation.

These divisions, plus the rise in the cost of living and an increasing perception of inequality between the most powerful and the majority of the general public, created a maelstrom of discontent and fear. News avoidance and a growing mistrust in the news (Reuters, 2022) were key contributors to the escalation of the abuse of journalists online (United Nations, 2022).

As audiences moved away from traditional news providers, there was a rise in influential "alternative" influencers on social media platforms (Lewis, 2022). The likes Tommy Robinson[1] and Alex Belfield[2] mobilised armies of followers by branding themselves as a challenge to the establishment. Across social platforms, similar "influencers" sprang up to share conspiracy theories about true-crime cases, the COVID pandemic and the rich and powerful. While each influencer's soapbox varied, many of these people shared two common factors: a rhetoric of mistrust in MSM and a large online network of followers. The anti-MSM stance taken by many such influencers has, in fact, appeared to normalise and legitimise threats, personal attacks and stalking against journalists and high-profile public figures.

The culmination of online influencers, political discourse, social inequalities and the news agenda, plus the need for journalists to work in online spaces to reach an increasingly online audience (Jigsaw Research, 2022), created a perfect storm for online abuse and harassment of journalists both in the UK and globally (Reporters Without Borders, 2018).

Investigations into online harm against female journalists demonstrated a global concern, with almost three-quarters of respondents to research by UNESCO reporting experience of online violence. Misogyny and sexual violence were layered with racism, homophobia, transphobia, ablism and religious bigotry, with women of colour and lesbian women receiving the highest levels of abuse (Posetti et al., 2021).

In the UK, a survey conducted by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) demonstrated that physical and online violence against journalists was commonplace, with more than half of respondents reporting some kind of abuse (2021).

The online harms evidenced by the NUJ included harassment, abuse, personal comments, stalking, doxxing,[3] threats of death, violence or sexual violence, sharing of personal information online and abuse of family and friends online.

Research conducted by Reach plc[4] and Women in Journalism[5] demonstrated the impacts of online harm against women working in journalism; half of the 403 participants said they promoted their work less online, and a fifth said they had considered leaving industry altogether (Whittington, 2023).

It is recognised by much of the research conducted that online harm also increases the risk to the psychological safety and mental health of journalists (CPJ, 2019; Dart Center, 2021). The cumulative result of online abuse and harm against journalists has been evidenced to have a "chilling effect" (Posetti et al., 2021)—pushing journalists to self-censor their editorial choices due to the threat of harm, silencing diverse voices and damaging the recruitment and retention of new and existing talent (NCTJ, 2022). In fact, the abuse and harassment of journalists has been described as "one of the greatest threats to press freedom" (Pidd, 2022).

Initial Response and the Challenges

It was in this landscape that the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists was founded by the British government in response to the increasing dangers of working as a journalist on home soil and online (2020). Its National Action Plan included a call for publishers and broadcasters to appoint designated safety officers (2021).

In 2021, Reach plc was the first news organisation to appoint an online safety editor (Tobitt, 2021b).[6] The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) appointed a Social Media Wellbeing Advisor (Public Media Alliance, 2021), and in 2022, the Thomson Reuters Foundation employed an Online Safety Project Manager. Similar roles were later created in the US and elsewhere. However, the increasing pressure on the media industry to take responsibility for the safety of its staff and freelance workers came with myriad challenges. These included smaller organisations struggling to have the capacity to employ someone specifically with editorial safety as their remit and larger organisations being resistant to cultural change (Farrell, 2022).

The Safety Spectrum

I propose that such workplace challenges can be met by acknowledging safety in journalism as a spectrum comprising online safety, physical safety and psychological safety. There has been plenty of research and evidence in connection to the physical safety of journalists; after all, journalists have been covering war zones and other dangerous events since the advent of news. Hazardous environment training has long been provided for correspondents making them ready to travel overseas for risky but vital coverage, and debriefing to assist their psychological safety is offered as part of that process.

However, the research into trauma caused by covering routine news is less evolved; it is only more recently that evidence of the potential mental health impacts of grassroots journalism have been explored (Shah, 2023; O'Neill & Lindsay, 2022; Headlines Network 2023; Hepple, 2018). The level of understanding of online harm in journalism is also still in its relative infancy, and its impact on journalists and news organisations has only recently been addressed more thoroughly.

Workplace Culture Model—a Solution

As a solution, my design of a Safe Workplace Culture model (Figure 21.1) addresses the psychological, physical and online safety elements of the safety spectrum by applying an overlap of pastoral and protective measures that feed into any required response to a safety issue.[7] In the most basic sense, the model is an illustration of the structures that need to be applied consistently by employers and individuals within a work environment to create a sense of safety and security. The model design demonstrates the need for both pastoral structures (such as mental health and wellbeing service provision, inclusive workplace structures and regular 1-2-1s with managers) and protective measures (such as engaging with health and safety, preparing for risk and implementing staff training). The overlapping pastoral and protective elements illustrate the need for both parts to make the model a success in terms of creating a Safe Workplace Culture for an individual, team and organisation. The third element of the model is the responsive section, the area that reflects the need for response when safety is compromised. The concept of the model is that if the pastoral and protective elements are applied consistently and thoroughly as part of workplace culture, then the requirement of response to safety threat is minimised due to the existing supports and preparations that will have taken place.

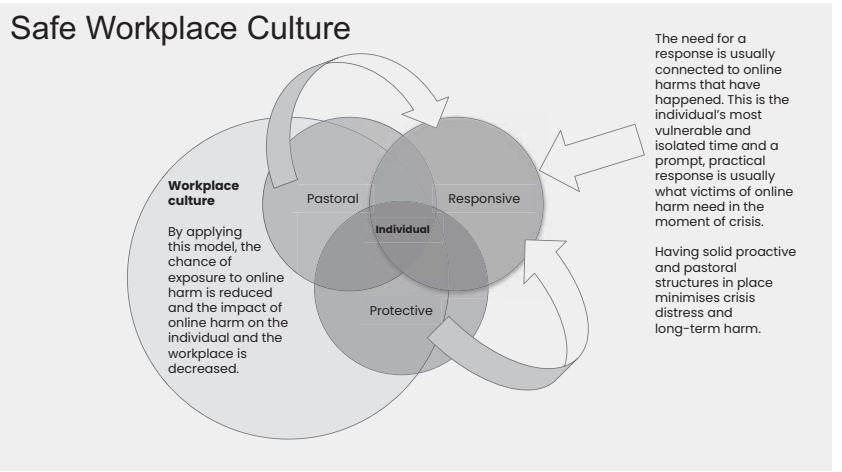

Figure 21.1: The Safe Workplace Culture model

Even with individual workers within organisations or journalists working as freelancers, there is a possible application of the model; the only barriers to the application are knowledge of the model and identifying the resources available to support the application.[8]

In a moment, the pastoral, protective and responsive elements of the model will be explored in greater detail to assist with application (see Figure 21.2). First, the concept of the model will be analysed alongside the varying structural scenarios in which it might be applied.

Large Organisations

News publishing and broadcasting organisations with more than 250 staff members often see different departments operating in relative silos, with only a small number of leaders from those departments coming together to create a finished product. An example of this would be editorial and advertising, where journalists working as reporters and advertising sales staff rarely work in the same groups and often are not connected either by the same physical or online space, despite both content types appearing alongside each other on the page or screen. However, large organisations, such as Reach, Sky, and the BBC, all have departments within their structures that contribute to the pastoral and protective elements of Safe Workplace Culture; these just need to be identified and effectively communicated to the teams working in their siloed departments. This process would clearly be easier if there was an individual coordinating the process, but that person doesn't need to have that as their sole occupation, it could be an existing employee working in editorial leadership, HR, Health & Safety or elsewhere.

Within those siloed teams, managers can also implement the Safe Workplace Culture model; by doing so, they can reinforce the psychological, physical and online safety of their staff, which ultimately feeds into the creation of a robust, secure team and potentially increased job satisfaction and

greater staff retention. To achieve the implementation of the model at the team level, managers must engage with the pastoral and protective elements provided by their organisation and, again, have a responsibility to regularly and clearly reinforce the presence of those elements to their team. Even at the team-member level, individuals can take responsibility for their own Safe Workplace Culture by actively identifying and applying the protective and pastoral elements of the model available to them.

The challenge in the latter scenarios is twofold; first, protective activity is perceived as really quite dull (don't believe me? Try Googling "health and safety" and "boring" and you will get a slew of results desperately trying to dispel the perception) and in regard to safety, often the intent is there, but it can struggle to make it to the top of the priority list in a busy newsroom.

Therefore, to succeed in the application of the Safe Workplace Culture model, managers and individual team members must take time within their schedules to prioritise safety; at first, this may need to be done consciously, but over time, the model can and should become part of the fabric of newsroom planning, decision-making and activity.

Small Organisations and Freelancers

Small and medium-sized organisations, such as digital start-ups, hyperlocal news outlets and independent publishers and broadcasters, might have different teams working more closely together and might often see staff turning their hands to a wider variety of roles. For example, a hyperlocal news organisation might see the editor also selling advertising and actively marketing the product. In smaller organisations, there might also be an outsourcing for some functions, such as an external lawyer contracted to provide legal advice rather than the in-house lawyers appointed in larger organisations. In this scenario, there might be fewer pastoral and protective elements available within the fabric of the organisational structure, mainly because there is not the budget or the capacity to provide them. Instead, leaders will need to identify what internal resources do exist and identify the gaps in provision. They will then need to identify the external resources available to help construct and apply the Safe Workplace Culture model. The good news is that there are plenty of free and reliable resources available for use by individuals and organisations in this scenario; the challenge is identifying them (which is where the end of the book can help).

Freelance and independent journalists face similar challenges. Research demonstrates that freelance workers are cynical about whether contracting organisations will provide support if their safety is threatened (Whittington, 2023). Following the publication of the research, Women in Journalism called for employers to create an online safety policy that would also cover freelance workers (Whittington, 2023). In the meantime, with some preparation and conscious effort, the Safe Workplace Culture Model can also be applied by individual workers.

Application of the Model: Larger Organisations at Leadership Level

Journalistic organisations of 250 staff or more come with a set of integral departments as standard. These, most likely, include:

Protective

- Security—providing safety for buildings, staff working in high-risk environments, leadership teams and hopefully also offering advice to journalists who receive threats in person or via malicious communications.

- Health & Safety—providing risk assessment for physical safety and response in the case of a physical safety incident.

- IT and cyber security—providing support in connection to online tools, including email and phones.

- Legal—providing editorial and organisational legal advice and support both protectively and responsively.

Pastoral

- HR—providing support for staff welfare and advising managers in need of guidance around staff issues, including threats to psychological and physical safety. Often, HR departments will also be in charge of employee assistance programmes that provide outsourced services such as counselling, lifestyle advice and mindfulness. HR may also have a diversity, equality and inclusion lead or team, who can support with advice around hate speech and discrimination.

Other

- Editorial—often comprising leadership in digital as well as print/broadcast output.

- Training—identifying and developing training for managers and staff to understand online safety responses and procedures.

- Internal communications—managing messaging to the workforce.

Organisations aiming to apply the Safe Workplace Culture model to protect and support staff in connection with online harm would do well to bring members from the above departments together to form a committee. Clearly, that action would require leadership by an individual, but collectively, the committee would be able to share information, best practice and communicate the messages needed for staff to identify and engage with the elements provided that create a safe workplace culture.

Ideally, in this scenario, there would also be investment from the organisation to appoint an online safety expert who would be able to help manage the response to individual requirements and incidents. At the very least, the committee would be able to create guidance from an organisational level about protection and response to online safety issues.

However, to make the guidance effective, clear and recurring, communication of the provision available is crucial. Ideally, this would be fed into compliance policy for managers, staff induction, and freelance contracts and reinforced via monthly committee updates, with committee members actively communicating information and provision to their departments.

Application of the Model: Smaller Organisations at Leadership Level

Smaller organisations will still have a leadership structure but may have a significant number of the services listed previously, either outsourced or lacking entirely. In this case, those leaders will need to identify where best to inform their protective and pastoral elements of the model. It would be wise, in this situation, to identify the gaps and look to see if there is free or affordable provision from external sources.[9]

Protective

- Security—if this exists, it may not be available to provide individual protection. In that case, is there training available in connection to risk and response for organisational leaders, learnings from which can be documented and cascaded more widely?

- Health & Safety—providing risk assessment for physical safety and response in the case of a physical safety incident.

- IT and cyber security—this may be outsourced or amateur/self-taught. Again, there may be free information or training that can assist.

- Legal—providing editorial and organisational legal advice and support both protectively and responsively. This is most likely outsourced. Check if they can support online safety issues. If not, then look to see what other provision is available.

Pastoral

- HR—may exist as in-house, outsourced or be an element of the leadership role. Welfare provision may not be an automatic element, so we look for alternative options for signpost staff.

Other

- Editorial—often also responsible for training.

- Internal communications—most likely managed by organisational leaders.

The identification of the elements of the model will likely fall to organisational managers and could be established through a project group. Quite often, smaller organisations will also see the same people leading the establishment and taking the line management responsibilities, as outlined in the next section, which means that communication of the available elements can be managed effectively.

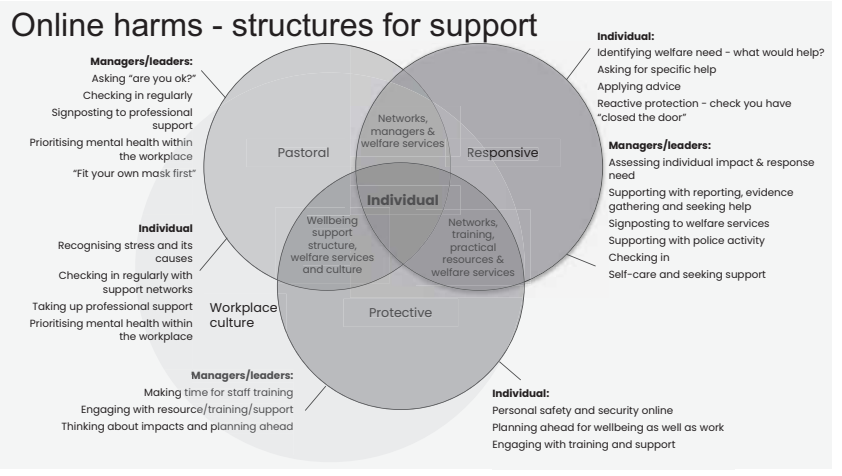

Figure 21.2: The Safe Workplace Culture model—response for leaders and individuals

Application of the Model: All Organisations at Team Level

Managers and team leaders will often be the main point of contact for staff facing an online safety issue (Whittington, 2023), but the pressure that this puts onto managers can be significant if there is no clear guidance on support and provision available for them to signpost staff to. A lack of clarity from the organisation in terms of safety and welfare provision can also result in inconsistency from managers. Research demonstrates that while many managers provide support in the case of staff experiencing online harm, there are many who still regard it as simply "part of the job" (Whittington, 2023). This dismissal of online harm and its impact is far less likely in organisations that have clear leadership in addressing the issue.

Within teams, there are also the pastoral and protective elements of the model that are less easily implemented at the organisational level. These are:

Protective Team Leadership Actions

- Outlining existing provision for the team regularly.
- Regularly reminding staff to take action to identify risk and enact protections on their online platforms and devices.
- Making time for staff training in connection to safety.
- Personally engaging with training and available resources/provision.
- Identifying risk and planning ahead for both online and physical safety.[10]

Pastoral Team Leadership Actions

- Talking about online safety and regularly "checking in" with staff and raising the subject—normalising the conversation around online harm.
- Signposting staff regularly to available welfare and support provision, reminding staff to engage with the services.
- Talking about mental health and wellbeing in the workplace as a regular priority and offering guidance on how to manage work/life balance.
- Offering debriefing following difficult coverage to encourage best practice, to build resilience via shared experience response and to identify staff who might need additional support or signposting.
- Fitting their own mask first—managers must prioritise their own wellbeing to be able to support others.

Application of the Model: Individuals within Teams and Freelancers

Making organisational and team change takes time and will vary depending on impetus and leadership. However, individuals working for organisations or those working as freelancers or independent journalists can also embrace the creation of their own safe workplace culture. While an ideal scenario

also sees organisational and team structures for a safe workplace culture, the individual application of the model has the potential to positively influence colleagues and leaders to enact similar practices.

Protective Individual Actions

- Taking responsibility for online safety by checking all account security and elevating personal privacy online.
- Ensuring multifactor authentication is applied on all accounts online.
- Separating private and professional accounts and tools, including where possible, phones and emails.
- Planning ahead for wellbeing and ensuring wellbeing activities are prioritised.
- Identifying boundaries and applying them.[11]
- Identifying work that might pose a risk to online, physical or psychological safety and requesting support in planning for those elements.
- Engaging with available resources, training and support.

Pastoral Individual Actions

- Identifying the peer support available and using it to discuss risk and challenge and just to "check-in". This might be colleagues, managers, friends, family, professional support, unions or networks.
- Recognising stress and its causes and discussing this with a line manager or someone in the identified support structure.
- If professional support is available, such as counselling, coaching or a colleague network, it is worth taking advantage of even in times when specific support is not needed. These will also be useful if specific help is needed.
- Prioritise mental health and wellbeing within work by creating and applying boundaries, taking proper "down time", taking regular fresh air and exercise, separating professional and personal accounts and being disciplined in identifying and eradicating bad habits in terms of work-life balance.

Response to Safety Threat

If the Safe Workplace Culture model is successfully implemented at the organisational, team and individual levels, the protections put into place and the establishment of a pastoral workplace environment should mean that when online harm occurs, its impact is minimised, response need is decreased and the recovery time is swifter. By prioritising pastoral elements such as mental health and wellbeing in the workplace, victims of online abuse will feel less worried about speaking up if they need help and will also know who and what provision is available to them.

By reinforcing the importance of protection and encouraging protective practice, victims of online abuse will be less vulnerable to doxxing, impersonation and violation of private accounts. They will also be better informed about separating work and private life in online spaces and, as a result, will be less likely to find themselves targeted outside of working hours, meaning they will more easily have support

networks available to ask for support if needed. The Safe Workplace Culture model does not seek to control the behaviours of others online. Instead, it operates to minimise the impact of online harm.

Response to Online Harm—Managers and Teams

In the event of online harm occurring, the target of the harm will still require a prompt, robust and consistent support response for the model to work. The crucial element to respond in the case of online harm is for managers to be led by the individual but to guide them with advice and response. The only time this should vary is if they are at real risk of physical harm from a perpetrator or if there is a welfare concern for anyone involved, in which case immediate advice should be sought from HR, security, the police and/or a healthcare professional.

The following actions should be taken by team managers or company online safety specialists to ensure that the individual is helped at the point of crisis and to ensure a swift recovery from the impact of online harm.

- Assessment of the individual response needs and expectation management.[12]
- Supporting by reporting, blocking, evidence gathering and signposting to other support. Victims of online harm will potentially be retraumatised if they have to take these actions themselves, so acting on their behalf within their social accounts can have a significant positive impact.
- Signposting to welfare services.
- Supporting with police reports and follow-up.
- Arranging debrief and check-ins with the staff member directly after the event and then again in the days and weeks afterwards.
- Self-care is vital for managers in this situation. The responsibility of supporting others with online harm can take its toll, especially in particularly traumatic situations or events where very little can be done to remove harmful content.

Safe Workplace Culture Model—Why It Works

The model outlined in this chapter might sound obvious to some readers. This is because elements of the model already exist in many workplaces. There are already some managers doing everything they can to support their staff in the event of online harm. There are already some organisations offering training to protect their staff. However, what the model offers is a joined-up approach and a weaving of the pastoral and protective elements through the fabric of an organisation and its teams, as well as tips about how to establish the model as an individual working in journalism.

At Reach, there is the Online Safety Editor, but there is also a network of volunteer Online Safety Reps across the organisation who work within their teams to support and engage colleagues. There is also Reach Hive, a Twitter swarm of volunteers from across the business, who, when directed, flood colleagues with positive tweets to help recover from a backlash. There is an online safety reporting system. There are also mental health first aiders, wellbeing champions, diversity and inclusion networks, all of which contribute to the pastoral elements of the application of the Safe Workplace Culture.

Feedback from staff in exit interviews and Women in Journalism research (Whittington, 2020) demonstrated the success of this approach, with one survey participant saying: "Reach has introduced a clear and comprehensive pathway to support for people experiencing online harm, and it is excellent. As a local leader, I regularly signpost and support my teams in using it."

Another example is the award-winning duty of care policy implemented by the Global Press,[13] in which women working in bureaus across the world are supported in conducting their work thanks to a culture of training, daily safety protocols and active responses (Global Press, 2021).

There is also much still to be done; as digital development occurs, new challenges also emerge. There is no way to change the behaviours of others online. Therefore, what the Safe Workplace Model offers is guidance on what organisations, teams and individuals *can* control. Its success is reliant on identification of the elements of the model available and effective communication of those, framed by the context of online harm and the importance of all aspects of staff safety: physical, online and psychological.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Tips

Individuals experiencing online harm may find themselves feeling isolated and vulnerable. The following list offers guidance about how individuals, either within a team or in a freelance situation, can regain some control.

- Identify a support network (line manager, colleague, network member, union member, specialist online safety resource) and approach them to ask for specific help. This can include finding someone you trust who can go into your accounts to assist with reporting, blocking and gathering evidence.
- If advice or resources are provided, it can sometimes be tempting to wait before acting upon it—instead, try to prioritise your welfare by taking action as soon as possible.
- After an online safety incident, make sure the same thing cannot happen again by checking account protections and ensuring privacy settings are high on personal accounts.

Tasks

- Imagine you are starting your first day in a new job. Drawing on the tips and advice in this chapter, write a step-by-step action plan for your personal online safety.
- You publish a story covering pro-life protests outside a clinic. You are satisfied your copy is balanced and accurate, but later that day you receive online abusive comments, assuming you have similar views. Throughout the day the comments become personal and upsetting.
  (a) Make a list of what you can control, and what you can't in this situation.
  (b) What actions do you feel you could take in this scenario?
  (c) Which do you feel would benefit you the most?
  (d) What support would you expect from your employer?

Notes

1. Tommy Robinson, whose real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, is a British activist who founded the far-right organisation The English Defence League (EDL). In 2018, *Leeds Live* journalist Stephanie Finnegan was intimidated with threats of rape and violence and online abuse by Robinson's supporters after challeging a court order banning coverage of his previous convictions.
2. Alex Belfield is a former BBC Radio Leeds presenter who set up his own YouTube channel "*The Voice of Reason*". In 2022 he was jailed for stalking four men and handed a restraining order in relation to a further four women journalists he had harassed online.
3. Malicious use of personal information or images taken without consent or used without consent.
4. The largest commercial news publisher in the UK, which owns national titles including the Mirror, the Express, the Daily Star, and OK! and local titles such as the Manchester Evening News and the Liverpool Echo.

5. A not-for-profit organisation founded for women working in journalism in the UK.
6. For transparency, the person appointed to the role is also the author of this chapter.
7. The model has been applied at Reach informally since my appointment and work is currently ongoing to ratify the structure.
8. The resources listed at the end of the book will assist freelance and lone workers in this scenario.
9. See list of resources at the end of the book.
10. An example of this might be, if covering a demonstration between two fractious groups, there would be physical and online safety considerations for the journalist. Online safety considerations to manage the risk might include; how visible the journalist is online and checking protections on their accounts, checking multifactor authentication is applied to all accounts, planning factual promotion of coverage to avoid inflaming tensions, avoiding "tagging" of the journalist involved in promotional materials from the brand, limiting replies and comments on social promotion of the content.
11. An example here would be putting all work applications onto a work phone and switching that phone off outside of working hours. Another would be identifying the information you are happy to share with the world and the information you do not want just anyone to have access to, then using this list to check against your public-facing accounts and make sure it is also applied to private profiles online.
12. For example, many people who are upset by vile comments made about them on Twitter would most likely want the comments to be taken down and the perpetrators banned. However, in reality, this will only happen if the comments and accounts are deemed by Twitter to break their standards. The comments can and should be reported to Twitter, but as a leader you cannot promise they will be removed. Instead, you can assist the person in blocking the perpetrators from their own accounts and any connected brand accounts and you can help them hide the perpetrators' comments so they do not have to see them again.
13. <https://www.globalpress.co> is an international news organisation designed to cover some of the most underreported parts of the world. It has bureaus in locations such as Haiti, Mexico, Democratic Republic of Congo and employs only local women.

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SECTION IV

Gender and Diversity

CHAPTER 22

Rethinking "Hostile" Environments: Toward Trauma Literacy and Identity-Aware Safety Training for Journalists

Tara Pixley

Risks of detention, kidnapping, assault, and death have escalated among journalists in recent years, leading to constricting press freedoms and the global spread of disinformation. A 2022 UNESCO report found that journalists are more likely to die while reporting in nations that are not in active armed conflict than in war zones (2022). That same report identified a disturbing trend in which the percentage of murdered female journalists nearly doubled in the last two years, rising from 6% in 2020 to 11% in both 2021 and 2022 (UNESCO, 2022). It is difficult to assess whether the rise in female reporter deaths is attributable to an increase in women being targeted or an increase in women reporters worldwide. What is evident is that the work of journalism is increasingly dangerous for all.

Drawing on ten interviews with U.S.-based professional journalists and media safety trainers, autoethnography from two decades as a visual journalist and recent work as a safety trainer, I propose that college journalism programme and professional media industries adopt new methodologies for holistic risk assessment and management as well as provide safety training for journalists that are identity-aware, trauma-informed and equally oriented toward everyday risks. Such changes would engender safety training that is more inclusive of all newsmakers reporting in a multitude of environments from a range of embodied experiences. To demonstrate the need for such a move, I first offer an overview of what journalist safety training has commonly provided.

Limitations of Traditional Security Training and HEFATs

When Hostile Environment and First Aid Training (HEFAT) courses for journalists were first designed in 1993 by ex-military personnel in the United Kingdom, they were structured with the male body in mind. Over the subsequent thirty years, necessary safety training has continued to be inaccessible for most working journalists. Even if individual journalists or newsrooms can afford HEFATs that often cost upwards of $1,400 USD/person,[1] the existing safety training fails to account for many different

embodiments and lived experiences (Silva Ortega, 2021), such as Black, Indigenous, nonbinary, queer, disabled and neurodivergent journalists. Narrowing the safety field even more, an emphasis on combat zones has remained the standard, while the inclusion of gender-based violence, digital security, and other contemporary concerns continue to be the least taught topics. Notably, elite news organisations that foot the bills for HEFATs are doing so in large part because war correspondents who are trained can be insured for less. Local journalists, freelancers and others in media-supporting roles who are often in more danger than their better-resourced counterparts rarely have equivalent access to safety training. However, even those highly sought-after and expensive trainings leave much necessary knowledge out of their curricula.

A Dart Centre Report (2017) found that the five most frequently taught topics in journalism safety training were first aid, personal safety (i.e., ballistics and PPE), hostage survival, vehicle safety, and medical knowledge. Recent statistics indicate that the main threats to journalists in the last five years are online harassment, imprisonment, and physical threats during coverage of civil unrest rather than armed conflict or war zones (UNESCO, 2022). However, among journalists surveyed, "only 8% […] reported receiving sexual harassment/gender-based violence training and only 3% reported receiving online harassment training" (Dart Centre, 2017, p. 23).

This is especially notable when considering the cross-section of gender-based dangers, where 73% of women journalists surveyed by UNESCO between 2021 and 2022 had experienced online harassment and 20% of those digital attacks turned into physical violence (2022). The Dart Centre study underscored that even when topics of gender were taught within safety training, they "received the lowest satisfaction rating" (2017, p. 34) from respondents, perhaps suggesting that HEFAT trainers were ill equipped with cultural awareness of varied identities.

Inattention to gendered difference is a frequent refrain in research on news security training and manuals, where a "naturalised portrayal of reporting in the hostile environment places physical, assertive masculinity as both the target of journalism's risks and the material condition of possibility for more secure modes of comportment" (Rentschler, 2007, p. 268). Just as images and language choice in training manuals continue to cast the imagined war correspondent as unequivocally male, the gendered experiences of the newsroom and the reporting environment are often missing from safety training. This also supports a postfeminist, neoliberal prevention discourse that frames concerns of sexual harassment or assault around individual responsibility of choice-making in spaces of risk (Rentschler, 2007), rather than acknowledging the media field itself as a misogynist and therefore inherently risky space for women (North, 2016; Somerstein, 2021a, 2021b).

In the 2022 State of Photography Report (Pixley et al., 2022), a majority of survey respondents (88%) said they generally accept risk in their day-to-day work as editorial photographers. That report, which represented the experiences of 1,325 photographers surveyed globally (most of them visual journalists), also found that "photographers who identified as female and /or POC, gender-nonconforming, non-binary, transgender and /or people with a disability were disproportionately more likely to indicate they were 'not at all confident' they had received appropriate training and equipment to do their job safely" (Pixley et al., 2022, p.7).

Collectively, these studies repeatedly indicate that the safety concerns of journalists of colour, women, LGBTQ+, nonbinary and disabled journalists have long been disregarded in order to focus on the perceived journalist norm of a white, heteronormative, cis-male body, typically also with a passport from a Western nation and a middle-to-upper class background. Those who fall outside those boundaries are often left without the necessary resources and support to do the job of journalism in risky reporting situations. These limitations and a general lack of consideration for a multitude of experiences show up in areas such as personal protective equipment (PPE) made with a male body in mind—an issue prevalent for women in many professions, including the medical field (Frederick,

2022). Ballistic gear that is not made to adjust its fit for smaller bodies or breasts will not protect its wearer effectively. Limited thinking about varied experiences along identity also appears in the safety considerations of female journalists, who are statistically far more likely to be sexually assaulted than male journalists.

Another foundational limitation of HEFAT training is written into the language itself, where journalists are primed to enter "hostile" environments, already framing their work with certain communities through an antagonistic "us vs. them" relationship. This Othering (Rohleder, 2014) is not limited to a reporter's relationship to the communities and events on which they report; it is written into the rhetoric deployed by mainstream Western news media (Allan, 2010; Steenveld, 2019). The language used to describe the work of journalists, the people whose stories they tell, and the locations where newsworthy events take place is often framed along in-group/out-group categories that construct non-white, non-Western people as Other. That underlying logic within Western news media is also written into the structure of traditional HEFATs. When safety courses are oblivious to identify and trauma, they are themselves hostile environments for journalists whose lived experiences do not align with the imagined homogenous white, Western, male journalist subject. Traditional safety training consistently lacks the inclusion of diverse journalist backgrounds and experiences in varied reporting environments.

Since the origins of HEFATs were situated in response to the 1992–1995 Bosnian War and have continued to be offered primarily to well-resourced media practitioners entering conflict zones, they also remain structured with foreign correspondents in mind. This creates yet another layer of inaccessibility and cultural insensibility. Many journalists of colour value telling stories closer to home, recognising that important stories are not merely across borders but can also be found down the street. Local storytelling is also common among student journalists and self-taught freelancers, who often focus on their own communities without the backing of well-resourced news organisations. As multiple studies have shown, however, there are growing and varied risks to reporters whether working in their own neighbourhoods or elsewhere in their home country. The conceptual prejudice of HEFATs toward correspondents in conflict zones leaves out key safety tips, limiting access to safety training for journalists focusing on local, community-engaged stories.

The benefits of having or seeking a deep local context are often absent from security education, despite its relevance to journalist safety. In Høiby and Garrido's overview of safety training courses and manuals (2020), they found that security education led by journalists and focused on a local context was more likely to include considerations of ethics, legal issues, journalist identity, and various other factors that strengthen risk mitigation capabilities. Given those results, they argued that safety training needs "lay closer to the journalistic practice than the 'hostile environment' they are set to navigate and that the media industry therefore may contribute significantly in training their own staff as opposed to, or in addition to, hiring expertise from outside the profession" (Høiby & Garrido, 2020, p. 75), a sentiment echoed by each of the journalists I spoke with.

Despite being the ongoing standard for journalists worldwide, HEFATs are insufficient in multiple key areas—financial accessibility, culturally aware course topics and framing of materials, recognition of different embodied experiences, trauma-informed practices, and coverage of expansive reporting environments. The pandemic and widespread civil unrest of the last three years have brought into stark relief the need for all journalists to be educated and prepared for an extensive array of risks they might encounter while reporting. These events also greatly underscored the divide between traditional journalism practices and ethics and the needs of a diverse public that mainstream news media has failed to fully serve for years. To meet the contemporary realities of risks posed to reporters, safety courses for media producers must evolve to include identity awareness as a structural component of its training.

Embracing Identity-Aware Risk Mitigation

Identity as a Tool of Empowerment

Being identity-aware when assessing a safety profile does not mean assuming race, gender, sexuality or other elements of marginalised identity are inherently safety risks. Echoing a sentiment shared by other women journalists speaking to their gendered experiences in journalism (Harris et al., 2016), International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) programme coordinator Maria Alejandra Silva Ortega said that there are many ways in which identity can be a boon for journalists. "Being a woman, someone might underestimate you and that could work to your advantage in some situations. Your identity can be empowering, not always something that is holding you back." While it might not be "empowering" to be underestimated due to your perceived gender, being cognizant of how you are perceived in social interactions and public spaces is a power of its own for journalism, where access to diverse sources is the coin of the realm.

Integrating identity awareness into safety training curricula means encouraging journalists to understand how their individual relationship to gender, race/ethnicity, citizenship status, disability, religion and other identity markers might impact their experience while reporting. A Haitian-American journalist who speaks Creole is likely to be safer reporting on the aftermath of an earthquake in Haiti as well as likely to obtain more accurate stories due to their cultural alignment with those most impacted by the environmental crisis. Similarly, a journalist who identifies as queer is likely to access more intimate stories from an LGBTQ+ community dealing with the aftermath of a mass shooting at the local gay bar. In both circumstances, however, journalists are also more likely to be deeply impacted on a psychological level because their work covers crises within communities with which they personally identify. These various elements would all be accounted for and discussed during a pre-assignment identity-aware risk assessment.

Another key element of risk mitigation is discussing with colleagues, editors and newsroom personnel how individual identities can best be integrated into the collective planning around any high-risk assignment. For example, a racially mixed reporting team heading into a protest where local police have been known to target people of colour for arrest should discuss how to support colleagues of colour if they are singled out for detention. Recognising, discussing and accounting for both potential identity-based attacks and possible areas of improved access make for more successful and holistic risk management practices across the reporting experience. Communication around and engagement with identity-based risks upfront also engenders a more collaborative and well-equipped team and a more connected, collegial newsroom.

IWMF has set out to specifically address the limited safety resources available for women and non-binary journalists while also leading courses that actively empower people from marginalised identities to foreground those experiences in their safety training. In line with this aim, Silva Ortega cites a key acknowledgement the organisation has kept in mind since it first started offering HEFATs six years ago:

> If you're a reporter who is a woman or you're a reporter who is a woman of colour or a reporter with a disability who is a woman of colour, you have to face all the threats every other reporter has to face plus everything your identity makes unsafe for you.

The ability to offer comprehensive training that engages with that reality requires a willingness among journalists to acknowledge their own identities.

Marginalisation in the Newsroom

Newsrooms and journalism classrooms, however, have not been welcoming spaces for discussions of how journalists' lived experiences inform their reporting work, largely due to the hard embrace

of objectivity in Western news production (Alamo-Pastrana & Hoynes, 2020; Alemán, 2017; Oh & Min, 2023; Peuchaud, 2021). This is despite mounting critiques that it serves to replicate socio-political marginalisation (Budarick, 2022; Lowery 2020; Schmidt, 2023; Wallace, 2020). Dedication to the objectivity norm discourages journalists from acknowledging their identities in newsroom settings, which therefore limits the ability to deploy comprehensive support for reporters of all identities. Journalists with intersecting marginalised identities, such as Black women or visibly queer reporters of colour, are especially disadvantaged by disavowal of their lived experience, as they are often faced with the most inequities within and beyond the newsroom, as well as experiencing the most risks in the reporting environment. Student journalists are also asking for more awareness of how their identities might impact their experiences in the reporting environment, which led scholars Arrey and Reynolds to recommend a more intersectional approach to journalism training in college newsrooms that "can help (journalism educators) introduce coping strategies while addressing identities, privileges and oppressions" (2023, p. 6). Establishing identity-aware risk assessment practices as the new norm could produce a radical shift in the efficacy of safety training for all journalists and particularly for the most marginalised reporters.

Another key aspect of identity-aware risk management is understanding the varied and ongoing psychological impacts that traumatic events can have on both journalists reporting in such environments and the sources they work with. Taken together, an understanding of how best to do the work of news media production in the face of traumas such as war, mass shooting, sexual violence, environmental disasters, etc., constitutes a trauma-informed practice. Both the invocation for safety trainers to empower journalists in sharing their expertise of surviving in myriad environments and for newsrooms to acknowledge journalists' identities require doing that work from a trauma-informed standpoint.

Trauma Literacy for Journalists

While there has been much recent instruction on trauma-informed reporting practices with sources and journalistic publication output among media practitioners (Miller, 2022; Thompson, 2021), there is far less discussion of how journalists themselves need to prepare for, recognise and engage their own on-the-job traumatic experiences coming from the news media field. Journalism scholars have long pointed to the ongoing impacts of trauma on journalists and, more recently, the need to integrate such recognition into the journalism classroom (Arrey & Reynolds, 2023; Beck & Shontz, 2022; Ogunyemi & Price, 2023; Wake, Smith & Ricketson, 2023) but mainstream newsrooms and campus media have been much slower to engage these ideas.

Photojournalist Leah Millis is well-versed in trauma-informed practices that recognise that the toll of reporting on traumatic events can take on journalists themselves. She covered mass shootings and the Ukraine war and was one of the many journalists photographing and filming at the U.S. Capitol on 6 January 2021, when insurrectionists overtook the building. During four hours of documenting the siege, Millis was sprayed with chemicals by both police and protesters while working to avoid being trampled, as she also scaled a scaffolding for better views (Kellerman, 2021). Although she escaped that day relatively physically unscathed, the psychological toll of such trauma is much harder to quantify. This is a common experience for journalists who might be well prepared with tactical vests, helmets and other safety gear but are lacking requisite training to adequately assess, manage or mitigate the psychological risks they are taking on the job.

Megan Farmer is a staff photographer at Seattle's NPR station, KUOW Public Radio, and she describes multiple instances where she was endangered while covering several racial justice protests in the summer of 2020. Farmer has run the mental and physical gamut of trauma-inducing risks: from the terrifying feeling of being unable to breathe after a police tear-gassing to teaching herself how to tie

a tourniquet in case she was shot by a local man who was threatening to kill journalists. She did receive a safety training through her newsroom that she says was very useful and informative as she had those experiences, but it is the engagement with trauma that she wants to see more of:

> Journalists could benefit from more training around processing the events we witness, more mental health training and newsrooms offering more support for their journalists. We send people out into these situations, so taking stock of what journalists have been through and what could help them process and manage all of that would be beneficial.

While traditional HEFATs and other physical safety training are likely to teach journalists how to tie a tourniquet or respond effectively to a gunshot wound, the mental preparation required to knowingly go into an assignment where you might be targeted is not so commonly touched upon. Similarly, how to respond to police tear gas and what kind of gas mask gear to have on hand in case civil unrest scenarios escalate are often learned in training, while the PTSD one might experience from being gassed or detained by police is not typically addressed. As previously noted, many journalists accept exposure to physical and health risks on the job, but fewer recognise the psychological impact that constant exposure to traumatic events can have. The first step towards normalising attentiveness to journalist mental health is acknowledging the toll the work of news media production can take via frequent exposure to acute, complex and secondary trauma, also known as vicarious trauma (Leonard, 2015).

Vicarious Trauma and Journalists

The potential for physical life-threatening dangers while in the fray of civil unrest, war zones or an occurring environmental disaster such as wildfires, hurricanes and floods are one way many reporters experience trauma. Journalists are often also uniquely situated to experience vicarious trauma as they move from one crisis to another, interviewing, photographing and otherwise recording people who have experienced extreme tragedy and torment. Burkinabe journalist Mariam Ouédraogo says she developed PTSD from her work telling the stories of sexual violence in Burkina Faso, and after winning a prestigious award for that work, she then had to re-engage with the vicarious trauma again and again as she was interviewed about the reporting experience (Macdougall, 2023).

Even officebound media roles are not free from experiencing trauma. Front lines of war zones are now re-enacted on repeat online, and for those whose job is to view traumatic imagery for veracity or editing, repeated exposure is unavoidable. A 2015 report by Eyewitness Media Hub found that 52% of journalists surveyed in the study view distressing media multiple times a week, and 40% of respondents said their consumption of such media had a negative impact on their personal lives (Dubberley, Griffin & Bal, 2015).

Exposure to vicarious trauma is a constant experience for many journalists, but when this reality goes unacknowledged in newsrooms, journalism classrooms and safety training, media practitioners may not recognise it or feel resourced to address it. This is compounded by a lack of identity-aware trauma resources that understand how trauma is often gendered and racialized. Recent graduates of journalism schools report having had little to no education on the potential for trauma exposure as media professionals, much less how to deal with it when it happens (Dubberley, Griffin & Bal, 2015). Although journalism educators widely recognise the importance of teaching resilience, they cite a lack of institutional support and their own lack of training on the necessary pedagogical tools as limiting their ability to engender trauma literacy in student reporters (Ogunyemi & Price, 2023).

Centering Resiliency in Training

The overarching lack of trauma literacy in newsrooms and journalism classrooms is well documented across two decades of research and deeply felt by the journalists I spoke with. While minimal resources,

limited time, and a lacking knowledge base on the subject of trauma are ongoing barriers within newsrooms and journalism schools, the considerably more well-resourced space of the HEFAT can and should overhaul curricula to make trauma literacy and resiliency core components.

Silva Ortega says there are a few basic trauma-informed principles that can easily make journalist training a better experience:

> Having a disclaimer is very important so that people know what to expect, such as "this training will include pyrotechnics, actors may physically touch you, there might be loud noises", etc. That truly helps everyone but especially any participant who might have trauma or PTSD.

IWMF courses also utilise tactics such as allowing participants to have a safe word if they need to step away and opting out of certain scenarios that might be retriggering for them.

"(Traumatised journalists being triggered by safety training) happens all the time in HEFATs," says Silva Ortega. "All of the IWMF facilitators have received some kind of training from a psychologist who specialises in how best to engage a traumatised person."

Making trauma-informed safety trainers the norm allows for holistic safety courses but might also enable a shift toward trauma literacy in the larger news media landscape. Teaching resilience as a core competency to both journalists and their hiring managers in newsroom-sanctioned safety courses institutes it as a necessary professional skill for media makers. Specifically, discussing tactics such as healthy self-care, grounding techniques, psychological first aid and how to recognise trauma responses in yourself and others can go a long way toward normalising trauma-informed practices in the newsroom as well as the journalism classroom.

Conclusion

Journalists need accessible and comprehensive safety training that introduces identity-aware risk mitigation and trauma literacy as key skill sets in the reporter toolbox. There is an ongoing and widespread disconnect in the journalism industry of both how to serve marginalised journalists and how to connect to diverse communities across a spectrum of identities and lived experiences. These two conversations—about journalist safety and socially marginalised identities—should be consistently understood as directly correlated. The world is increasingly unsafe for journalists in part because public trust in news media professionals has declined. The way that journalists show up to do their work in any environment impacts their relative safety, as it also influences public perception of news media. Professional and student journalists benefit from an understanding of how journalism practices can either build trust or create suspicion in particular communities and that their ability to do media work safely, ethically and well are all intertwined.

Safety courses that emphasise physical injury over psychological impacts or that marginalise the diverse bodies and experiences of journalists are failing to impart holistic, vital knowledge to the media field. A reliance on the multinational security business of HEFATs led by ex-military rather than current or former journalists has left large gaps in the knowledge base of journalists who are not white male war correspondents. Identity-aware journalist safety training can fill those gaps by facilitating collaborative learning that values disparate and diverse self-acquired safety practices and emphasises trauma literacy as a necessary survival skill.

To embrace trauma literacy in form and function, media safety courses should ideally act as safe spaces for journalists who may be unwittingly (or knowingly) suffering PTSD or lingering secondary trauma. Importantly, identity-aware and trauma-informed safety courses would include discussions of gender-based discrimination, harassment and assault where each participant, regardless of gender, understands themselves as responsible for making media work safer for all journalists. This

is an important move away from the neoliberal emphasis on women's individual responsibility to deal with sexual violence in the reporting environment. Thorough safety training would encourage an understanding that female journalists are more likely to be assaulted by people they know and that the ongoing social construction of the news media industry is itself masculinist and therefore rife with internal threats to femme-presenting media professionals.

Student journalists are actively walking away from news production practices that deny the trauma of the work, trivialise burnout, deride boundaries and reproduce misogyny, racism, homophobia and ableism in the newsroom (Editorial Board Staff, 2021; Mekonen, 2021; WSN Staff, 2020). Journalism educators should meet these students where they are with holistic trauma training that takes their individual and collective experiences into consideration, preparing them for a profession of varied risks and inherent trauma. Media organisations can build on the lessons student journalists are imparting by embracing an ethic and culture of care from safety tactics to daily newsroom practices.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Talking points

- Consider your own practices and working (or studying) environment, to what extent is the concept of identity-aware risk management incorporated? Are different identities taken into account? How could a more holistic approach be adopted? What is missing?
- How can you approach your management, your lecturers, your departmental head to raise awareness of these identity gaps in training and support? What strategies could you use to be heard and to ensure changes are implemented?

Tasks

Working either in pairs or on your own, think of a scenario which describes an upcoming news assignment where you will be exposed to some form of physical or mental stress and where you will be tasked with interviewing/photographing a person who is also experiencing that traumatic event as it unfolds.

- Craft a risk assessment that takes into consideration what kind of support they might need during and after the difficult assignment. What resources or understandings do they advocate for from an editor and how? What can the editor do to support them before, during and after the assignment? What future self care practices can they setup beforehand to help in the aftermath?
- Design interview questions that are trauma-informed, specific to the unfolding event of the assignment. How will they be flexible to the needs of the source? How can they support them if they are in visible distress? What are ethical and conscientious practices in these circumstances and how can the journalists be aware of their own relationship to the traumatic experience even as they navigate awareness of their interviewees needs?

Note

1. At the time of this writing.

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CHAPTER 23

Encouraging Reporting of Sexual Harassment by Journalists

Autumn Slaughter, Elana Newman, Bradley J. Brummel, Kelsey Womack, and Susan Drevo

Although journalists experience sexual harassment in connection with their work, they rarely report these experiences to their organisations (Flatlow, 1994; Idås, Orgeret & Backholm, 2020). Reporting sexual harassment allows organisations to know the extent of the problem and create mechanisms for ensuring a safe workplace. However, reporting is not a simple endeavour. Journalists must recognise the event as harassment, know organisational policies and procedures about how to report, assess the relative risks and benefits associated with reporting by considering different scenarios based on history, and determine the likelihood of experiencing retribution. It is unclear which of these many reasons explains why journalists do not report harassment. If an organisation understood the factors preventing reporting, it could create training and policies that are more effective and keep journalists safe. Clearly, each concern might dictate different interventions by the organisation. The goal of the chapter is to provide concrete strategies to help journalists and organisations institute policies and procedures to ensure workplace safety and encourage reports of sexual harassment so that organisations can effectively respond to sexual harassment within their workplaces. The chapter builds the case for these policies and procedures by describing what is currently known about sexual harassment more broadly.[1] Then, the chapter discusses the potential individual and organisational responses to harassment. Next, we use a subset of data from a study examining journalists' exposure to traumatic events to explain the reasons for low rates of reporting. Finally, we conclude with suggestions for how media organisations could improve the willingness of journalists to report harassment within their organisations.

Definitions, Prevalence, and Impact of Sexual Harassment

According to the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, n.d.), sexual harassment is "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature…when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly

affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment". This definition is generally similar across the world (UN Women, 2013). Sexual harassment is typically divided into four subtypes: (1) sexual hostility (discriminatory behaviours based on a person's gender), (2) sexist hostility (explicitly sexual discriminatory behaviours), (3) unwanted attention (unwelcome or offensive verbal and nonverbal sexual behaviours), and (4) sexual coercion (bribes or threats to elicit a person's sexual cooperation) (Gelfand, Fitzgerald & Drasgow, 1995; Fitzgerald et al., 1999). In the United States, an estimated 81% of women and 43% of men have experienced sexual harassment (Stop Street Harassment, 2018). In a global survey of 22 countries, 7% of employees reported that they had been intentionally physically assaulted out of anger on the job by a co-worker or manager, and 9% said a supervisor or other senior employee had harassed them for sex (Reuters, 2010). In another study of employees in 121 countries, 8% of women and 5% of men reported experiencing sexual violence and harassment in their workplace (International Labour Organisation, 2022).

While men do experience sexual harassment, sexual harassment in the workplace is often conceptualised as a gendered issue, in part because sexual harassment largely targets women and is most prevalent in work environments where women are underrepresented and the workplace culture is "masculine" and patriarchal (Fitzgerald, 1993; McDonald, 2012). Not only are women more likely than men to experience sexual harassment, but the gender difference in sexual harassment victimisation is greater for those types of sexual harassment perceived as more serious, including unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion (Cortina et al., 2002). Women may experience "sex-role spillover" when women in the workplace are treated like mothers, daughters, sex partners, and other "traditional" female roles rather than as professionals and employees (Cortina et al., 2002). Individuals who identify both as a minority gender and another minority group are at increased risk of experiencing sexual harassment, as their double minority status leads to a form of "double jeopardy" (McDonald, 2012).

Sexual harassment is experienced at high rates within journalism and is typically perpetrated by industry insiders such as colleagues and coworkers (Barton & Storm, 2014; Brummel et al., 2019; Chick, 2018; Flatlow, 1994; Idås, Orgeret & Backholm, 2020; Newman et al., 2016). In fact, women photojournalists experience sexual harassment so often they view the behaviour as part of "the realities of working as a woman in the profession" (Chick, 2018). Among Norwegian journalists ($N = 3626$), 66% reported experiencing unwanted sexual attention (e.g., "unwanted comments about clothing…", "being the object of rumours with sexual content") within the past six months, with 69% of victims experiencing harassment from managers or colleagues (Idås, Orgeret & Backholm, 2020). Additionally, 14% of 977 female journalists who reported experiencing work-related sexual violence, co-workers, bosses, or supervisors reportedly perpetrated 50% of the incidents (Barton & Storm, 2014). Among 76 female and 122 male newspaper journalists, 68% of females and 15% of males reported experiencing sexual harassment (Flatlow, 1994). More than half of the journalists (60%) reported harassment by a coworker, 29% reported harassment by an employer or supervisor, and 23% reported harassment by others in their organisation.

Sexual harassment is not only a concern for an organisation's direct employees. In the United States in 2016, 11% of broadcast news analysts were self-employed, and 11% of reporters and correspondents were self-employed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Self-employed and freelance journalists face additional obstacles when responding to sexual harassment due to an absence of protocols designed to protect this group (Corcione, 2018). It is not known whether freelancers are at greater or lesser risk of sexual harassment from within an organisation, and once exposed, it is unclear whether and to whom freelancers should report sexual harassment complaints (Brummel et al., 2019).

Internal reporting of sexual harassment is designed to benefit both survivors and organisations (Bergman et al., 2002; Clarke, 2014; Ford, 2013; Knapp et al., 1997). Reporting can end ongoing

sexual harassment (Knapp et al., 1997), thus assuring the physical and psychological safety of all workers. Likewise, by ending specific harassment incidents, reporting allows organisations to minimise the negative consequences of prolonged harassment, including lawsuits and reduced productivity, absenteeism, burnout, and employee turnover (Berdahl & Raver, 2011; Faley et al., 1999). These costs and savings are not trivial; in 2015, the EEOC secured $164.5 million for employees alleging workplace harassment (sexual or otherwise) (Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016). However, journalists often do not report their experiences of sexual harassment (Flatlow, 1994), often due to fear of reprisal and/or damage to their reputation (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Gutek, 1985). Organisational changes may be able to increase journalists' ability and likelihood of reporting acts of sexual harassment.

Individual and Organisational Responses

Sexual harassment and increasing the reporting of sexual harassment is a complex phenomenon that involves the interaction of individual and organisational factors. As such, there is no single solution that will ensure workplace safety. Instead, a myriad of strategies must be implemented in conjunction with one another to simultaneously address both sets of factors.

For the individual, a precursor to reporting sexual harassment is identifying the experience as harassment. A person who labels their experience as harassment is more likely to report the behaviour (Gutek, 1985). Research has linked self-labelling with a negative appraisal of harassment and linked both labelling and negative appraisal to reporting behaviour (Dardis et al., 2018, Wilson et al., 2017). Among 579 university library employees, 42% of those who experienced sexual harassment did not report their experiences to their organisations because they believed the experiences were not significant enough to report or they did not label the experiences as sexual harassment (Barr-Walker et al., 2021). Appraisal of sexual harassment as a negative experience and the status of perpetrators have also been linked to reporting behaviour, with higher perpetrator status, higher negative appraisal, and higher frequency increasing the likelihood of reporting behaviour (Dardis et al., 2018; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Magley & Shupe, 2005; Smith & Freyd, 2014).

Organisational policies and actions also affect employee decisions to report sexual harassment. Research has linked an organisation's sexual harassment tolerance to individuals' reporting behaviour (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Gutek, 1985). Among 118 college students who had experienced sexual harassment, 51 (43%) utilised their university's sexual harassment reporting process (Rudman, Bordiga and Robertson, 1995). Researchers found that the perceived futility of reporting predicted reporting behaviour. Studies of journalists have found similar results. Among 70 newspaper journalists who experienced sexual harassment, none filed complaints with their organisations (Flatlow, 1994). Journalists provided multiple reasons for not reporting, most prominently concerns that nothing would be done.

Organisational factors, including a masculine culture, a high ratio of men to women in workgroups, and a greater proportion of male supervisors, may create an organisational climate that is more tolerant of sexual harassment (Berdahl & Raver, 2011). Female journalists providing qualitative responses to a survey on journalist safety trainings reported working in "macho" environments that emphasised masculinity (Slaughter et al., 2018). Female journalists are also outnumbered in American newsrooms. According to a 2018 survey, women comprise 42% of newsroom leaders and 42% of full-time journalists in the United States (American Society of News Editors, 2018). These numbers vary depending on the type of media organisation, with women comprising most of the workforce in 40% of online-only organisations and only 13% of daily print organisations.

In addition to creating work environments that tolerate and promote sexual harassment, organisations' actions may directly harm those who report. Female journalists reported negative experiences after filing complaints, including being "sent home and removed from normal responsibilities" (Barton

& Storm, 2014). Others felt their organisations were more supportive of perpetrators than of those who reported concerns (Barton & Storm, 2014; Chick, 2018). Additionally, journalists did not report sexual harassment because of concerns that they may lose their jobs (Flatlow, 1994) or would otherwise be committing "career suicide" (Barton & Storm, 2014). Organisational reporting structures may increase concerns about retribution. One journalist who did not report intimidation, threats, or abuse chose not to do so because her harasser was also the individual to whom she was supposed to report complaints (Barton & Storm, 2014).

Other evidence links poor organisational responses to sexual harassment with negative job and psychological outcomes (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). For example, among 1,782 female and 553 male federal employees, sexual harassment victims who responded with the use of external coping methods, such as reporting, had worse job outcomes than those who did not (Stockdale, 1998). Individuals who experience institutional betrayal when an organisation responds to sexual harassment in a harmful manner may experience higher rates of posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTS) than individuals who do not experience institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2013, 2014). Research on institutional betrayal and organisational tolerance suggests that how an organisation is perceived to respond to sexual harassment may influence reporting behaviour, and while institutional betrayal has not yet been studied in journalists, there is no reason to believe that it does not impact this population.

Data from Journalists' Experiences of Online Harassment

Below is a description of reporting behaviours and sexual harassment among 150 journalists who endorsed experiencing sexually harassing behaviour in relation to their work drawn from a larger study of journalism and trauma. Journalists completed a demographic and workplace questionnaire, as well as the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire—Specific Experience (SEQ-SE) (Fitzgerald et al., 1999), which was modified by the researchers to include perpetrators specific to journalists. The modified SEQ-SE included behavioural questions about harassment frequency and type, whether journalists labelled their experience as sexual harassment, who perpetrated the sexual harassment, the journalists' negative appraisal of the harassment (e.g., how threatening and harmful the experience was), whether the journalists reported the sexual harassment, and how organisations responded to reports of sexual harassment.

The journalists who endorsed experiencing sexual harassment were predominantly female (70%, n = 104) and worked full-time for an organisation (71%, n = 105), although 17% (n = 25) consisted of freelancers. They resided in 23 countries, with the majority in the United States (60%, n = 88). Most respondents (96%) identified as White/Caucasian.

Journalists reported experiencing 19 sexual harassment behaviours (Table 23.1) across all four categories: sexist hostility (84%, n = 126), sexual hostility (77%, n = 116), unwanted sexual attention (25%, n = 38), and sexual coercion (7%, n = 11). The average frequency score was low. Of the 150 journalists, 67% (n = 101) did not label any of their experiences as harassment (e.g., although they endorsed experiencing behaviours that met the definition of sexual harassment, they did not endorse the experiences as "sexual harassment"), and 33% (n = 49) labelled at least one of their experiences as sexual harassment. Of the 150 journalists, 125 answered all questions about the perpetrators of sexual harassment (Table 23.2). Of the 125, 46% (n = 57) reported that at least one of the perpetrators held a position of power in their organisation (e.g., a manager or editor). Overall, the reported negative appraisal was low, equivalent to a response of "slightly".

Of the 126 journalists who answered the reporting question, 87% (n = 110) did not report and 13% (n = 16) reported. Of those who reported, the majority were female (81%) and worked for one

Table 23.1: Percentages and Ns of specific sexual harassment behaviours (150 total journalists)

Sexually harassing behaviour	Sexual harassment type	*n*	%
Repeatedly telling sexual stories or jokes that were offensive	Sexual hostility	99	66
Treated you differently because of your gender	Sexist hostility	90	60
Referred to people of your gender in insulting or offensive terms	Sexist hostility	89	59
Put you down or was condescending to you because of your gender[a]	Sexist hostility	66	44
Made offensive remarks about your appearance, body, or sexual activities	Sexual hostility	60	40
Made unwelcome attempts to draw you into a discussion of sexual matters	Sexual hostility	57	38
Made offensive sexist remarks	Sexist hostility	56	37
Made gestures or used body language of a sexual nature that embarrassed or offended you	Sexual hostility	40	27
Made unwanted attempts to establish a romantic sexual relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage it[a]	Unwanted attention	23	15
Touched you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable[a]	Unwanted attention	21	14
Other unwanted gender-related behavior[b]	Unwanted attention	16	11
Continued to ask you for dates, drinks, dinners, etc., even though you said "no"	Unwanted attention	14	9
Intentionally cornered you or leaned over you in a sexual way	Unwanted attention	10	7
Made you feel like you were being bribed with some sort of reward or special treatment to engage in sexual behaviour	Coercion	8	5
Made you feel threatened with some sort of retaliation for not being sexually cooperative	Coercion	8	5
Treated you badly for refusing to have sex[c]	Coercion	6	4
Implied faster promotions or better treatment if you were sexually cooperative	Coercion	4	3
Attempted to have sex with you without your consent or against your will but was not successful	Unwanted attention	4	3
Had sex with you without your consent or against your will	Unwanted attention	1	1

Note: [a] 1 journalist skipped this question. [b] 6 journalists skipped this question. [c] 2 journalists skipped this question.

employer full-time (75%, *n* = 12). Journalists' reasons for not reporting are shown in Table 23.3. In total, 10 of the 16 (63%) who reported sexual harassment also reported at least one type of professional, social, or administrative retaliation. In total, 6 reported experiencing one type of retaliation, 1 reported experiencing two types of retaliation, and 4 reported experiencing all three types. Of the 16 reporting journalists, 7 reported experiencing professional retaliation, 7 reported experiencing social retaliation, and 5 reported experiencing negative administrative actions (e.g., being placed on legal hold or transferred to a different assignment).

Implications for Organisations

Previous research has identified common responses to sexual harassment that include avoiding the perpetrator, denying the severity of the situation, or otherwise ignoring harassment. Notably, reporting sexual harassment is one of the least common responses (Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016). Identified reasons for low reporting numbers include fear of reappraisal and/or damage to the victim's reputation

Table 23.2: Perpetrators of journalists' most distressing sexual harassment experience (150 total journalists).

Person	*n*	%
A colleague	64	43
Your manager	38	25
An editor	37	25
A person(s) in the local community	30	20
Your source/subject	20	13
A crew member	15	10
A subordinate	4	23
A safety detail/guard	3	2
A translator	1	1
A fixer	0	0

Note. Numbers and percentages do not equal 150 and 100. Journalists could report multiple perpetrators.

Table 23.3: Reasons for not reporting sexual harassment (126 total journalists).

Reason	*n*	%
You thought it was not important enough to report	79	77
You did not think anything would be done	46	47
You felt uncomfortable making a report	33	34
You thought you would be labelled a troublemaker	32	33
You thought reporting would take too much time and effort	31	32
You were afraid of retaliation/reprisals from the person(s) who did it or from their friends	30	31
You did not think your report would be kept confidential	28	29
You heard negative experiences other journalists went through when they reported their situation	24	25
You did not want anyone to know	21	22
You thought your performance evaluation would suffer	20	21
You thought you would not be believed	16	16
You did not know how to report	13	13
Other	6	10
You feared you or others would be punished for infractions/violations, such as underage drinking or fraternisation	6	6

Note: Not all journalists provided an answer for each question. Journalists could report multiple reasons for not reporting.

(Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Gutek, 1985). The current study replicates these results in a sample of journalists, with 63% of those who reported harassment experiencing retaliation, suggesting that the challenges in addressing sexual harassment within this industry are similar to the challenges facing other organisations. Perceived retaliation is one of the most common outcomes. Therefore, to increase the reporting of sexual harassment, media industries must increase employees' confidence in the utility of reporting procedures (Howald et al., 2018) and ensure that there is no retaliation. One way of increasing this confidence is to ensure harassment is addressed, not ignored, and the journalist is not punished, as was often true of the sexual harassment experiences in this described study.

Organisations need to create a climate in which reports of sexual harassment are taken seriously and acted upon (Howald et al., 2018). Organisations must also work to protect those who report further harm. Ways of creating a climate that encourages reporting may include supportive counselling

for individuals experiencing harassment (Adams et al., 2019), training on conflict resolution and interpersonal skills (Brown & Battle, 2019), and programmes that emphasise group and team-building activities (Hurley, Sholar, & Rodeheffer, 2021).

Less than half of the journalists in this study reported receiving sexual harassment training (30%, n = 45). According to previous research, effective trainings designed to improve organisational culture around sexual harassment should include (1) an identification of the prevalence of sexual harassment and its risk factors in the organisation, (2) information about the prevalence and definition of sexual harassment, (3) manager training in interpersonal skills (e.g., conflict resolution and emotion management), and (4) challenges of masculine norms and values (Howald et al., 2018). The second component of effective training, defining sexual harassment, may be especially salient in the media industry. In this data set, labelling an event as sexual harassment contributed to reporting behaviour. There is evidence that training can increase the labelling of sexual harassment. Harassment training may increase the probability that a person would consider an unwelcome sexual remark, sexual gesture, deliberate touching, or a supervisor pressuring them to go on dates as sexual harassment (Antecol and Cobb-Clark, 2003). Other studies have shown similar increases in labelling behaviour after sexual harassment training (Blakely, Blakely & Moorman, 1998; Perry, Kulik & Schmidtke, 1998). In addition to defining sexual harassment, trainings should also specifically include information about how to avoid, document, and respond to sexual harassment. Padawer (2017) provided recommendations that include meeting sources in safe, public places. When harassment occurs, they recommend carefully documenting the harassment in a secure manner, including emailing the harasser to keep a paper trial of the harassment. Information about responding to sexual harassment can be included not only in organisational trainings but also in journalism schools where students should learn how to address boundaries with sources, colleagues, and bosses (Padawer, 2017).

In addition to sexual harassment trainings, structural changes may also improve the organisational culture surrounding sexual harassment. Steps for structural change might include increasing communication avenues and the right to appeal decisions made during the complaint process (Sylvie, 2003). Berdahl and Raver (2011) recommend that organisations provide multiple reporting channels, including informal channels for use by victims who are not comfortable using more formal procedures. They also recommend focusing on interventions that make victims comfortable rather than punish perpetrators to minimise possible retaliation and encourage victims to report when they do not want their harasser punished but instead only want the harassment to stop. These and similar structural changes may help decrease victims' concerns related to reporting. Taking the view of the system from the perspective of the victim making decisions on whether and how to report can inform organisational changes and communication. We used the data from the journalists in our research to create the decision tree in Figure 23.1. This diagram shows how a journalist might decide to report sexual harassment and points at which an organisation may intervene. This visualisation shows that effective organisational structures need to support multiple decision points in reporting and retaliation prevention.

Other recommendations for addressing sexual harassment in news organisations come from research seeking to address the impact of online harassment against journalists (Posetti & Shabbir, 2022). Unlike sexual harassment, online harassment is more likely to be perpetrated by a news consumer rather than a colleague or supervisor. However, similar to sexual harassment, journalists experiencing online harassment report organisations fail to understand the psychological impacts of harassment, fail to provide effective and holistic support, and, in some cases, are insensitive and blame the victim. Posetti and Shabbir (2022) encourage news organisations to address online harassment by (1) publicly defending their journalists in highly visible cases, (2) creating new roles within the newsroom that focus solely on tracking harassment and updating and implementing organisational policies concerning harassment, (3) implementing peer support programmes, and (4) ensuring that the reporting process is concise

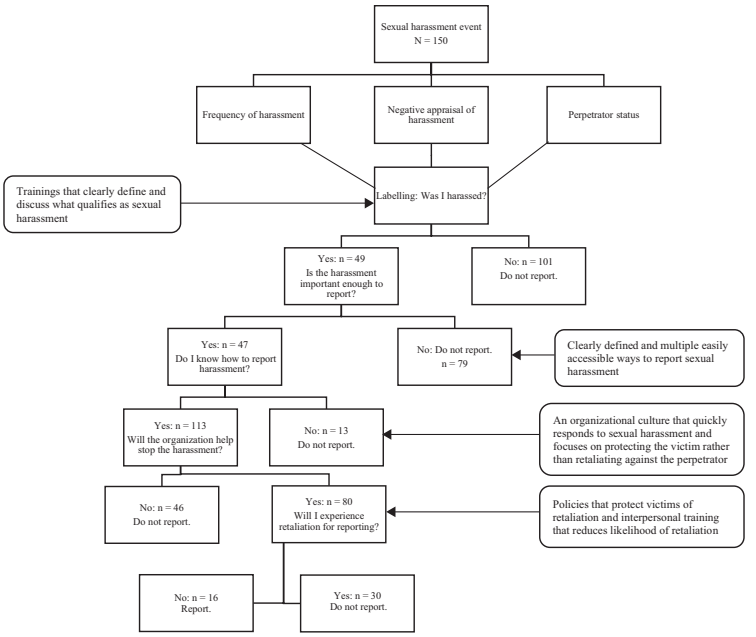

Figure 23.1: Why only 16 reported. Graphic depicting decisions a journalist may make when deciding if they should report sexual harassment, with data from the current study included. Opportunities for organisational intervention are also noted. Numbers may not equal 150. Journalists could provide multiple reasons for not reporting

and intuitive. These strategies can be adapted to address sexual harassment. The solution to increasing journalists' reporting of sexual harassment is multifaceted and requires organisations to address both individual and organisational factors. It is important for organisations to carefully consider the solutions that best fit their newsrooms and strive to create cultures of safety.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Talking points

- What is the relationship between how journalists define sexual harassment and if they report sexual harassment?
- What are three barriers that may prevent journalists from reporting sexual harassment to their organisations? What are three things organisations can do to address those barriers?
- How does sexual harassment hurt organisations? How does it specifically hurt media and journalism organisations?
- What are some of the important components of sexual harassment trainings?

Tasks

- In groups or alone, look through Table 23.3 and the reasons journalists gave for not reporting sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Discuss and identify measure organisations could put in place in order to provide a more supportive environment. Draft an "ideal" employers charter in dealing with sexual harassment. Does it differ depending on the perpetrator? In what way?

Note

1. Although we use studies across the world about journalists, the general literature is based mostly on US codes and regulations.

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SECTION V

The Education Environment

CHAPTER 24

News Feature: Chris Elliott: "If you are triggered by trauma, then there is a need to consider if journalism is the right job for you"

Lisa Bradley

Chris Elliott was the readers' editor at The Guardian until 2016 and before that was the managing editor between 2000 and 2010. He has worked as the home affairs correspondent for the Sunday Telegraph, chief reporter for the Sunday Correspondent and assistant news editor for the Times. In 1995, he joined The Guardian's newsdesk and was part of the team that won the UKPG Team Reporting Award for the Jonathan Aitken investigation.

"By refusing to cover certain stories in case it triggers unpleasant responses, reporters are denying that person the chance for their story to be told."

Chris Elliot, former managing editor of The Guardian and The Observer, was a news editor when Dunblane happened and managed correspondents who covered the Twin Towers, Dunblane and the Iraq War—and was exposed to vicarious trauma of the first degree.

He said: "The Iraq war and the Twin Towers was when I really came to understand how bad things were. At the time it was quite difficult to persuade staff that they needed hostile environment training and that after a tour of Iraq or Afghanistan they may need help.

"One of our reporters who saw people jumping from the windows in New York wouldn't accept help and left soon afterwards. I also think the issue around vicarious trauma was so apposite. When we got our first picture server we would get 600 images through it a day—within two or three years we would get up to 20,000 images a day, especially around events like the Twin Towers. It was horrific for the picture desk. They had to filter through all that imagery before deciding if it was too distressing for the public, but it had an enormous effect on them.

"Before that, I was on the newsdesk for Dunblane and I had to catch my breath at a couple of moments in the days that followed. My wife was dropping me off somewhere, and out of the corner of my eyes I saw a father toss his little boy up in the air and catch him, and in that moment it really got me.

Figure 24.1: Headlines after 9/11
Picture: World History Archive. Photograph copyright Alamy.

"At the time, a lot of male reporters did not like to admit that they had been affected by Dunblane and, in my lived experience, it was mainly the women who said they were struggling. We of course kept asking if they were ok and they'd say yes yes we're fine. But that was the culture.

"When I first did my journalism training, a coroner came in and showed us gruesome pictures on slides, including one of a man with a central reservation through him. The exercise was to demonstrate that if you can't cope with that, how will you manage going to the scene of a road traffic accident and seeing body parts?

"The rising number of young journalists who report being unable to cope with these situations is worrying, adding that if you are unfortunate enough to suffer a traumatic, life changing event, then there is a need to consider if journalism is the right job for you."

CHAPTER 25

"They definitely throw you in the deep end"—a UK Graduate Perspective on Journalism Practice

Lada T. Price and Lisa Bradley

New journalists are under pressure from editors to hit the ground running and sometimes join newsrooms where they can encounter "toxic cultures that breed emotional distress" (Duncan & Newton 2017, p. 192). However, studies of journalism course syllabuses in the UK and US (e.g., Dworznik & Garvey, 2019; Specht & Tsilman, 2018) and surveys/interviews with working journalists and university lecturers (e.g., Duncan & Newton 2010, 2017; Melki et al., 2013; Trifonova Price & Ogunyemi, 2023) have identified gaps and inconsistencies in teaching resilience skills and emotional and trauma literacy. The UK's National Council of Training for Journalists (NCTJ) has made safety and resilience training mandatory from 2023 on the back of these acknowledged gaps, but previously, training providers were not required to include these skills in the curriculum. This suggests that young journalists are not always sufficiently equipped before they leave higher education and begin work. At the same time, scholars argue that journalism educators, trainers and newsrooms have a "moral responsibility in regard to safeguarding the physical and emotional health of those sent into harm's way to bear witness and keep society informed of what they have seen" (Feinstein, Osmann & Pavisian, 2020, p.39). Emotional literacy and resilience-enhancing training can make a positive difference in the journalism practice of newcomers to the field and lead to better emotional handling of difficult experiences (Rentschler, 2010). Arguments for including teaching strategies on managing emotional challenges are based on evidence that there are benefits of such training for dealing with everyday stressors, and it is particularly effective for new professionals in the early stages of their careers (Simunjak, 2023). Providing safe spaces for reflective practice can also help young journalists consider ethical ways of covering trauma. Kay et al. (2011) propose a number of reflective approaches to be adopted as a standard journalism classroom routine so that they can be applied to future practice. These include reflection-in-action, which allows students to express how they would act and behave in covering a story and discuss potential implications; collective reflection based on simulations on trauma reporting in the classroom and serves as a type of rehearsal before students are faced with real reporting; action research,

which allows individuals to become more reflective and improve their own practice; and action learning in groups of others that can be practiced later in newsrooms (Kay et al., 2011). There is an overall agreement among scholars and educators that journalism higher education curricula globally need to include resilience-enhancing training alongside other essential practical and analytical skills that newcomers to the field of journalism are taught. This raises the question—to what extent are journalism graduates in the UK, for example, prepared to cope with emotional distress, covering traumatic events and the psychological challenges that they will face in their daily routine practice?

This chapter focuses on the challenges that new graduate and trainee reporters encounter when faced with difficult and potentially traumatising assignments in their first graduate or trainee jobs and offers student-centred ideas for how to include this in the curriculum. It is based on the experiences of eight recent journalism graduates from either a UK BA or MA NCTJ accredited degree program, all in their first year as reporters in national or regional newsrooms of major UK media outlets.[1] Our interviews included open-ended questions that explored their emerging careers as journalists, descriptions of their current role in the newsroom, types of stories and incidents that they reported on, how they coped with potentially stressful and traumatic events, the impact of routine work on their wellbeing and whether they received any newsroom support. It draws on these interviews to propose a strong argument for not only embedding resilience-enhancing teaching and learning in all university journalism courses and professional journalism training but also how to execute this.

Trauma on the Job

According to some definitions, trauma is not just a synonym of disaster and tragedy, nor is it an endlessly stretchable concept or a medical condition (Tumarkin, 2005). Tumarkin notes that the term entered Western public discourse in the 1970s, but the word has been continuously misused since then. She describes the feeling of being "overwhelmed" as the closest meaning of trauma, where the sufferer cannot fully understand what they have experienced or seen, but the impact of a particular event can sometimes be felt after several years. The mere memories of traumatic experiences can be more traumatising than surviving them. Trauma is then defined as "an individual and collective response to loss and suffering" that can have a long-lasting impact on people (Tumarkin, 2005, p. 13). However, in regard to journalism practice, the impact of witnessing trauma on reporters has been largely ignored, particularly among young starters who can be more vulnerable due to lack of experience. In newsrooms, for example, there is a perception of "macho culture", which promotes "suffering in silence" (Buchanan & Keats, 2011), leading to hesitancy among journalists to seek treatment or support for burnout, depression, or PTSD symptoms (Seely, 2019). When asked how they felt after covering traumatic assignments, young reporters often described feeling overwhelmed, as these quotes illustrate.

> I was like this is sad but you know, you have to get on with it. […] Oh my god, I was trying not to cry in court because obviously I cannot cry. However, But yeah, that was horrible […] I was a bit drained the rest of the weekend. I didn't really do anything. You just keep thinking about it. Like I don't process anything that I cover, I just completely forget about it. It's on to the next thing. […] I can't get upset. Especially, I don't know, because I'm the only girl in the office as well. And I'm the youngest. (J1, F)

> You feel, you feel quite heavy. Heavy is the word I'd use and… (J2, M)

Daily Routines and Reporting Assignments

Similarly to previous work (e.g., Barnes, 2016), the interviews we conducted show a notable pattern of new graduates in their first months of work, and in some cases even in their first weeks on the job,

being "thrown in the deep end" by editors and line managers and unprepared for what they would be exposed to from the very start. New reporters have been asked to cover potentially traumatising stories, for example, door knocks where the person they have to interview has been previously abusive towards reporters in and outside court; door knocks with terminally ill cancer patients; court reporting on cases ranging from domestic violence and stalking and multiple graphic rape cases; watching and editing graphic videos from the war in Ukraine and police brutality cases as these journalists describe:

> So I just went to a house, and I was sat in her living room with her husband. Kids were at school. And it was, that was a really, really emotive one because she was very, very frank about the fact that she didn't have long left to live. And, you know, you could tell, she was really ill. She kept having to apologise because she had to take a break. It was heart wrenching. I'd only been in the job for a couple of weeks. (J2, M)

> Yesterday I had to watch a video of a soldier being shot… I have had this a few times where we get like, video, sent and stuff, where we have to carve out the distressing bits so no-one else has to see it… But, obviously, when it comes to us, we need to watch it to know what's happening. I usually try, if they already put in an email like, "Oh, please ask 'Video' to cut out XYZ", then I usually try to not watch that part because I did in the beginning and I went home and cried. […] Yeah, it's a lot of the war stuff in Ukraine, especially now that I'm on a foreign desk. I do a lot more of that, but usually get them on a night shift when you do more foreign stories and you're tired. And you're not really prepared to see something like that. So you really have to watch it to kind of see what's happening. (J6, F)

Responses and Coping Strategies

In regard to their responses to traumatising situations, our interviewees from the UK tend to adopt a range of coping mechanisms to deal with the impact of these stories in their daily routines. The main responses include avoidance, compassion fatigue, crying and feelings of helplessness and numbness, which are well documented in the literature. Scholars have found that journalists often do not recognise some of the symptoms of trauma, such as guilt, compassion fatigue, burnout, avoidance, helplessness, mental health breakdowns and anger outbursts (Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Seely 2020). To cope with the pressures of witnessing and documenting human suffering regularly, some reporters adopt maladaptive strategies, including drinking heavily and closing off and isolating themselves from colleagues, friends and family, which can have a significant impact on their emotional and psychological wellbeing (Backholm & Björkqvist, 2012; Backholm & Idås, 2015; Barnes, 2016). Our interviewees describe a mixture of similar responses. For example, not having the time to reflect and "moving on fast" to the next story; losing the ability to be shocked; "laughing it off" with other reporters in the newsroom; experiencing guilt and compassion fatigue where stories of death and suffering become "normal"; sometimes crying; detachment through separating their professional and private lives; and "switching off" work completely and setting boundaries. Some interviewees describe routine practices where the sheer volume of traumatic stories they have to produce makes the suffering of others "normal", prompting them to remind themselves that behind each one, "there is a real human with real problems" (J2, M). However, the pressure of the "game" to get stories out quickly—especially if they are breaking—demands an instant shift from being horrified and upset to thinking about good headlines.

> At the time I just focus on getting the details. You get all of the emotion and it isn't filtered at all. And it comes at you so fast, and you're so focused on, you know, getting it done. […] I was too busy for the rest of the week to even think about it. […] it's not obvious but I feel like I am sent out on like, to door knock victims of rape or stalking or, you know, when there's been an attack. But I just have to do it and then move on fast […] I used to be shocked but not anymore. (J1, F)

> I wanted to tell her story in way that we discussed, and that's what I was working towards but once the story was done, it was cold, I kind of compartmentalised it. I'm moving on to the next one, which was quite useful because I don't like to linger on stories particularly. (J4, M)

> I wouldn't say I'm not empathetic anymore, but it doesn't affect me as much because I can separate my journalism day from my private day a lot more. But those kinds of videos—words don't stay in your head as long as the images do—and those kinds of images I think I'll have a long time of them staying with me. I've watched a lot of videos of soldiers being shot. But I think the worst one was mass graves and a video panning over. Lots of bodies in a grave. That was, that was the worst bit. It made me cry a lot. And luckily I was at home […] I was like, Thank God, I'm not crying at work. I would have, I would have literally had to go outside. (J6, F)

While some of these coping strategies are adaptive, such as seeing "my mates, my girlfriend, have a pint, watch football" (J3, M), several interviewees found it hard to completely switch off from work or to draw a line between their work and personal life. They perceive journalism practice to be all-encompassing with constant calls, emails and text messages, which makes it difficult to set boundaries and take time off work. Scholars recommend that journalism students and trainees should be taught effective skills to cope with the effects of exposure to traumatising events during their careers, which our interviewees lack (e.g., Barnes, 2015; Seely, 2020), to avoid burnout and ultimately prevent them from leaving the profession. The responses and coping strategies that our interviewees describe add further weight to this argument.

Support in Newsrooms

In addition to being exposed to traumatising reporting in daily routines and only being in the job for a year or less, the new journalists we interviewed had already experienced and been subjected to verbal abuse inside and outside their newsrooms. This includes intimidation and verbal insults in court, online abuse and harassment from readers and viewers, and harassment from senior colleagues and line managers in their own newsrooms for making mistakes. Several interviewees describe a toxic newsroom culture in some workplaces, where young reporters are afraid that they will be fired after making a mistake or taken off certain assignments because they are labelled "emotional" by editors. This is particularly evident for female reporters who report much worse treatment by male, and occasionally female, line managers. Such perceptions indicate a lack of concern from senior staff members for the wellbeing of new reporters who are in their first journalism jobs after leaving the safe classroom environment, which is surprising given that older and more experienced journalists would have been in the same situation at the start of their careers in journalism.

> One of the mistakes I made was quite stupid, but I did a story earlier that day with a guy with a very similar surname. In my head I mixed them up…They were not happy. They called me a c*** and said you can't f****** do this. It is not acceptable. I was convinced I was gonna get fired the next day. I was terrified but it was forgotten about for the next day and never mentioned again. […] Reporters avoid discussing stories in front of editors or other senior editorial staff. One reporter ensured not to cry in court, for example because they were afraid they might be seen as being weak. I couldn't have it get back to my bosses. They would have thought I wasn't up to the job. (J1, F)

> There was one editor who's now left. Who's the only one that was really rude to me a few times. Just like calling me stupid and…stuff. One night shift I was on, there was a mistake in a picture caption. It wasn't even my mistake, like I hadn't written the caption. But I didn't spot it and he had a go at me on email. Luckily I was home so no one sees me crying and but he was like, "Oh, that was so f****** stupid. Why did you put that in there?" Called me names. […] I don't feel like they particularly care that much about mental health. Although it is changing. They're getting nicer. Although the culture of being shouted at and leading through fear is there. But it is changing. (J6, F)

> I found that with another manager at a different desk. They had basically approached one of my colleagues and screamed at them in front of the entire newsroom. They cried and cried after and kept saying sorry. But it wasn't their fault. They are a trainee. I won't say sorry if I'm not sorry. If I don't know how something should be done that's on them. By saying sorry again and again they are making it ok to be spoken to like that. (J7, F)

These quotes illustrate that in some newsrooms there is still a shocking culture of bullying, where trainees are singled out, picked on, mocked and ridiculed for their mistakes in the work group WhatsApp chat or witnessing unethical and sexist behaviour towards sources from senior editorial staff. A survey of 160 UK journalists working in national and local newsrooms conducted in 2013 shows high levels of harassment, bullying and discrimination in their workplaces, where three out of four journalists reported being bullied (FEU, 2013). It is clear that a decade after the results of the survey, there is hardly any change. In this type of high-pressure environment, young reporters and trainees quickly learn to stay quiet, "out of the way" and not to expect any support from their managers. In our interviews, this was much more weighted towards the experiences of young journalists in national newsrooms, as opposed to regional—where all interviews felt supported by their line managers. Recent studies suggest that university students are often portrayed in popular media discourse as passive, entitled and fragile snowflakes, regardless of their age and social background (Finn, Ingram & Allen, 2021). This perception, especially among previous generations, arguably makes the transition from higher education into the workplace even more challenging for young journalists.

Abusive readers' comments further add to the pressure of the job. Studies show that many journalists, and female journalists in particular, are regularly subjected to a tide of intimidation and harassment online in the form of hatred, rape and death threats, and misogynist attacks (Posetti et al., 2023) that significantly impact their daily practice and wellbeing. The interviews also demonstrate that newcomers to journalism experience this from the start of their careers and in much higher volumes than older generations of journalists would have had to contend with. Incidents range from being verbally abused at traditional assignments such as courts and crime scenes, but the majority take place in the digital sphere. Many interviewees are left feeling disheartened and worried when readers "pounce on you truly quickly" and "hurl abuse" (J2, M) for innocent mistakes such as missing links on social media or posting vile comments during Facebook Live reports. For interviewees of colour, the abuse is often racist.

> At court, like, people call me awful things. […] (J1, F)

> There's been a few occasions where I've had stories, where there's been a backlash and not my fault, just people generally not understanding how journalism works. […] I hate getting sent to a crime scene. Not because it's scary, it's because I know I'm gonna have to do a Facebook Live. […] all I can see are comments pinging up saying how shit I am. (J2, M)

> On Facebook, they're very cutthroat over there, our readers. And so yeah, they are very quick to jump on the bandwagon and it kind of creates a bit of a pile on. (J3, F)

> One comment that I got after a story that said the police need to check my hard drive and phone. I was being accused of being a, you know…, child abuser. And I thought. Yeah, right. But that was like the last straw for me after a long stint of racist comments. He's since made a different account and he's back on but he seems to have reigned it in a bit. But I think that's probably the main thing that you get used to in the first couple months is the social flack. (J4, M)

> Football fans are pretty fickle, they're not very forgiving. They're diehard fans, they want to read the content. […] And quite a lot of people just digging into you saying, "Oh, who's written this rubbish" and this waffle whatever… quite often a lot worse is said than that. A lot. (J5, M)

Our interviews indicate that the difference in how new reporters perceive their experiences and practice during the first months of their professional careers is rooted in the particular culture of the newsroom they work in, but also in the level of support they receive. In larger newsrooms there appears to be little support, no induction or any in-house training before new starters are sent out on difficult assignments. We found that in some instances, new starters are sent to death knocks on their third day of work. Instead of offering support, some interviewees describe editors reprimanding them for feeling sorry for interviewees and being told not to take sides, get invested in a story or try and connect with people.

The interviews indicate that new journalists quickly learn to speak to others in the same roles as them (1) to seek peer-to-peer support; (2) find a sympathetic ear and a collegiate understanding of the problems they encounter in their daily routine; and (3) for camaraderie and for advice on how to deal with difficult and challenging situations, as these examples show:

> We have an agreement that we tell each other, very openly about our work, but don't ever tell our bosses that, you know, we share information. […] we are just really close, so we help and support each other. (J1, F)

> We get the flack for it, that we haven't got the page views. […] And I know that there are other colleagues there that were struggling a bit with that. But we'd be starting meetings throughout the day. We'd have, like, a little secret meeting. A little clan about. We just chat throughout the day today. Go quicker. Felt like we're in an office. It's good to have that little friendship group. (J5, M)

> I talk with the other trainees about it, which really helps because obviously, they're in the same boat and they see the same kind of stuff and like, they're just like, the same. […] We have a little group chat and every time we get annoyed, we can get it out and talk it through and then move on. Because if you ponder too much about it, it's just gonna stay, I'm just gonna get worse. (J6, F)

> There was a lot of camaraderie I guess . We do chat all the time about stuff. That helps. […] It was more colleagues. I guess we seek each other out. Because you tell like, non-journos and they don't really get it. Like, of course, on surface level they do. That sounds like a lot, but yeah, they don't really get it… (J8, F)

Notable in the interviews is that all the trainees we interviewed had hybrid working patterns, which involved splitting their time between the office and working from home. Most find working from home to be much more challenging in terms of finding support from colleagues. This is a new

challenge as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that placed their older colleagues in uncharted territory:

> I think it helps working in your office because it helps compartmentalising a bit more. And because at home, I struggle to switch off and put my laptop down and not look at work emails and not look at the website constantly to see what's new, what's updating? But when I'm in the office, I leave and then on the way home, I always, always read a book and then continue reading at home. So that proper gets me out of the workspace. […] I think if I was working from home permanently, that I would be struggling a lot more. (J6, F)

> I think it depends whether you're in the office or at home. And I think, if it happens in the office, you'll go look at this story. I'm getting absolute dog abuse here and you'll bounce off of the other people. […] I think when you're working from home, you sort of deal with it by yourself a little bit more, like every now and then you might ping someone a message "so, are you seeing this" or, "I'm getting it in the neck", but I think that's definitely one of the advantages of being in the office. Sometimes, it's just being able to very quickly bounce it off someone and then nine times out of 10 immediately get some reassurance. […]And I think, as much as I do like working from home, sometimes I think if you're having a bad day and you've got two or three stories where people are getting on top of you, then I think it can be quite lonely. (J2, M)

> We are definitely supportive of each other, but I think it's been easier to build relationships with some more than others because I work in the office three days a week and two days working from home. (J3, F)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Journalism education has always had to respond to the changes in and demands of the media industry. Embedding journalism ethics teaching in journalism courses across the world is a prime example of responding to the needs of the industry but also to the need of societies for ethical journalism practice. Ethics courses/modules have become a vital early step in guiding future journalists to engage with ethical standards. While students cannot learn everything they need to know in university courses, they enable them to can develop foundational knowledge, skills, and even attitudes that will help them effectively deal with issues that arise long after they have left university (Wyatt, 2021). This links to Robinson's (2013, p. 1) model of journalism as a "process", emphasising the ongoing nature of journalism practice, which does not just end with the content published by the journalist. Interactions in the newsroom and with audiences are part of the process and can sometimes include negative comments and violent abuse directed towards journalists. Part of this "process" of content creation and journalism practice can also involve exposure to distressing digital content that can potentially be harmful to the wellbeing of journalists. Because of this, we argue that the "process" needs to incorporate steps that help journalists protect and safeguard their mental and emotional health. Journalism education has responded well to the demand for journalism graduates to be equipped with digital news production skills that allow them to easily fit into the routines of digital news production practices (Jiang & Rafeeq, 2019), but it needs to go further in preparing them to work with all aspects of the digital environment. Trauma and mental health literacy is still a relatively rare or minor part of the teaching and learning of the "process" of journalism. Although their findings apply to humanitarian and human rights work as well as media work, Dubberly et al. (2015) make some recommendations to educators at academic institutions, which are asked to ensure that students do not leave their classrooms without acquiring some knowledge and understanding of how journalism practice can expose individuals to PTSD and/or secondary trauma. They stress the importance of creating modules or programmes, with help from mental health professionals, that equip students with the skills to recognise, prevent and cope with PTSD and secondary trauma. Alongside theoretical journalism teaching, practical learning should also include how to identify symptoms of PTSD and how to treat these symptoms.

Several studies have already demonstrated the substantial contribution that journalism courses can make to equip aspiring journalists with effective skills to manage trauma in their future practice (e.g., Amend et al., 2012). Importantly, what also needs to change is the newsroom culture, which, instead of bullying new reporters, provides a supportive and encouraging work environment where newcomers to journalism can learn to "swim in the deep end" and thrive in a challenging and fast-paced job. As educators, we have a duty of care to our students, but so do newsrooms and editors.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Teaching Points

In the final part of the interviews, we asked our interviewees what their courses could do to better prepare them for the challenges that lie ahead. The responses we received show a simple, straight to the point, practical steps that journalism educators and trainers can take:

- Have more than one lecture on trauma literacy.
- Have masterclasses and guess lectures from working journalists who are willing to share what truly happens on the job that is different from university newsrooms.
- Have guest speakers be honest about the side of journalism where they get abused and get called names despite being successful.
- Teach the courage to say "No" to bosses
- Be honest in saying that traumatic stories get page views in the line of news reporting so we are prepared for this.
- Teach us not to ignore trolling and to tell our managers.
- Teach us to take the weekend off and take some time off, even just a 10 minute coffee break.
- Conduct simulation exercises where we can see what happens during disasters or attacks.
- Teach us how shocking and disturbing digital content can be, and how to deal with graphic images and video.
- Teach emotional intelligence and how to manage our emotions effectively.

Note

1. The interviews are anonymous to protect the identities of interviewees. In quotes throughout the chapter, the interviewees are identified with a number, e.g. Journalists 1 (J1), Female (F) or Male (M).

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CHAPTER 26

Effective Ways to Teach Safety, Trauma and Resilience to Journalists

Colm Murphy

Finding effective methods to teach how to deal with trauma and enhance safety and resilience is key for journalists, employers and journalism educators. This chapter tells how an international consortium led by Ulster University in Northern Ireland devised and tested a new methodology that it named the "Holistic Humanitarian Approach". At the end of the chapter, the four main stages of this new training approach as it relates to trauma mitigation are outlined.

The new method was a response to the fact that the underlying threat facing journalists is changing and, prior to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2002, the majority of fatal attacks on journalists occurred in their own country. Often, journalists are targeted for intimidation or, at the extreme, assassination. In response, UNESCO and others have called for research into best practices for journalism safety education as a tool to halt both this and the consequential decline in global media freedom since 2012. The premise of the new training approach covered in this chapter is that journalists' safety is greatly enhanced by understanding key threats and knowing how to take action to reduce them. Three studies by influential organisations such as UNESCO (2018), Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma New York (2017) and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEMJC) (2013) have identified a significant gap in safety and resilience education. Other experts, who advise on training in the military and medical profession to mitigate combat posttraumatic stress disorder, have also called for significantly enhanced resilience and safety training research for news professionals (Shapiro et al., 2017). The little-changed international provision for training journalists going into hostile environments, which has dominated for 32 years—or the "military battlefield" pedagogy—is used by the world's major news organisations such as BBC, CNN and the New York Times but is largely based around military training, and much of it is delivered by ex-military personnel.

This new pedagogical method has adapted and customised best practices from other organisations, such as the Red Cross's international safety and security team's training, the Police Service of Northern Ireland anti-terrorists and riot training, disaster healthcare trainers and trauma training from

the Ambulance Service of Northern Ireland, as well as working with several trauma psychologists. A key piece of underlying research was Taylor's 2020 Competencies for Disaster Healthcare professionals (2020). This changed the thinking on the core competencies required amongst professionals going into hostile environments. It shifted the training from the "military battlefield" model towards more humanitarian competencies in personal care, stakeholder engagement, trauma awareness, peer support and cultural understanding. Traditional areas, such as situational awareness, first aid, bomb and firearm awareness, remained an integral component.

New Training Method

The new training method[1] was devised by the international consortium building on Taylor's research, best practices in other professions and interviews with 20 journalists who have worked extensively in hostile environments. It was tested and refined during its delivery to four pilot cohorts between 2018 and 2023, and all of the participants judged that it "very significantly" enhanced their resilience and safety skills. The programme's concentration on group and individual physical and mental resilience building, risk mitigation, psychology, and communication was a paradigm shift in training internationally for news professionals in dangerous environments. It was run in different settings, formats and durations in the four pilots. The effectiveness of each in enhancing the resilience of journalists was measured. They ranged from being totally immersed in a forest for seven days (2019), to a hybrid of forest for three days and then a classroom (2018), to a one-day intensive class in a forest (2021 and 2023). The cohorts ranged from international groups in 2018 and 2019 to national groups from Northern Ireland in 2021 and 2023 (due to COVID-19 restrictions). The first group, for example, was taught "shelter building, bush craft, water purification, how to manage personal nutrition, light fires, cooking outdoors and other critical survival skills. This exercise also rapidly developed teamwork in the cohort who had not met before and leadership skills, as well as building personal resilience" (Murphy et al., 2020).

There is much evidence that scenario-based and immersive experiential training is effective for safety and resilience (Deeny et al., 2009). "Immersive" pertains to the creation of a simulated event that evokes sensory, emotional, behavioural, and conceptual engagement so that the learner has a felt experience that the event is real (Lioce et al., 2020). This level of realness, accuracy, and detail is referred to as fidelity, of which there are different types, ranging from conceptual fidelity, where the scenario makes sense; physical fidelity, where the simulation duplicates reality; and emotional or psychological fidelity, where the learner feels it is real (Vannin, 2016).

The other element of the new pedagogy was outdoor immersion. A review of outdoor learning proposed eight themes relating to learning outcomes and psychosocial benefits (Fernee et al., 2018). These included developing outdoor living skills, dealing with risk and challenge, gaining environmental knowledge and exploring nature and wildlife, sustainability issues related to the natural environment, personal growth and leadership, self-awareness, building confidence, sense of community, building connections, having fun in nature and lasting impact. The therapeutic value of wilderness as a method to improve mental health is well documented (Meerts-Brandsma & Rochelle, 2019), as is the transformative nature of outdoor adventure education (Taylor, 2020). This type of learning can be described as "foot learning", where students learn by walking a similar path to that walked by a journalist in a real hostile environment but in a "safe" environment. Immersion in the wilderness environment provides additional stimuli directly from nature, such as temperature change, smells, sounds, mud and dirt, rain and wind. There are benefits to resilience building from being in an austere wilderness environment. This, in turn, theoretically, should make the individual better able to cope in dangerous situations, regardless of the environment.

The effectiveness of each format and duration of the delivery was measured using the Connor-Davidson Resilience index (2018) and semi-structured interviews with participants. In terms of quantitative results, the 2018 student cohort demonstrated the most effective learning following three days in a forest, two intense days in a classroom with interactive workshops and a day in a hostile environment (interface areas of Derry city).

Each of the journalists participating in the 2018 training completed the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale 25 (2018) before starting the programme. The students were asked 25 questions about their resilience and scored them between one and four each. Therefore, the maximum was 100 on the Connor–Davidson scale. The scale was developed specifically from Connor and Davidson's treatment of people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This study involved the participants evaluating the effectiveness of the new pedagogy rather than rating their own performance. The less experienced group members initially scored approximately 61 on the scale, with the more experienced ones at approximately 83. The 2018 cohort remarked themselves against the Connor–Davidson scale six weeks after completing the course, and all reported that their scores had risen significantly. The greatest rise was in the students who had started with the lower scores—now up to approximately 83. Those more experienced rose from the 80s to the 90s, which indicated that the programme did have a very significant impact on building the resilience levels of participants.

A second quantitative method was used to gather results from the 2018 cohort. This was a questionnaire on their skill and knowledge level relating to safety. This was completed prior to the programme starting and again after the final day. The results showed an 83% improvement in their knowledge safety skills. A male trainee journalist in the 2018 cohort said: "Going back to the self-assessment forms after the training, I was able to see a marked improvement in all areas. As well as highlighting the paramount importance of detailed knowledge and preparedness, I now feel confident, and excited, to begin a career working in harsh and hostile environments." Another Spanish female journalist who took the 2018 course reflected: "Risk will always be there, but now I have the tools to cope with it and prepare for it."

There were similar results from a more international mix of participants in the 2019 cohort who spent the course living in a forest, except one day in a hostile environment in interface parts of Derry city. An interface area is where there are physical barriers erected to stop one section of the community from attacking another. They had no tents but instead were taught as part of the course on how to build shelters from tarpaulins. Participants from Africa, Scandinavia and Canada, who had experienced more outdoor adventure, scored significantly higher on the Connor Davidson Resilience Index before the programme started. However, those with little outdoor experience, for example, suburban UK and Chinese cities, initially scored low. Some of these in the survey even questioned their suitability to work in dangerous environments. However, they all commented on the camaraderie they had built and the informal learning and mental health support from each other, which helped them through the program.

Significantly, several of the participants in the 2019 cohort had previously had "military battlefield" style training. They all said that this new programme was more effective for them, as it better addressed their real safety issues. While the sample size was small, so it is not possible to generalise to the entire population, the indication would be that the new pedagogy is gender and language neutral. The most important indicator of effective learning was that it led the journalists to successfully undertake assignments in Syrian refugee camps, under fire in Gaza, and cover illegal immigrants in the Mediterranean. Several of the journalistic outputs that resulted were shortlisted for UK national student journalism awards. The experimental conclusions are that the pedagogy developed to build resilience and safety skills to prepare journalists for hostile environments is effective in its principal aims.

The results from the day-long intensive programmes (the 2021 and 2023 cohorts), devised to comply with COVID-19 restrictions, indicated that they were, on average, less effective than the more prolonged time in the forest. The journalists had absorbed extremely useful and relevant information, but their resilience had not improved as much as those who spent several nights in the forest. They also did not have the time to benefit from peer-to-peer support or form new friendships. The main advantage of the one-day course was that it had the highest number of participants, averaging 22 journalists each day, as many stated they found it hard to get the time to do training longer than one day. The Rory Peck Trust, an international charity that supports freelance journalists in hostile environments, paid part of the costs of the one-day training, allowing freelance journalists to benefit from it.

The Training

There is much misunderstanding of what trauma is, so the trainers on the Ulster University course provided an initial general introduction, based on the American Psychological Association definition of trauma "as an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea" (American Psychological Association, 2023). It was stressed that while these feelings are normal and some people have difficulty moving on, there are constructive ways, with the assistance of clinicians, of managing emotions.

There is evidence that although journalists build coping mechanisms to face constant trauma, it is a high-risk factor for the profession. Self-medication in the form of alcohol, drug misuse, depression, dissociation, personality disorders and other health problems are higher within the profession than in the general population (Monteiro et al., 2016). Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms are widespread. Among war reporters, the incidence of PTSD was found to be one in five, similar to that of combat veterans (Feinstein et al., 2002). While frontline emergency services frequently argue that their trauma training is inadequate, most journalists receive no training at all. However, within journalism, there is increasingly greater awareness of physical and mental safety. Much of the credit for this is that younger new entrants to newsrooms attach less stigma to talking about mental health issues. ABC in Australia and the BBC in London, for example, have occupational psychologists working with newsrooms. Some smaller newsrooms, such as the York Daily Record in Pennsylvania, have trained staff to offer peer-to-peer support. However, few news organisations do this, and their efforts to address the issue are often treated with skepticism by experienced journalists. A highly experienced television reporter who has covered traumatic events globally almost daily for over 30 years said: "It feels like they are just trying to protect a company from litigation rather than the journalist."

An experienced investigative reporter said: "The macho culture is still there. However, a manager's job is to remove barriers to get people to do their jobs better. So we need to build better managers." Little support generally comes after a traumatic event. However, the journalists, trauma medical experts and emergency services trauma trainers interviewed for this research say the training should be preemptive rather than reactive. The reporters argue that they need to know how to deal with online abuse, tragedies involving children and other areas, but often editors were themselves desensitised to trauma and therefore took little action to ameliorate it.

Another who has covered constant conflict and trauma for 34 years in Northern Ireland said that when living in a conflict zone, "You need to switch off your emotions [to survive]. However, you need people with empathy in newsrooms, you cannot lose the human aspect." He learned how to get people often on the worst day of their life when they have suddenly lost a loved one in horrific circumstances

to talk: "You need to be conscious of how you deal with people who have trauma. I am not a fan of the aggressive interview. Ask people the question gently."

Another reporter was in a war zone when a bomb killed his friend, and he developed PTSD and had to stop reporting. "The first rule of front-line reporting is not to become a victim yourself. I saw the bodies in blankets coming out. It haunted me." He said, "Trauma is like a door you step through and cannot get back. You are in the clouds and it is dark. The only thing that helps is the sun is going to rise." It took him a number of years to recover and re-enter journalism.

Stages of Training

The following are the four stages used in the Ulster University "Holistic Humanitarian Approach" hostile environment training course.

Stage 1: Be Physically and Mentally Prepared for Covering Traumatic Events

The initial stage of the training is to give journalists an understanding of how to be physically and mentally healthy, particularly when operating in stressful environments. Pat Deeny (2018), a pioneer in international disaster healthcare, said you need to maintain your body and brain at an optimal level to obtain the extra capacity to cope with trauma. First, as sleep is viewed as the barometer of mental health, he advises having the amount recommended by the American Centers for Disease Control (7 hours a night for adults). This means no caffeine after lunch, no mobiles in bedrooms and a dark but not too cold setting. Ensure that you exercise, but not excessively or under three hours before sleep, and eat and drink healthily with not too much sugar or alcohol. Good hydration is also key, with a recommended 1.5 litres of water a day in a moderate climate and up to 3 litres in a warm climate.

Deeny also advised that being a journalist can be all-consuming, especially because of 24/7 news, but it is important to switch off from professional life. This can be through sport, a hobby, meditation, mindfulness or socialising with friends or family. You should, he said, be compassionate with yourself, take breaks and try to manage the stress. This preparatory session in the training also involves an intensive briefing by a trauma specialist from the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service on how to understand and then cope with trauma. This service has gained considerable experience in dealing with traumatised staff and victims during 30 years of conflict in Northern Ireland. In the Ulster University training, they explain the body's fight, flight, freeze and submit responses to a traumatic episode. Through an interactive workshop, they explain how the brain and body react to trauma and draw on their real-world experience to explain coping strategies.

Then, they outline how it, as a service, has learned to support staff involved in traumatic incidents. First, after a traumatic incident, they check on staff 72 hours after the traumatic event. However, at that point, it is policy to ask at least twice: "How are you? How are you truly feeling" (NI Ambulance Service trauma trainers, 2023). If needed, they also hold a nonoperational debriefing for the whole team involved a few days after the event. This concentrates on emotions and feelings and is led by a trained trauma specialist. Staff who then require it start intensive specialist trauma counselling. They point out that the effects of traumatic events can take four weeks to 20 years to come out, so everyone can react differently.

Stage 2: "Talking Stick" Approach to Peer and Employer Support after a Traumatic Event

The second stage is when trauma occurs and the affected journalists need to understand what has occurred, process it and contextualise it, allowing the brain to deal with it in a more rational way. The police service in Northern Ireland, the PSNI, uses experiential learning to train officers how to react safely in trauma situations such as riots or bomb or gun attacks. In Ulster University's "holistic

humanitarian" training, we followed this best practice and simulated a riot for journalists and for them coming under gunfire. The objective was to train their brain to identify threats and then to react safely under intense stress. Once the gunfire started during the riot, they were trained to react immediately and get down to hardcover. They had to repeat this exercise up to eight times until it became an automatic fast reaction. Other exercises with the police and St John's Ambulance involved a mock terrorist attack where journalists had to administer first aid to students, acting as simulated casualties with mock wounds. In all these exercises, the aim was to use experiential learning to teach them how to react safely in traumatic circumstances.

Significant time after the simulation is spent analysing the journalists' emotional responses; by being able to identify our responses, we will feel less under threat and have greater control over our brain's and body's responses. It is essential to know first how your body reacts to a fast release of adrenaline—alertness of the central nervous system, rush of blood to muscles and vital organs, faster breathing and faster heart, the effect of which can take over 72 hours to wear off, and second, how cortisol puts more sugar into our blood, giving us an energy rush that will peter out.

That is the physical reaction, but what of the emotional one? How are you emotionally processing your experiences? Your brain has to process and remember a perceived life-threatening experience. These body and brain responses are normal and expected responses, but by talking about them or writing them down, we help ourselves look at them more rationally.

The Ulster University "holistic humanitarian" hostile environment training had a daily debrief called the "Talking Stick". A stick was passed around, and once you had it, you had to talk about your day, your stresses and anxieties with peers around a campfire. It is not an operational debrief, rather a "feelings" debrief. For many journalists attending the hostile environment training, it was the first time they had ever spoken about their emotions in association with the job. The participants, who were strangers before the training course, quickly became good and often lifetime friends and key supporters of each other.

Unfortunately, for most journalists, there are no formalised methods for peer-to-peer support. Several of the journalists interviewed for this research, particularly freelancers, argued strongly about the benefit a formal method of peer-to-peer support would have been to them. The difficulty is that given the increasing amount of remote and freelance work, the traditional newsroom with its informal support mechanism is becoming rarer. Therefore, valuable previously available peer support is no longer always available face-to-face.

A traditional strategy to deal with traumatised staff was to give them a few days of leave. However, the emerging thinking is that this can be counterproductive, as staff may feel even more isolated if appropriate support is not available there. The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service does not therefore automatically send staff home after experiencing very traumatic incidents. It checks in with them via its trained support network 72 hours after the traumatic event or when the cortisol-induced energy boost and adrenaline have worn off and the reality begins to hit.

While few news organisations have employee assistance programmes, it is important that journalists know in advance any organisational arrangements to deal with those in distress and how they can be accessed. It may be a manager, colleagues or an outside employee assistance programme. Freelancers, often excluded from such programmes, must seek specialist support via their union or online, such as specialist trauma and journalism not-for-profit organisations. A highly experienced Northern Ireland photojournalist, Kevin Cooper, said: "As a freelancer, you have to keep covering the story, as you do not have the stability of a news organisation that has your back. Freelancing is the norm now, so this is troubling." Other initiatives are the "buddy system", whereby journalists often from different organisations work deliberately in pairs. This is both for physical and mental safety.

Sadly, the consensus among those journalists who suffered significant trauma and were interviewed for this project was that managers, while sympathetic, were ill-equipped as were their organisations in providing support.

Stage 3: Avoiding Secondary or Vicarious Trauma/Explicit Material

People can absorb the trauma of others. This is known as secondary or vicarious trauma. For example, a year after the Omagh bomb in Northern Ireland, which killed 31 people in August 1998, people living 50 miles away were experiencing trauma simply from seeing associated news reports. For journalists, this can come in many forms, such as talking with the bereaved and covering road accidents, tragedies, fires and murders.

Reporters face a real risk of secondary trauma due to having to view graphic or explicit material. This risk has increased exponentially due to the proliferation of mobile phones and CCTV, which has meant that traumatic events, previously rarely captured, are regularly sent to newsrooms uncensored and without warning. Journalists then have to curate this to determine what is suitable to put out. One international television news editor said: "This can be very traumatic for our staff, particularly younger reporters often working night shifts with few people around."

The mental health consequences of this on reporters is an area of ongoing research, but there is increasing evidence from other sectors of the negative consequence of repeated exposure to such material.

To avoid secondary trauma from such material, first, you must understand your own sensitivities or triggers. You can either prepare yourself or avoid content that may trigger you, for example, if you have a child of a similar age to one who is being attacked in a video. You must mentally prepare yourself for what you are about to see and warn your colleagues.

You should also set the physical boundaries for this sensitive work. Preferably do it in an office and leave it there. However, if you have to work from home, avoid working in your bedroom or more personal space. It is important to maintain a safe space within your home.

When viewing difficult content, there are several strategies to help reduce potential trauma. It can help to turn off the audio accompanying footage. On YouTube and Facebook, you can also pause the video and preview it as a thumbnail. This allows you to preview any potentially harmful content so you can avoid it or prepare yourself. If there are elements of a video that are particularly disturbing, you could cover that element with a post it note or your hand. It is also prudent to disable the autoplay as this will stop another more graphic video coming up.

Stage 4: Identifying Persistent Post-traumatic Stress (Continues for over Four Weeks)

The majority of journalists who suffer trauma thankfully never reach this final stage. Nonetheless, it is useful to discuss warning signs, as they have the most serious long-term health effects if they reach this acute stage. In the first four weeks after a traumatic event, some patients will develop acute stress disorder (ASD) as an immediate short-term psychological response. These symptoms can vary but are generally intrusive thoughts, a negative mood, arousal, avoidance, re-experiencing the trauma and disassociation. Most people with ASD reactions will recover in time without clinical intervention. If these symptoms continue for four weeks after the traumatic event, those affected should seek help from a qualified medical professional, often first through their doctor who is best qualified to diagnose and prescribe appropriate treatment.

They will examine the patient for PTSD, which is diagnosed using the DSM-V criteria. The following are some of the four categories of symptoms used by the medical profession to diagnose PTSD. People with PTSD may have all or some of these symptoms, some of which may be interrelated; for example, they are afraid to sleep to avoid flashbacks, which then causes fatigue and mood disorders.

Temperament, past experience, support received and other factors can also influence the symptoms. The common symptoms according to the American Psychological Association are as follows:

Intrusive or recurrent memories of the trauma. Nightmares and flashbacks that can be triggered by environmental triggers such as noises, smells or anything that reminds you of the traumatic event.

Avoidance of trauma reminders. Avoiding situations that act as reminders of the event—thus avoiding potential triggers. You may also try to work excessively and do other activities to avoid thinking about the event.

Feeling sad, angry or numb. Experience more negative emotions than they did before the event, including sadness, anger and a loss of pleasure in things that used to make them happy. Using alcohol or drugs to suppress memories and emotions.

Feeling "on edge" or other changes in reactivity or arousal. Being more jittery than normal, feeling and acting impatient, irritable, trouble sleeping or concentrating. This is due to how the brain changes after a traumatic event. There are a number of evidence-based therapies available that can reduce PTSD, and several medications are recommended by the American Psychiatric Association, all of which are variations of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). The category of CBT encompasses various types and elements of treatment used by cognitive behavioural therapists.

Finally, given their overexposure to trauma and often constant stress, some journalists can develop another condition known as Allostatic Load. This is caused by chronic exposure to all types of stress, activating a variety of hormones in the nervous system and provoking immune system responses. This can occur when challenges exceed a person's ability to cope. Forms of exposure may include ordinary daily stress, such as work-related stress, and those with symptoms should contact their doctor.

Conclusion

To conclude, learning to cope with trauma is difficult but worthwhile. It cannot be kept in isolation from your physical and information security wellbeing, as they are all interlinked. It is therefore worthwhile to take a course that also addresses physical safety and IT security. It is also useful to learn about interviewing people who are traumatised using resources available from the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma and other organisations (see the books in the section: Further Multimedia and Online Resources You Might Find Useful). By doing so, it can also help reduce potential trauma to yourself and others and provide you with enhanced skills to work in the challenging but highly rewarding journalistic environment.

For those training journalists, the Ulster University practice-based research indicated that three days in immersive experiential learning was the optimum for effectiveness in improving resilience in journalists. This is accompanied by three days of classroom-based workshops. Longer periods of immersive training, up to seven days, proved less effective due to fatigue, making the learning of new skills difficult. One-day training was the most accessible to journalists. However, it was the least effective, as participants had little time to practise newly learnt skills and see the benefit of peer-to-peer support in adverse circumstances. Immersive experiential learning in an austere environment also proved to be one of the most effective means of training journalists in physical and mental resilience.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Teaching Points

Using the four-stage approach in the classroom can be an effective method for training journalists, not just those already in the field.

- Stage One

Using the chapter, ask students either in groups or alone, to produce a poster on physical and mental good health. This should include sleep, caffeine consumption, diet and exercise. This can then serve as a continual prompt and reminder for self care.

- Stage Two

Use the "talking stick" approach. This would be particularly beneficial after a lecture or workshop that involves distressing content. In small groups, encourage each member to talk about their day, including any triggering points in classes or stories they have been working on. This will encourage a healthy practice of sharing their responses and reactions with others.

- Stage Three

Create an action plan using the tips in Stage Three of the chapter. This should include creating a safe space if working at home, muting audio of distressing video, using the preview thumbnail tool on you tube to prepare yourself for upcoming content.

- Stage Four

How will you recognise symptoms of PTSD, in yourself or in others? Discuss in your groups what the warning signs could look like and create a list of resources as to where you might find help (see the multimedia resources at the end of this book).

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Note

1. For further details of the project, its methods and findings see Murphy et al. (2020).

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CHAPTER 27

"All Rise": Immersive Dramatic Performance Techniques to Build Resilience in Trainee Court Reporters

Lisa Bradley, Polly Rippon, Lindsay Pantry and Michelle Rawlins

Court reporting is vital to the preservation of open justice. In England and Wales, open justice involves "ensuring the public have a satisfactory understanding of the legal process by providing citizens with access to proceedings, data, advice, and information" (Ministry of Justice, 2023). Therefore, where possible, all cases heard in the criminal and coroners' courts in England and Wales are open to journalists and the public. The principle of open justice, the legislative framework of which dates back to 1925, promotes public confidence in the administration of justice, deters inappropriate behaviour on the part of the court and allows public scrutiny of the process of justice. It ensures that society knows how law-breakers are held accountable and how sudden and unexpected deaths are investigated. This is achieved largely through media coverage of court hearings, and it is an integral part of any democratic system of government.

However, exposure to both explicit and distressing details, as well as the raw, human emotions often seen in the courtroom, can cause secondary—or vicarious—trauma among reporters. It can also be "triggering" for students or trainee reporters if they themselves have experienced similar crimes, in particular, sexual violence, child abuse or domestic abuse.

Interviews conducted in preparation for this book by one of the authors (Bradley) with regional newspaper editors in the UK revealed an emerging trend of increased reluctance among trainee reporters to attend court cases through fear of being emotionally affected. Similarly, interviews with tutors in both higher and further education institutions reported both a reluctance among students to engage in the practical teaching of court reporting and a spike in students finding court reporting assessments, both practical and in exam situations, too difficult to handle emotionally. In interviews with trainee reporters with fewer than 12 months in the job, one of the most intimidating experiences they highlighted was the reality of court reporting, particularly among reporters who have gone on to work for national newspapers or news agencies.

The criminal courts in England and Wales deal daily with murder, domestic abuse, human trafficking, sexual offences, child sex abuse, robbery, drug and alcohol offences and violent crime, including

gun and knife crime. As Harcup and O'Neill (2017) point out, "The more shocking the court case, the more coverage it gets because bad news is particularly newsworthy." In recent years, taking the University of Sheffield as one example, formal student feedback has shown that learners are less resilient and increasingly nervous about attending court. This mirrors the picture observed among newly qualified professional reporters. Level 2 BA and MA practice-based students at the University of Sheffield are expected to attend criminal and coroner courts in person during the spring semester to cover cases for a portfolio assessment. For BA students, this is a core module, and they must produce three court stories from a mixture of magistrates' court, crown court and coroner's court hearings. MA students must produce at least one court story for their assessment. Concerns have been raised around the wellbeing and mental health impact on students of the graphic and distressing content of the nature heard in detail in the criminal courts.

Details of child sexual abuse, sexual violence, domestic abuse, and animal abuse were among some of the most upsetting cases to hear. To ensure that the next generation of journalists are able to fulfil its vital watchdog role, we wanted to equip new reporters with a toolkit to cope with the potential stress of court reporting and preserve judicial accountability by staging a mock criminal court case at the university prior to students having to attend court for real. A sexual offence (rape) case was chosen because students would be more likely to attend cases of this nature—they are more common than murder trials, more explicit in nature, and because student feedback was that this was the nature of offence they found most distressing to hear.

This chapter examines an award-winning, experiential teaching event conducted in 2023 at the University of Sheffield, designed to prepare student journalists for the potentially upsetting experience of reporting from courts in England and Wales designed an immersive courtroom experience, held in a mock courtroom at the university, with professional actors playing the roles of key figures including the prosecutor, defence barrister, judge and victim. Volunteer actors played the defendant and family members sitting in the public gallery. We recreated the opening of a graphic and emotional sexual violence trial, including the prosecution and cross examination of the victim. The event targeted Level Two undergraduate students and master's students studying in practical journalism programmes.

The students were part of the theatre, observing rather than having the pressure of reporting, allowing them to react and feel emotions in a safe environment while simultaneously gaining an appreciation of the relevant legal reporting restrictions and the formalities of the courtroom. The "performance" was then book-ended by teaching exercises from wellbeing health professionals, providing proposed coping strategies and space to explore and discuss reactions in a structured environment. The overarching aim of the event was not to censor material to make the students feel more comfortable and able to cope but rather to build up their resilience to hearing the details and experiencing the raw, human emotion of both the survivor and the defendant. We also wanted them to adopt a trauma-informed approach with family members in the public gallery. This in turn would empower them to feel more comfortable in a court environment and lessen the risk of emotional trauma at the start of their careers.

We recreated the formal atmosphere and physical layout of the courtroom by ensuring that the students entered in silence and remained so for the duration of the trial. We checked that our fully costumed actors were in the correct positions, in court and introduced themselves to the judge. Our students had already passed examinations in media law, so they were fully acquainted with the law. This ensured that they were respectful of the acts but empowered to understand their protections and rights.

There is evidence that classroom simulations of crises are beneficial when preparing journalism students for dilemmas they will encounter when working as journalists (Amend, 2012 as cited in Veil, 2010). Classroom simulations have the potential to better prepare trainee journalists and help them adhere to ethical norms and practices for reporting on trauma and violence. Classroom simulations make course material relevant, stimulating and vivid, thus sparking student interest (Amend, 2012, as

cited in Hess 1999). Even single-session simulations have been shown to have a considerable impact on student learning (Amend, 2012, as cited in Baranowski, 2006). This allowed the students to recognise their own emotional responses and identify relevant coping strategies in the wellbeing session that followed as a rehearsal for the "real" experience.

Method

The session was run twice for two cohorts, each with 75 students comprising both postgraduate and undergraduate students. The sessions took place in the university's law department using the simulated courtroom and were based on a real rape case, but details such as names, places, dates, and other identifiers were changed. Funding was secured from the University's School of Journalism, Media and Communication to hire professional actors for the main roles, with volunteers from the University Drama Society in minor roles. A male actor was cast to play the judge, although both male and female actors were auditioned and the part was written to be played by either. Rehearsals were conducted online, with a "walk-through" in the courtroom on the day prior to the performance.

Students were fully briefed both by email and in class and were given content warnings to ensure they had received sufficient notice that the hearing would contain sensitive and potentially triggering information. This information was reiterated on Blackboard—the university's virtual learning environment for the students—and the graphic nature of the content was again highlighted.

Staff in the School of Journalism, Media and Communication liaised with the University's Central Wellbeing Team to provide coping strategies and self-care sessions immediately after the mock trial. The aim was to encourage students to analyse and reflect on their reactions to what they had heard and seek professional support should it be needed. Relevant signposts to wellbeing services for the students were added to the session, and additional bespoke appointments were requested for journalism students post trial. Emotional support for the actors and volunteers was not provided but would be beneficial for future iterations.

The Event

Students were asked to file into the courtroom in silence and observe the case. Actors playing the usher, judge, the prosecution and defence barristers wore black gowns, as used in criminal cases in Crown Courts in England and Wales, and the judge and the prosecution and defence barristers wore wigs as they would in the Crown Court. On the arrival of the judge, the court was asked to rise, mimicking events in a real courtroom.

Once the judge took his seat, the prosecutor began his opening speech, which lasted for 40 minutes.

The case was the prosecution opening speech relating to an allegation of historic rape involving a female victim attacked 20 years previously by a male defendant who was caught by police due to technological advances in DNA processing. During the mock trial, the prosecution case was outlined, and the alleged victim was called to give evidence under oath—a Bible was used as a prop and the oath read out—although time was taken to ensure that the actress was comfortable in a religious context using a real Bible.

The actress, who has 20 years' experience of hard-hitting dramatic roles, recalled her character's sexual attack in graphic detail, becoming increasingly upset as the questioning continued, explaining that she had been raped both vaginally and anally. She was cross-examined by the defence barrister, which meant she had to repeat her evidence and effectively defend herself against allegations she was lying.

At three points during the hearing, there were emotional interruptions from a "woman in the public gallery"—an actress playing the alleged victim's mother—who was eventually asked to leave court by the judge.

After the session ended, students were given a 15-minute break and were given tea, coffee and biscuits to give them time to have a chat, decompress and digest their reactions with both the tutors and the actors to what they had just heard. An hour-long session was then run by two advisers from the university's central wellbeing team. As part of the session, the advisors explained to students that it was normal to have a response to hearing difficult content, but some people might need further support. They explained how a response to trauma and vicarious trauma can display itself in those affected by listening to emotionally distressing and harrowing details, including physical and mental health responses. Symptoms might include: low mood or feeling sad or down; feeling overwhelmed, not coping, finding it difficult to manage; feeling worried or stressed; low in energy, struggling with self-care, sleep difficulties; becoming isolated, avoidant, finding it difficult to engage; struggling with work/academic stress or having difficulty concentrating at university. The professionals suggested a number of "soft" ways students could take care of themselves, which included generic wellbeing advice for rest, a healthy diet, mindfulness and exercise. Tutors delved more into the coping strategy of public interest, reminding the students that in order to preserve open justice, this experience, as difficult as it was, is a necessary tool for a greater good.

Central mental health and wellbeing services were signposted to the students, and additional well-being appointments were set up following the mock court case to ensure that students who needed support could be seen quickly. Students were asked to write a 300-word reflection on their experience. This was not assessed but was used by tutors to gain informal feedback about the event and its impact and suggestions for improvement in the future.

Results

Nine weeks after the mock trial, two focus groups took place, led by departmental tutors. Both BA and MA students were invited to discuss how they felt the session impacted them. All participants who responded to the invitation attended. The nine-week time gap was vital to ensure that the students had the opportunity to experience a variety of real court reporting sessions and reflect on whether the mock trial had been beneficial. Level 2 BA students attended the Crown and magistrates' courts in the interim period, alone or in small groups, to find material for their court reporting portfolios, comprising three publishable court reports of 350 words each.

Throughout their second semester, the MA students also attended court hearings either alone or in small groups. The MA Journalism students were expected to produce one court report of 300–500 words based on a crown or magistrate court case for formal assessment. The MA Broadcast students were asked to submit a TV package of 60–90 seconds based on a Sheffield Crown Court or Sheffield Magistrates' Court hearing.

The first focus group consisted of six undergraduates (five female students and one male). The second focus group had four MA students and one BA student (one male and four female). This did mean that the groups were heavily biased in favour of female students. An open environment was created, with tutors the students knew well leading structured interview sessions and refreshments provided. Students participating in the focus groups were encouraged to be open and honest. They spoke about their emotional responses to the hearing, how it impacted their first experience of court reporting, how useful they felt the session was, the wellbeing session and their ideas for improvement. None of the participants had attended a court before the session.

The student response to the hearing was mixed. While some had an emotional response, which left them angry or upset, others were less affected.

One BA student explained:

> I did not expect it to be in quite as much detail. However, I'm really glad it was, because when you actually go to court, they have to run through absolutely every single detail to cover all the aspects. So it definitely prepared me to listen to those sorts of details again.

Another agreed that the realistic level of detail was a shock, explaining: "I was like, 'Oh, my God, this is really graphic'." One MA student commented: "I found it quite upsetting. I found it quite triggering actually, quite upsetting", while another emphasised: "I feel like it was uncomfortable to listen to, but I think it needed to be". Another MA student believed that hearing the harrowing and graphic details of a rape case was incredibly valuable, explaining:

> I think it was so important to have done a case like that, because the way that the victim was being questioned and stuff, I don't think anything could have prepared me for that if I went into a real court for the first time.

Another said:

> You've got that notepad as a little barrier, but then when someone is in tears on the stand, while someone is ripping apart their character, it's very hard to keep that impartiality and how to stay kind of neutral and not have an emotional reaction to that.

A different BA student was left feeling emotionally charged, and said: "I was surprised by how angry I got at the defence lawyer, and I was like, 'how do you sleep at night? How do you live with yourself?' " She went on to say that researching defence law after the case meant she found covering Crown Court "less triggering".

However, not all the students reported an emotional response to the hearing. One BA student, who described herself as resilient and "a bit cold" said the experience shocked her a little, but helped her to realise "when sitting in courtrooms and hearing what they're saying," that she could expect to "hear anything". An MA student added:

> I was trying to think of it from a journalistic perspective of taking notes and keeping myself kind of emotionally separate from the story. But once you got to the evidence, that was the bit where I found it hard to keep that separate, and not feel like I couldn't help but feel for the victim here and all this stuff.

Another BA student, who also described herself as resilient, was "surprised" she didn't get emotional, but said she felt "desentisitised" due to other reports of serious sexual violence. She did say, however, that when watching the case, it struck her that some of the male students had a different response. She explained:

> I don't know if it's because I'm a woman, but I am constantly alert. I am constantly running through the worst thing that could happen when I'm walking by myself. So the court case, although it was incredibly uncomfortable, and harrowing to hear, it wasn't that shocking.

An MA student added:

> Being a woman and having situations where, walking home in the dark, it feels like that's also just a constant thing that's on my mind. But at the same time, if it hadn't been really graphic then it would obviously have been unrepresentative of what we're actually going to hear. So I think, in a way, it was actually quite good that it was so extreme.

A female BA student explained her male counterparts had a different reaction. She said: "He was like, 'oh, does stuff like that actually happen? So we could actually go to court and get something like that?'" She explained that in her experience female students were more likely to have been exposed to sexual assaults than male students.

How It Impacted Their First Experiences of Court Reporting

Several students from the focus groups explained they found being able to understand the logistics and workings of a court hearing helpful. One BA student explained how seeing the furnishings of the courtroom, and the outfits and wigs the actors wore, meant she felt more at ease with the novelty of the surroundings when going into a real court for the first time. Another BA student said it helped them to know what to expect from a courtroom, while a third said it gave him the confidence that he knew what he was doing. One student said it felt like a "stepping stone to finally going into court. I think if I'd bypassed the 'fake' court, it would have been a very different experience". For another, "it was the chance to get something wrong", which fundamentally underpins the whole point of the exercise.

Having a shared experience with a group of her peers was particularly valuable to one BA student, who said: "I think if I had just gone straight to court with one other person without having the mock court case experience first, I would have found it really overwhelming." Another added: "If this was my first time and I didn't have anyone to talk about that with, it would have been a different story."

Referring to the point when the actor playing the role of the victim's mother made an emotional outburst from the public gallery aimed at the defendant, a BA student commented:

> I knew in the back of my mind that it wasn't real but it was a good thing to experience. I've since been in a public gallery before where the family has sat behind me, they've been crying, or they've been reacting in some sort of way. But it's just remembering the reason you're there. You're not there to be intrusive.

This was particularly encouraging and important to hear as it revealed the aims of the teaching session had worked and students were benefiting from the learning experience. Another BA student said sitting through such a harrowing case has meant she now feels equipped for anything else she may encounter. She explained she now felt prepared to report on future cases, saying: "Whatever I hear now, I'm just used to it. Now in court when I hear something, because I've sat in a rape case, I felt prepared."

For some students, the experience made them realise that the perpetrators of crime are very real, with one student remarking that it made them feel as if the defendant "could be anyone on the street", and this prepared them when they went to court in the subsequent weeks as part of their course. They said:

> For me, it's more harrowing to hear the stuff that someone is capable of, as opposed to the stuff that's happened to someone. I just covered a child rapist in court, and he was young. I could be serving him at my customer service job. And I would have no idea that this person is capable of doing that.

Another student said the court experience made them realise that perpetrators are "normal, average people", something he was confronted with when covering a paedophilia case, when he discovered the defendant had been standing behind him in the queue to go through security to get into court.

Usefulness

All the volunteer students in the focus groups provided very positive feedback about how useful the experience was. One student said she was relieved to have something to "soften" the "intimidating" experience of stepping into court for the first time, which showed the objective of the exercise had been achieved. This was supported by another student who stated that it was like "putting into practice" their court reporting skills before the "real thing," when it's "too important to mess up". "It was a practical way for people to get involved," she said. She said that she tended to find "completely new things challenging", and that without the mock trial experience, she would have felt the need for more "hand-holding" before covering court alone.

She went on to say:

> Afterwards, I felt I could do real court work on my own. I'm "court qualified" now. I felt fine the first time I went with one friend. I think if we hadn't had that I would have really struggled to motivate myself to just go to court. I would find that I had way too many questions in my head and way too many things that I'd be stressing about.

A second said experiencing the "tense" environment helped her "not to panic" when going to court. Another said the experience made her realise how important it was that journalists cover emotionally difficult cases. "You're there to give that person, report it and let the public know and, and make people aware that if you do something bad, you are going to be held to account," she said. She recalled being particularly struck emotionally covering an inquest for the first time, and keeping that in mind helped. One MA student also explained he now felt more comfortable in the physical surroundings of a court building, explaining: "We knew where to go, we knew what to expect, not just from speaking to the judge, but also from having time to have a look around as well."

Whilst many were positive in their feedback, improvements can still be introduced in future iterations of the mock trial. A third MA student explained, for example, that she would have liked more advice on how to handle abuse from members of the public gallery. She explained that, during one of her subsequent visits to court, a male member of the public gallery began verbally assaulting her. This highlights how, in court, reporters can suffer first-hand trauma but also be the victims of abuse. The court represents an arena of abuse and trauma from multiple angles, all impacting current and future journalists. The student said:

> He started shouting at us and saying we have been reporting wrongly on the case previously. He was truly quite aggressive. That hadn't been flagged before that actually just members of the public there could start shouting at you just for being journalists.

While the students in the focus groups collectively agreed with the importance of attending the experience, the wellbeing session, held after the trial, was not sufficiently targeted. One explained, "Mindfulness is great. However, it is usually for things like mental health. If you're if you're feeling a bit stressed or you have got a lot on at the minute, not if you've just sat and listened to a rape case, it did not feel very specific."

Ideas for Improvement

Two of the students in the BA group and all of the MA students said they would have liked to have watched the cross-examination of the defendant, something that was not included in the script due to time pressures. They realised this would have made the session longer but felt it would have been valuable to prepare them for real-life cases. Another BA student said a chance to experience the security procedures carried out in a real court—such as airport style security arches for all those entering the building, would have been useful. Another student suggested that they should attend cases in small groups to enable them to sit closer to the "families" of those involved in proceedings in the public gallery.

Students thought they were there to be traumatised, but in fact, their very presence and what they represented was traumatising to others, and they were attacked for that. One BA student explained, "In one of the court cases that I was in, I had the mum and the grandfather (of the defendant) sitting behind me. In addition, then when they first walked in, and they saw that I had my pad and my pen out, she literally shouted, 'what are they doing here? They're not meant to be here,' and I did not look at her because I did not know what to do."

In the joint focus group with the single BA student and the four MA students, it was obvious that the undergraduate student felt more resilient and prepared for the hard-hitting material she would be faced with, commenting: "For me personally, especially picking this course, as a journalist, I know I'm going to hear that stuff. So I'd prepared myself already, like, I know that it is going to happen."

In contrast, the MA students collectively felt they were confronted with much difficult material in core media law modules, a requirement of accreditation, that they did not feel fully equipped to cope with. One said, "In the media law lectures, we often talk about court cases. Sometimes there were quite graphic things like things like the Rotherham sex abuse scandal;[1] things like that are very hard hitting. In addition, at that point, we hadn't had any real resilience training."

This could be attributed to BA students being eased into the world of journalism over three years, whereas MA students only have a year to absorb and digest the difficult aspects of the course.

Conclusion

The mock trial project exceeded expectations in terms of the reception it received. Praise for the initiative was also received from journalism educators, the professional journalism industry body of the NCTJ, working journalists and practising court reporters. One news editor with over 20 years of experience in the regional press commented on a Twitter post about the project: "Rocking the robes. On a more serious note I'd have loved a bit of prep for some of the horrors of court evidence", and an experienced court reporter with 15 years of experience said: "Attending a mock court case before going to court for real would have given me an idea of what to expect. Particularly the level of detail you get in court."

The project won the University of Sheffield Education Award 2023 for Teaching Practice with certificates presented to the project directors by the Vice Chancellor. It also won the National Council of Training for Journalists Innovation award as a key component of our trauma-sensitive journalism training. Feedback from students has been extremely positive, with many saying how realistic they found the hearing. Others acknowledged that they would have found the experience of attending court for the first time far more intimidating without the mock trial exercise conducted in a safe space, which allowed them to make mistakes before going to court for real.

Staff within the School of Journalism, Media and Communication, external journalism tutors and colleagues at the National Council for the Training of Journalists have been fulsome in their praise for this innovative approach to teaching difficult material and preparing students for exposure to traumatic and graphic details of the nature heard in courtrooms up and down the country every day.

The focus groups provided staff with valuable feedback and learning points for the future, which included mocking up security arches as the students entered the court building and asking the students to take notes as they would in real life. In the future, the wellbeing session will be specifically tailored towards journalism students and held on another day, giving the students time to digest and process the details of the case and their reaction with their peers immediately afterwards. Staff from the School of Journalism, Media and Communication running the mock trial will also ensure that the relevant reporting restriction—preventing the name and identity of the victim as a victim of a sexual offence being published—is displayed at the entrance to the court, as it would be in a real courtroom. They will endeavour to ensure that sufficient volunteers are recruited so that there is a jury sitting on the case and that a full dress rehearsal takes place, rather than an online read-through.

Other improvements to make the experience more realistic might include having relatives or supporters of the defendant or victim sitting near the students in the public gallery and asking them questions or querying their presence. However, this would incur the financial costs of paying the additional actors.

For educators considering organising a similar event, we recommend the following:

1. Ensure that students are given adequate warning of the nature of the case and that they fully understand the graphic evidence they will hear.
   Although all students at undergraduate Level 2 and in MA practical courses were expected to attend the mock trial, learners were given the opportunity to raise any concerns about attending with staff prior to the event in case they needed to withdraw for personal reasons.

2. In terms of preparation, it is important not to underestimate the time and logistics involved when managing a project such as this. It is also important that attention is given to details such as time to write a realistic script, sourcing the correct costumes and props for performers, liaising with actors, ensuring actors and students can locate the venue and arrive on time and ensuring departmental colleagues find space in the timetable for the session.

3. Finding a male actor to play an alleged rapist proved more challenging than first anticipated. Allow sufficient time to ensure a gender balance among the actors and volunteers.

Nonetheless, the success of the project and the excellent feedback received has given us a sense of pride in the much-needed and long overdue work we are doing at the University of Sheffield to prepare the next generation of young reporters to be resilient in their quest to attend and report from the courts, therefore upholding the principle of open justice and ensuring that judicial proceedings are conducted transparently.

Next Steps You Could Take…

Teaching Points

- To prepare for the realities of court reporting, tutors can provide a simulated experience similar to this one. For a 50-minute performance, the script needs to be approximately 5,000 words. If you have longer for your session, it would be ideal to include the defendant's evidence in chief, defence cross examination and re-examination and any other defence witnesses.
- To prepare the script, draw on your own personal court reporting experience or that of others. Transcripts of real cases are readily available although for legal reasons, these should not be duplicated, just used as a template or starting point.
- If a courtroom, or simulated court room is not available, the layout of a classroom or lecture theatre can be easily adapted with space for prosecution and defence counsel, judge, clerk, jury and public gallery.
- Build in time at the end of the session to allow the students to discuss their emotions regarding what they have heard, including any personal "trigger points"—but only if they are comfortable doing so. Discuss what coping strategies they could implement.

Tips for Tutor

- Give advance warning about the content of the session.
- Allow students to speak to you on a one-to-one basis if they are worried about what details they may hear. Give them an overview of the content.
- To prepare for a real experience, discuss what clothing attire is appropriate to attend court in and encourage students to dress suitably.
- Do not use tutors as the actors. This stops the experience being realistic for the students and professional training is required for convincing raw emotion.
- Do you want the student to write up the story? If so, remind them to take shorthand notes (reminder that recording devices are not allowed in a courtroom).

Note

1. In 2011 The Times newspaper exposed a child protection scandal in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, which involved the grooming of 1,400 children. South Yorkshire Police and Rotherham Council social services were alleged to have turned a blind eye to the sexual abuse between 1997 and 2013, predominantly by British-Pakistani men.

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Further Multimedia and Online Resources You Might Find Useful

- Check out the online resources and tip sheets for journalists provided by The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (<https://dartcenter.org/>), a resource centre and global network of journalists, journalism educators and health professionals dedicated to improving media coverage of trauma, conflict and tragedy.

- To learn more about the safety of journalists, check out UNESCO's online resources (<https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists>). Explore the database of attacks on the press by the Committee to Protect Journalists (<https://cpj.org/data/>) and the database of killed and imprisoned journalists and media workers by the Reporters without Borders (<https://rsf.org/en/barometer>).

- A series of short 2-minute videos available on Jenny Kean's Twitter profile (@jenkean) and under the hashtag #DontTakeTheFlak.

- The videos are also available on the NCTJ's Journalism Skills Academy website where you can also find more in-depth tips and advice as part of their free short course. Go to <https://skillsacademy.nctj.com/>, click on Short Courses and then Safety and Resilience for Journalists.

- Headlines Network, founded by Hannah Storm and John Crowley, has worked with the charity MIND to produce a free training resource, *Covering traumatic breaking news stories: a guide for journalists and newsrooms*. Go to the home page, <https://headlines-network.com/>

- Check out the online course "Reporting Safely in Crisis Zones" co-organized by the ACOS Alliance, Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, and James W. Foley Foundation, 2023 edition: <https://dartcenter.org/events/2023/10/reporting-safely-crisis-zones-course-october-19-22-2023>

- Mental Health and Journalism Toolkit by International Journalists' Network: <https://ijnet.org/en/toolkit/mental-health-and-journalism>

- News, information and resources for journalist safety by Radio Television Digital News Association: <https://www.rtdna.org/news/safety>

- Committee to Protect Journalists Resource Center: <https://cpj.org/emergency-response/resource-center/>

- Coalition Against Online Violence: <https://onlineviolenceresponsehub.org>

- NUJ safety toolkit: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/advice/journalists-safety-toolkit.html>

- Meta safety for journalists:
  Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/formedia/mjp/journalist-safety-online>

- Twitter
  <https://help.twitter.com/en/forms>

- TikTok
  <https://support.tiktok.com/en/safety-hc>

- Safely Held Spaces: Peer support for those supporting people experiencing extreme mental and emotional distress.
  safelyheldspaces.org

- The Hub of Hope: UK-based mental health support database of private, charity and state support for mental health.
  Hubofhope.co.uk

- Rory Peck Trust: Provides practical and financial support to freelance journalists and their families worldwide, assisting them in crisis.
  Rorypecktrust.org

- Journalist Trauma Support Network: An international community of qualified therapists trained to care for journalists impacted by trauma.
  jtsn.org

- Trust for Trauma Journalism: Works with journalists, before, during and after they cover trauma related events to support them.
  traumajournalism.org

- National Centre for PTSD: Resources and diagnostic tools.
  ptsd.va.gov

- Storysmart: Free online training modules to help in hostile environments and with hazardous tech from the UK's National Union of Journalists.
  nujstorysmart.com

Notes on Contributors

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Saleem Abbas holds a Ph.D. from the Islamia University of Bahawalpur; he completed his post-doctoral research at Clemson University in the USA. With a deep commitment to studying gender representation in visual media, mainly Pakistani television shows, Dr. Abbas has explored the impact of political regimes on the rhetoric of TV dramas in Pakistan and has extended his research interests to women and transgender studies. Moreover, Dr. Abbas has an intellectual affinity with Urdu literature, which has inspired him for a detailed critical analysis of Pakistani TV dramas. Dr. Abbas has attended Summer Schools in Journalism and Media Studies at the Florida State University (2008), USA, and the University of Oslo (2010), Norway.

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Colm Murphy is Subject Leader in Media at Ulster University, Northern Ireland. He worked in investigative journalism for *The Sunday Times* and prior to that ran bureau in Israel, Turkey, India, Poland and Russia. He has a UK National Teaching Fellowship and Principal Fellowship. He is a director of the UK's National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) and Ofcom. He developed the "holistic humanitarian" technique for training journalists in safety while in hostile environments. This fed into the NCTJ's first national course on safety for journalists and has been used in the Middle East with support from UNESCO.

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