



Journalists and Occupational Trauma

Overview

- ✓ Up to 95% of journalists report exposure to potentially traumatic events (PTEs) ¹
- ✓ This can lead to a myriad of consequences¹² such as PTSD¹³, depression¹⁵, substance use¹¹, and compassion fatigue
- ✓ Unique factors related to journalists' experiences, such as ethical dilemmas requiring quick decision making and workplace cultures that fail to recognize the potential for psychological harm, may further contribute to the development and maintenance of poor mental health

Cumulative Trauma Exposure

- ✓ Potentially traumatic event (PTE) exposure may include directly witnessing the event²⁻³, reporting to a gruesome scene³, or repeatedly viewing detailed traumatic imagery and content⁴⁻⁵
- ✓ Common PTEs for journalists include: receiving threats of violence or experiencing physical violence due to their reporting^{6,12}, reporting traumatic content such as school shootings³, motor vehicle accidents, and other events involving significant violence and casualties²⁻³
- ✓ Many journalists cover several traumatic assignments in the same week and directly witness the aftermath of these traumatic events, further increasing their risk for PTSD³

The Role of Ethical Dilemmas and Guilt

- ✓ Journalists often encounter ethical dilemmas (EDs) on the job, such as uncertainty about rules of conduct, completing tasks that conflict with personal values⁸, and navigating situations beyond their control or job scope⁷⁻⁹
- ✓ Because of the fast pace of media content production following crises, there may be few opportunities to negotiate ethically questionable practices or review rules of conduct⁸
- ✓ Both EDs⁸⁻⁹ and guilt after exposure to EDs have been associated with more severe PTSD symptoms⁸⁻¹⁰

Organizational Challenges and Support

- ✓ Journalists are rarely offered trainings on reporting traumatic content; moreover, they are unlikely to receive psychological resources¹¹⁻¹², even when they seek these resources⁵
- ✓ Vocalizing or displaying psychological struggles is often viewed as a sign of weakness that will be detrimental to one's career, leading many to suffer in silence^{5,13}
- ✓ Lack of support from organizations may lead to feelings of institutional betrayal (i.e., [wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution](#)) and altered world beliefs (e.g., I cannot trust people in positions of power), which then in turn can increase PTSD and depression symptom severity and alcohol use³
- ✓ Journalism students who received trauma training reported increased preparedness for PTEs, sensitivity toward victims when interviewing and reporting, and tools to work through ethical dilemmas¹⁶

Developed by: [Ashley Horodyski](#) and [Michelle Lilly, PhD](#)



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