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 consequences \(^{12}\) such as PTSD \(^{13}\), depression \(^{15}\), substance use \(^{11}\), 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 event \(^2\)-\(^3\), reporting to a gruesome scene \(^3\), or repeatedly viewing detailed traumatic imagery and content \(^4\)-\(^5\)
✓ 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 shootings \(^3\), motor vehicle accidents, and other events involving significant violence and casualties \(^2\)-\(^3\)
✓ Many journalists cover several traumatic assignments in the same week and directly witness the aftermath of these traumatic events, further increasing their risk for PTSD \(^3\)

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 values \(^8\), and navigating situations beyond their control or job scope \(^7\)-\(^9\)
✓ 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 conduct \(^8\)
✓ Both EDs \(^8\)-\(^9\) and guilt after exposure to EDs have been associated with more severe PTSD symptoms \(^8\)-\(^10\)

Organizational Challenges and Support
✓ Journalists are rarely offered trainings on reporting traumatic content; moreover, they are unlikely to receive psychological resources \(^{11}\)-\(^{12}\), even when they seek these resources \(^5\)
✓ 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., \textit{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 use \(^3\)
✓ Journalism students who received trauma training reported increased preparedness for PTEs, sensitivity toward victims when interviewing and reporting, and tools to work through ethical dilemmas \(^16\)

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