

Expert Report Syndicate 8: Trauma literacy, education, and research

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From 1980 to 2010, just 19 studies were published in academic journals investigating the psychological effects of journalistic work (Aoki et al., 2012). From 2011 to 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were nearly double that at 23 (Flannery, 2022). In the 5 years since the pandemic, there have been roughly *55 studies* published exploring journalism and trauma in English-language academic journals.

It can be argued that the pandemic helped ignite this explosion of research interest. Now that the spotlight appears to be shining squarely on the journalistic experience, where do we focus it? The political climate in many parts of the world suggests that we need solid journalism now more than ever. Yet a 2024 survey showed that 56% of working journalists in the US would leave the profession if they could (Reynolds, 2024). At this vital time, what can we do to keep journalists in the field? What follows is a summary of what we know journalism, trauma, and trauma education based on research from 2020-2025.

Research supports the assertion that journalists are vulnerable to traumatic stress due to the nature of their work. The events they cover (Miller & Kocan, 2024; Obermaier et al., 2023), the conditions under which they work (Gascón et al., 2021; Siddiqi et al., 2023; Šimunjak, 2022), the harassment (Markov & Đorđević, 2024; Miller & Kocan, 2024; Ivask & Lon, 2023; Park & Lee, 2024; Siddiqi et al., 2023; Sinclair et al., 2025; Uwalaka & Amadi, 2023), and their need to manage and/or suppress their own emotions (Huxford & Hopper, 2020; Ikhida et al., 2023; Ivask et al., 2024; Muindi, 2023; Šimunjak, 2022; Šimunjak & Menke, 2023; Sinclair et al., 2025; Yao et al., 2025), all contribute to traumatic stress.

Exposure to trauma and the working conditions of the news industry manifest in many detrimental emotional and psychological consequences for journalists. Posttraumatic stress and depression (Dadouch & Lilly, 2021; Flannery, 2022; Miller & Kocan, 2024; Muindi, 2023; Shah et al., 2022), general symptoms of traumatic stress (Malik et al., 2022; Radoli, 2024), burnout (Deavours, 2023; Gascón et al., 2021; Graham et

al., 2024; Roman & Beasley, 2024; Shah, Murphy et al., 2024), and emotional exhaustion (Yao et al., 2025) are all prevalent.

A key problem appears to be newsroom culture which creates an atmosphere where trauma is normalized (Ivask & Lon, 2023; Radoli, 2024), and journalists are reluctant to express their problems with trauma due to fear of stigmatization or appearing unprofessional (Deavours, 2023; Konow-Lund & Høiby, 2023; Oh & Minn, 2022; Park & Lee, 2024). Discussion of trauma is often discouraged (Obermaier et al., 2023; Siddiq et al., 2023). This dearth of peer support is concerning because isolation heightens the traumatic impact of journalism (Graham et al., 2024); however, it's not necessarily surprising given the journalistic ideal of the "thick skin" (Ivask et al., 2024). This culture is also pervasive in student newsrooms, which are often advised by seasoned journalists (Arrey & Reynolds, 2023).

The newsroom culture appears to be a direct result of the inconsistent support offered by news organizations and highlights the important role organizations play in traumatic stress (Frey, 2023; Huxford & Hopper, 2020; Miller & Korcan, 2024; Obermaier et al., 2023; Radoli, 2024). Proactive efforts regarding psychological support from their organizations appear to help journalists alleviate stress and traumatic stress (Shah, Murphy et al., 2024; Tandoc et al., 2022; Williams & Cartwright, 2021; Yao et al., 2025), cope better (Gascón et al., 2021), and increase job satisfaction (Muyidi et al., 2023; Urbániková & Haniková, 2022).

Many journalists don't realize the toll the emotional distress is taking on their personal lives (Shah et al., 2024) or their ability to do their work (Tornero-Aguilera et al., 2020).

However, a key to coping with traumatic stress is understanding that it exists, and research shows journalists lack this type of trauma literacy. Being trauma literate means understanding the potential effects of story assignments, while being able to spot symptoms of traumatic stress in oneself (Shilpa et al., 2023). It's understanding that trauma is common in journalists (Markovikj & Serafimovska, 2023). Research suggests both journalists and newsroom supervisors need trauma literacy skills (Šimunjak & Menke, 2022).

Journalists do not receive training on emotion management, coping or trauma from

their newsrooms despite its potential benefits (Hughes et al., 2021; Sinclair et al., 2025). Many try to learn from older more experienced co-workers who are also not trauma literate (Huxford & Hopper, 2020). One study of journalists showed 91% were aware of the stressors and emotional situations they might encounter on the job, but only 42% were aware of strategies for managing them (Šimunjak, 2023). Shah et al. (2022) argued that because journalists are not trauma literate, they may not even know they have symptoms from something like PTSD. This could explain why journalists tend to use avoidant coping strategies like substance abuse. Šimunjak and Menke (2022) suggest improving trauma literacy could also help change the negative culture in newsrooms that is so detrimental to journalists' mental well-being.

Ogunyemi and Price (2023b) argued journalism educators have a duty to respond to the urgent need for trauma literacy training. Other research supports this idea that the best time to prepare journalists for the trauma is *before* they enter the field (Dadouch & Lilly, 2021; Muindi, 2023; Šimunjak & Menke, 2022). Shilpa et al. (2023) suggested the absence of trauma literacy in education creates a wide gap between what is taught in the classroom and what is experienced in the field. Anderson and Bourke (2020) argued trauma is an important and missing piece of journalism curriculum because journalists are sent to traumatic events regularly, but journalism students say they have no idea how to handle it (Deavours, 2023; Markovikj & Serafimovska, 2023). Research also suggests trauma literacy training should be happening in student newsrooms as well (Arrey and Reynolds, 2023; Hill, 2023).

Journalism educators appear aware of the need for trauma literacy training, but many barriers exist. A study of Australian educators found 86% were aware of the psychological toll of trauma exposure, and 91% believed more should be done to increase resilience in student journalists. However, lack of knowledge, no materials or resources, accreditation constraints, and no room in the curriculum were significant barriers (Wake et al., 2023). Ogunyemi and Price (2023a) found 88% of journalism educators were aware that journalists can experience emotional distress on the job, but only 28% said their universities provide trauma training. Only 14% thought students were well-prepared to deal with trauma. The authors argued the barrier is not the attitudes of the educators, but instead, accreditation concerns, and lack of training and resources for the instructors. Newman et al. (2023) found journalism educators favored basic reporting skills over self-

care in classes. Educators who do teach trauma cover it in generalities out of discomfort or fear of being incorrect. Additionally, very few robust training resources on trauma literacy in journalists are available (Huxford & Hopper, 2020; Newman et al., 2023).

The **central question** the members of this syndicate will discuss and answer is:
“What is the global status of teaching and training regarding journalism and trauma around the world?”

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