

Public Abstract

First Name:Jo Anne

Middle Name:

Last Name:Killeen

Adviser's First Name:Charles

Adviser's Last Name:Davis

Co-Adviser's First Name:Esther

Co-Adviser's Last Name:Thorson

Graduation Term:SP 2011

Department:Journalism

Degree:MA

Title:PTSD in Journalists: Below the Fold

This study applies the normative theory of the media using both a social responsibility model and professional model as a lens through which to examine news organizations' role in exposing employees to vicarious or secondary trauma and the prevalence of PTSD or other depressive disorders (Study 1). The researcher subsequently uses a transformative approach to the social and professional responsibilities of news organizations to mitigate the occurrence of PTSD among their employees (Study 2). Quantitative survey data (Study 1) revealed 85% of responding journalists were exposed to at least one traumatic event in the prior 12 months, while many had multiple exposures. However, the relationship between frequency of exposure and full-blown PTSD was insignificant. There was much higher correlation between a journalist's personal or emotional involvement in the scenes and the prevalence of sub-symptoms of PTSD. Further data revealed 8.5 percent of journalists received any warning about the potential for emotional content of the story; 2.8 percent were encouraged to take time off afterwards and 11.4 percent were encouraged to talk to someone about it.

Qualitative data (Study 2) revealed the need for training on dealing with the emotions of the reporter in a crisis situation, training on dealing with traumatized subjects of stories and greater encouragement and support by management before, during and after a reporter has covered a traumatic event. This study discusses the findings in relation to the social responsibility of news organizations to protect the public's interest by properly training reporters and photographers and protecting the profession by preventing traumatized employees from further traumatizing interview subjects and mitigating emotionally charged or otherwise biased reporting in the field.