

PTSD IN JOURNALISTS:
BELOW THE FOLD

JO ANNE KILLEEN

Charles Davis, Thesis Advisor

ABSTRACT

The study combines the normative theory of the media using both a social responsibility model and professional model through which to examine news organizations role in exposing employees to vicarious or secondary trauma and the prevalence of PTSD and other depressive disorders in reporters. 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. 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.