

TRAUMA IN JOURNALISM:
MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS IN TV NEWS FIELD JOURNALISTS

A Project Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of the School of Journalism
at the University of Missouri (Columbia)

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
of the Degree Master of Arts

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DECEMBER 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank the members of my committee for their enthusiasm, guidance, and feedback: Professor Jim Flink (Chair) and Dr. Zach Massey.

I'd also like to thank all the study's participants who helped make this research possible.

Finally, this project is dedicated to my family: my mother, Kim, my father, Michael, and my grandmother, Mary. Thank you for being my biggest supporters in my life, especially when it comes to my education. You are my heroes.

ABSTRACT

This project is a case study using qualitative research methods to examine mental health impacts of TV news field journalists who cover breaking news and severe weather on a consistent basis. The study also uses the cognitive appraisal theory to look at how journalists act, react, cope, and exhibit emotional responses while covering breaking news and severe weather stories. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 TV news field journalists and one TV news manager within The E.W. Scripps Company to answer the following research question: What are the mental health impacts TV news field crews experience from consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather? Interviews with the TV news field journalists focused on their experience covering breaking news and severe weather in their careers, personal and professional impacts from this type of coverage, how they act, react, cope and exhibit emotions while covering breaking news and severe weather, their experience with trauma training, and any areas of opportunity they feel could help the industry regarding this issue. The interview with the TV news manager focused on their experience covering breaking news and severe weather in their career, their mental health philosophy as a TV news manager, areas of opportunity they believe could be useful, and their responses to areas of opportunity brought up by TV news field journalists interviewed in this project. The answer to the overall research question brought a variety of different responses when it comes to mental health impacts. Similar trends could be found in answers related to trauma training experience and areas of opportunity to address this issue.

KEY WORDS

Mental Health

TV News

Journalism

Trauma

Trauma Training

Breaking News

Severe Weather

TV News Field Journalist

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Roughly 8:00pm on a September night in 2018, the reporter has been with their photojournalist for 8 hours and counting in the middle of a deadly hurricane making landfall. As the rain pours and wind howls through rural North Carolina communities, the duo braves the elements, including downed power lines and flooding among other conditions, to send live and recorded reports back to the newsroom for wall-to-wall coverage. As the day turns to night, they get ready for their next live report. A water rescue is currently underway near a hospital. Electricity is out and very few, perhaps only one, of the streetlights are lit. Water has taken over the road, at least 8 inches deep, which leads the reporter and photojournalist to stay on the sidewalk next to the barrier for safety. As the photojournalist tries to wipe away the water that's been taking a toll on his camera and rain gear, the crew goes live. Within a matter of seconds, the reporter hears what sounds like a tree coming down very close to him. While live on-air, he ducks out of the way, and eventually the reporter and photojournalist leave the scene to take shelter as a tornado warning commences.

The year before, on a Sunday afternoon, a TV news anchor volunteers to go grab video of a motorcycle crash on a nearby mountain. When he gets to the scene, he realizes he beat the first responders to the scene. How does he know? The motorcycle is laid down at an angle on the side of the road, and the man riding the motorcycle is about three feet from it. As the anchor gets video of the scene, he notices the man's body and stops recording. What stood out to the reporter was the man's facial expression as his lifeless body laid on the ground. A disturbing image, the anchor turns away and goes back to his car to take a breath and gather his thoughts. Eventually, first responders show up, set up a scene and cover the man's body with a sheet. The anchor, composed after what he saw, went back to shooting video for an update on the evening news he

would present from the desk later that night.

These two experiences are not hypothetical. These are factual. These events have stuck with me over a now roughly 10-year career in TV news, and arguably have impacted my mental health on the job and after I leave the newsroom. These are just a couple of examples of situations TV news journalists are often assigned to cover for their stations: breaking news and severe weather. Yes, there's an understanding that we may, and will, be called upon to cover these assignments as part of our job duties. Some are routine: reporting in front of crime scene tape, interviewing law enforcement, witnesses, loved ones of those impacted by the breaking news and severe weather. However, personal colleagues have also responded on the front lines of mass shootings as information was developing in real time, delivering reports inside a studio as the roof was getting ripped off and water was pouring in during a Category 5 hurricane, and even had to seek safety because of a shooting taking place at a vigil for gun violence. Exposure to events such as murders, shootings, crashes, mass casualty: all have had an impact on me. These experiences my colleagues and I have experienced over my career have made me want to investigate what I believe is an area problem in journalism: trauma for TV news field journalists along the front lines. The goal with research work related to this area problem of journalism is to create a conversation regarding mental health of TV news field journalists, including what they're experiencing and the need for resources to assist them personally while serving their communities.

Most, if not all, journalists cover some type of traumatic event, especially camera operators (MacDonald et al., 2021). For instance, a survey of 117 international camera operators showed photojournalists/camera operators are arguably the first line of exposure to traumatic events. When asked about the frequent exposures to work-related post-traumatic events, results

showed more than 90 percent of respondents reported being exposed to events involving an injured or dead child, fire, and motor vehicle accident (MacDonald et al., 2021). The next highest, roughly 89 and 84 percent respectively, were murders and natural disasters (MacDonald et al., 2021). In the same survey, the sample indicated greater levels of PTSD symptoms than expected in the general population, and there were fewer differences regarding symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress (MacDonald et al., 2021). More than 40 percent of participants were also considered to possibly be at risk of PTSD.

According to the Dart Center For Journalism and Trauma, the vast majority, if not all, journalists have been exposed to traumatic events related to work (Smith et al., 2015). Furthermore, research suggests an argument for increased organizational support, as well as trauma training for work, whether that would be in the classroom or within their current line of work with their parent company (Smith et. al, 2015).

Dworznik and Grubb conducted a study specifically looking at the argument for journalism trauma training in the classroom. This study involves a mixed-methods approach, interviewing students covering a death-penalty murder trial, and surveying journalism students (Dworznik & Grubb, 2007). The students advocated for trauma training in the classroom prior to graduating, as well as how to approach certain subjects when covering news stories that can be considered traumatic. It also found that trauma wasn't being addressed in the classroom, and they were being more aware of traumatic events through their internships.

Objective

The purpose of this research project will be examining the issue of journalists who consistently cover breaking news, wall-to-wall news events, severe weather, within the field, are

impacted from a mental health standpoint. To do this, I'll be conducting semi-structured interviews with TV news field journalists and a TV news manager.

From a theoretical standpoint, the model which will be used to help guide questions in the project's interviewing process is the cognitive appraisal theory (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020). This theory will weigh a journalist's response when exposed to stressors in the field while on an assignment (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020). With backing from Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Ellsworth and Scherer (2003), the cognitive appraisal theory (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020) argues, "when someone is exposed to a stressor, the stressor is appraised in order to elicit an appropriate emotional response." (p. 158). The cognitive appraisal process consists of two parts: primary appraisal where a person establishes the importance of the stressor, and the secondary appraisal which looks at the ability to cope with the stressor (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020).

The sample size for this project was TV news field journalists who've been in the industry from 2015-2022. This provided a contemporary lens when it came to TV news field journalists, particularly covering a variety of different breaking news and severe weather events. I planned on interviewing 10 field journalists (anchors/reporters, photojournalists and meteorologists with field experience). The reasoning behind the number of participants is to meet the time given to work on this research project, as well as to give the project a case study treatment. This will be explained further in the methodology section. With qualitative data gathered from the semi-structured interviews, I will review, analyze, and summarize findings and trends for this project. Overall, the purpose of this research is to look at trauma in journalism by answering the following research question: What are the mental health impacts TV news field crews experience from consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather?

LITERATURE REVIEW

What Do Journalists See?

What happens when journalists get on scene and are amid their reporting? What do they experience? A study by Dadouch and Lilly (2021) looks at journalist post-trauma psychopathology. Dadouch and Lilly (2021) surveyed journalists and found, when looking at exposure to work events within the past year, more than 82 percent reported on injuries or deaths (Dadouch & Lilly, 2021). Rounding out the top three work events were murders at more than 68 percent and a person's life-threatening illness at nearly 68 percent (Dadouch & Lilly, 2021). Other work events reported include motor vehicle accident, sexual assault, physical assault outside the family, people hurt or killed in a fire, other types of events involving injury or death, physical assault with the family, mass casualties, torture/kidnapping, people hurt or killed in a natural disaster, airplane accidents and war zones (Dadouch & Lilly, 2021).

Backholm and Bjorkqvist (2012) investigated associations between trauma and PTSD. Overall, they learned that exposure to potentially traumatic assignments is common within the journalism industry. More than half (i.e., 55 percent) of surveyed participants reported working with at least one potentially traumatic assignment in the previous year (Backholm & Bjorkqvist, 2012). The report also indicated the more frequent types of assignments like this to have taken place within the same time frame, with the highest being motor vehicle accidents as 37 percent reported having been exposed at least once or more times (Backholm & Bjorkqvist, 2012). Following motor vehicle accidents were deadly fires at 20 percent and people with life-threatening illnesses at 18 percent (Backholm & Bjorkqvist, 2012).

More proof is present from these studies of journalists having to cover traumatic events as part of their work. A portion of the focus of the studies referenced so far were the assignments

they covered and elements they were exposed to. Some of the common events seem to be motor vehicle accidents, injuries/death, murder, and life-threatening illnesses. But how do these types of events impact journalists on assignment?

Mental Health Impacts and Use of Cognitive Appraisal Theory

The cognitive appraisal theory is a useful framework for understanding mental health impacts in TV news field journalists. The aforementioned theoretical framework (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020) argues, “When someone is exposed to a stressor, the stressor is appraised in order to elicit an appropriate emotional response.” (p. 158). The cognitive appraisal process consists of two parts: primary appraisal, where a person establishes the importance of the stressor, and secondary appraisal, which looks at the ability to cope with the stressor (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020). More specifically, when someone is confronted with news reports, a person evaluates the severity of the stressor as well as the extent to which the news impacts them, and whether the news is something within or beyond their control (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020). de Hoog and Verboon (2020) collected data from Dutch men and women who reported their news exposure and affective states multiple times a day over a 10-day period. Results showed news perceptions that were negative were related to more negative affect rather than positive affect (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020). Also, de Hoog and Verboon (2020) state the findings to their study show, “The more severe the news was perceived and the higher perceptions of personal relevance, the stronger the affective response.” (p. 168). Therefore, de Hoog and Verboon (2020) argue their study’s findings, “Support the cognitive appraisal theory as a relevant framework for explaining the effect of news perception on emotional states,” (p. 168).

Shweder (1993) states Lazarus’s definition of cognitive appraisal as, “an evaluation of the significance of what is happening in the world for personal well-being,” (p. 323). One view

of the cognitive appraisal theory, as Yarwood explains, is emotions cause appraisal. For example, a person could hear gunshots and experience fear, which is then followed by cognitive appraisals of ability to cope and unexpectedness (Yarwood, n.d.). Yarwood also states people could feel angry and not know why, and therefore look for a reason (Yarwood, n.d.). This can relate to journalists covering breaking news or severe weather, when unexpected events take place or new information comes out and they have to react to it personally while focusing on reporting the details to their viewers.

The cognitive appraisal theory is incorporated by Balzarotti and Ciceri (2014), who state news reports can bring out emotions in people. The authors' study also showed that when those taking part reported their emotions in response to a news story, results showed a report with mutilations caused by bacterial infections brought out more fear than a story about mutilations caused by land mine explosions (Balzarotti & Ciceri, 2014). It also stated that reports that were positively framed created less fear than those negatively framed, with effects mediated by dimensions of unpleasantness and coping potential (Balzarotti & Ciceri, 2014). More specifically, Balzarotti and Ciceri (2014) state, "positive framed reports led viewers to the evaluation that the traumatic event was less unpleasant, as well as that there was more opportunity to cope with it; these evaluations led viewers to experience less fear," (p. 372).

de Hoog's and Verboon's study focuses on the theory's application from a viewer's perspective, not TV news field journalists covering the events in real time on the front lines. For the basis of this literature search, no research on how this theory is applied to TV news field journalists covering breaking news and severe weather, having to process (appraise) what they witness on scene, and how they choose to react while doing their jobs, could be found. This study will work to fill any gaps in existing research regarding the application of this theory

towards TV news field journalists. de Hoog's and Verboon's application of cognitive appraisal theory to viewers' exposure of news reports is the closest to how I intend on applying it on TV news field journalists' exposure to raw news events happening in real time. Journalists are on the front lines exposed to raw news events firsthand and must either report/show the complete raw event as it's happening or channel important parts of the event in an ethical manner that is suitable to news consumers. While they're exposed to stressors of breaking news and severe weather, which type of emotional/mental health response will they illicit? How will the journalists try to cope with the stressor in the immediate aftermath of reporting and beyond? This also elicits the question to ask participants in the interview process for the research on how they respond to certain events, as well as if they can recall specific coverage of a certain event and how they responded at that time and afterwards.

Journalism and Mental Health

Scholars examining the issue of mental health effects on front line journalists have found one common impact: posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), PTSD is a disorder that can occur after someone experiences or witnesses a traumatic event, including serious accidents, natural disasters, terrorist acts, war, rape or who have been threatened with death, sexual violence, or serious injury (Torres, 2020). The APA defines triggers of PTSD to be exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation (APA, 2013). These exposures, according to the APA, must result from at least one scenario such as direct experiences of traumatic events, witnessing events in person, learning events happened to close family or friends and experiencing first-hand repeated or extreme exposure to the event's details. Finally, regardless of the trigger, it causes significant distress or impairment in the person's social interactions, capacity to work, other important tasks.

MacDonald et al. (2021) found greater levels of PTSD symptoms than expected in the general population of camera operators, and there were fewer differences regarding symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress (MacDonald et al., 2021). Forty-seven camera operators, or more than 40 percent of participants, were also considered to possibly be at risk of PTSD. Feinstein (2004) wrote, regarding a study conducted on nearly 50 journalists working for a New York-based news organization following the 9/11 attacks, that PTSD symptoms were common among them in the months following the attacks. Thirty percent of participants reported losing a friend in the attacks, and roughly 12 percent lost a colleague (Feinstein, 2004). It appears with the two examples above there's been an emphasis in past studies on PTSD when looking at journalists, including those in TV news, being exposed in the field when covering assignments.

What about journalists who continue to cover traumatic events? Dworznik (2006) dove into how journalists make sense of what they experience on a routine basis, interviewing 26 reporters and photojournalists from a large midwestern market on past experiences (Dworznik, 2006). The study indicates all respondents detailed their stories of trauma while on the job around one of four motives of personal narratives: purpose, justification, efficacy and control or self-worth (Dworznik, 2006). The study also suggests, while people working in news do not admit to any emotional impacts from covering traumatic events, they could still find methods to process events or to make sense of what they see while on the job (Dworznik, 2006).

Newsrooms also regularly receive and rely on user-generated content (i.e., photos and videos taken by the public and submitted to newsroom for potential publication), some of which may involve potentially traumatic situations. Feinstein et al. (2013) looked at psychological impacts in newsroom journalists witnessing violent images (Feinstein et al., 2013). More than 40 percent of respondents indicated they're exposed to user-generated content daily (Feinstein et al.,

2013). The findings indicated higher scores on indices measuring PTSD, depression, and psychological distress (Feinstein et al., 2013).

Smith et al.'s study on journalists covering traumatic news stories looked at more than 160 journalists from different organizations at risk for PTSD following their coverage of work-related traumatic stories (Smith et al., 2018). More than 79 percent were witnesses to potentially traumatic events as part of their job. Nearly 10 percent of the sample's participants met criteria for probable PTSD.

So far, we've looked at potentially traumatic impacts from events that occur on an often basis, such as car accidents, illness, and death. But what about journalists having trauma training and resources to help them before and after exposures in the field?

Trauma Training and Resources

With various examples of exposure to potentially traumatic events among journalists, what about training for workers within this industry to prepare them for these types of events? Studies address the lack thereof, and need for trauma training in the classroom, and potentially on the job, for journalists and those studying to be journalists upon graduating from college.

Maxson interviewed more than three dozen journalism graduates in terms of whether they received some type of trauma training (Maxson, 2000). Of 41 journalists who were interviewed, 14 took part in trauma training. Maxson added, "Several interviewees spoke of the lack of sensitivity the producer/editor felt for the job of the reporter and the privacy of the victim," (p. 82) when it came to newsroom priorities in accordance with protecting victims (Maxson, 2000). Furthermore, all 41 who were interviewed for this study indicated trauma training would be "a potentially useful exercise" (p. 84).

Seely (2020) examines trauma training in her study of 254 print journalists, and the extent of their preparation for trauma on the job while in school (Seely, 2020). Those who got some education of trauma reported higher levels of being aware to traumatic effects, such as anxious thoughts, sadness, and guilt (Seely, 2020). More than half of respondents, 53 percent, reported never getting any sort of trauma training.

Hill et al. (2020) also looks at preparing future journalists for traumatic events being a part of their work expectations. The authors argue journalists experiencing work-related trauma can be susceptible to mental health issues, including PTSD and burnout (Hill et al., 2020). The study also looked at worldwide studies addressing limited number of courses focused on trauma training for journalism students. Just 12 percent of universities within the United States offered trauma and journalism work classes (Hill et al., 2020). The group recommends putting in classroom training, making sure “essential” contacts, literature and resources are available and making sure normalization of reactions to trauma while working in journalism are promoted (Hill et al., 2020).

Weiss (2013) detailed research posted on the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, in which roughly 93 percent of journalism educators surveyed said their college or department did not offer any classes in crisis training or trauma (Weiss, 2013). Also, 73 percent of respondents indicated interest in teaching a course on this subject to future journalism students (Weiss, 2013).

Aside from the need for trauma training, one report addresses media companies being held accountable for protecting their employees. Calumbrian (2021) breaks down a specific case involving *The Age*, an Australian media company, being found responsible in court for one of their former journalist’s psychological traumas (Calumbrian, 2021). The author calls the case “a wake-up call” to media companies around the world (Calumbrian, 2021). According to

Calumbrian, the journalist, known in the case as “YZ,” filed a lawsuit against *The Age* for PTSD she claimed she accumulated while covering traumatic events, including 30 murders, gang-related crimes, suicides, car crashes and natural disasters. The court said the company provided “insufficient psychological support” to the journalist, and “YZ” was awarded \$180,000 in damages due to PTSD. In conclusion, the study argues the need for media companies and journalists to be more open regarding mental health issues, giving journalists the option of choosing whether to cover an event that may be psychologically harmful to them. It also allows us to ask the question to interview participants in this research whether journalists have received any trauma training before starting their career, or at any point during their career. Also, what do they believe can help TV news field journalists who consistently cover breaking news and severe weather on the front lines?

Approach and RQ

Past studies (e.g., MacDonald et al., 2021) indicate journalists face significant risks of developing mental health issues, including PTSD, through covering traumatic events. Numerous reports have detailed exact conditions, including PTSD. They’ve also identified exact assignments on what journalists, including those with field experience in TV news, have covered, how they justify continuing to cover these types of events and advocating for more company accountability and trauma training at schools for both current and prospective journalists. However, there’s little, if any, research on looking at the impacts TV news field journalists who consistently cover both breaking news and severe weather as part of their expected job duties. Also, no research could be found regarding the application of the cognitive appraisal theory to mental health impacts surrounding TV news field journalists. This study will work to fill those gaps. By doing so, the following research question is posed: What are the

mental health impacts TV news field crews experience from consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather? To answer this question, semi-structured interviews with TV news field journalists will be conducted to look at their career experience, including covering traumatic events related to breaking news and severe weather, questions guided by the framework of the cognitive appraisal theory, any training and/or resources to help them following their experiences, and their view on any areas of opportunity to help fellow TV news field journalists who cover breaking news and severe weather regularly.

METHODOLOGY

Field Journalists

The primary sources for this research are 10 field journalists in television news (reporters and photojournalists) and a TV news manager. My sampling frame includes those with TV news field experience from 2015-2022. I believe that range provides a more contemporary lens of our industry today and experiences journalists worked through. More specifically, of the 10 journalists, 5 are from WTKR-TV/WGNT-TV, the CBS and CW affiliates for the Norfolk-Portsmouth-Newport News market, and the other commercial TV news stations owned by the same station ownership group, The E.W. Scripps Company. By going outside the Norfolk-Portsmouth-Newport News market, the research was not limited to simply one geographical area, yet still maintain a case study approach. The reason why I chose WTKR-TV/WGNT-TV as one of the stations to recruit participants is because it's currently where I work. WTKR-TV/WGNT-TV also has covered a variety of breaking news and severe weather events, which benefits this project's sampling frame. I also believe 10 field journalists is a good round number given the time constraints to execute this research project.

Executing the project as a case study within the E.W. Scripps Company allows for attainable expectations when participants were recruited, as well as a potential publication opportunity to help address any issues related to this area problem of journalism within the TV news industry. The E.W. Scripps Company also has stations located throughout the United States, therefore, giving the project potential to gather a variety of results amongst TV news field journalists (i.e., hurricanes vs. tornadoes). Overall, the interviewees had career experience working in 10 states across the country and the District of Columbia: California, Colorado, Florida, Michigan, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia.

Once I got approval of the project proposal through my committee, I got approval from WTKR's News Director and General Manager for recruitment within Scripps. Participants at WTKR/WGNT were recruited via in-person, meanwhile the other Scripps journalists were recruited via email. Out of more than a dozen journalists, 10 were recruited and interviewed over a two-month timespan. Two participants chose to remain anonymous. For the basis of this project, subjects were labeled Participants 1-11 to help keep them as anonymous and safe throughout this process as possible (Please see Appendix 2 in Appendices for a more detailed description of Participants 1-11).

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method for this research. According to Jamshed (2014), semi-structured interviews are interviews with depth where participants must answer preset open-ended questions. This method sought to allow participants to provide responses with some flexibility pertaining to a vast amount of information about their career, including their own personal experience covering traumatic events related to breaking news and severe weather, questions guided by the framework of the cognitive appraisal theory, any training and/or resources to help them following their experiences, and their view on any areas of opportunity to help fellow TV news field journalists who cover breaking news and severe weather regularly. The goal with this research was to find any thematic analyses addressing the main issue of TV news field journalists' mental health impacts related to consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather.

Semi-structured interviews can provide flexibility, as researchers can vary the order of questions and ask follow-up questions to get deeper into the topics addressed or clarify participants' responses (Brennen, 2013). Other benefits for the use of semi-structured interviews

in qualitative research are allowing informants freedom to express views in their own terms, as well as providing dependable, comparable qualitative data (Cohen, 2006).

Interview Execution and Reasoning

All 11 interviews were conducted via Zoom at a time and location that was most convenient with each individual participant's schedule. Virtual video conference devices allowed for easier scheduling due to travel and time constraints with completing this research. These participants were given the choice of using either pseudonyms or project identification numbers if they did not want to use their names in this research. They also had the choice of whether they'd want their recorded interview to be displayed as part of this research project's final presentation, as well as the option to review the video elements regarding their recorded interview prior to the project's presentation. Each interview took anywhere from 30 minutes to one hour, depending on the responses of the individual participants. All participants were provided with resources following their interviews.

The interviews with the field journalists were conducted first, followed by the interview with the manager. Once the interviews were gathered, they were stored via OneDrive and transcribed with Otter. The transcribed responses are shown in written form, and with some participants with permission, portions of their video interviews are included as part of a video presentation with PowerPoint slides to illustrate the findings in this study. As far as publication goals, I intend to pitch this to the Reynolds Journalism Institute and The E.W. Scripps Company. The hopes are this will help create a conversation to help TV news field journalists who often cover breaking news and severe weather events and lead to a standard set for companies in terms of making sure their employees have all the resources they need to help them continue serving their communities.

FINDINGS

Breaking News

Frequency of Covering Breaking News

After gathering basic information about their career background, I first asked participants about their experience covering breaking news and severe weather, and how it has impacted them throughout their career. How often do TV news field journalists cover breaking news? Participant #3 told me it's frequent. "Being a nightside reporter, crime is always sadly happening," they said. "I always have to adjust or change gears or if my producer or my boss wants me live, I have to be live." Participant #3 referenced a story on a "massive fire" they recently worked on prior to the interview for this project. "I was working on a story, and a massive fire happened not too far from our station," Participant #3 said. "I had to switch gears and go live, with little to no information, but that's just the life of a journalist."

For Participant #10, they estimated covering "hundreds" of stories throughout their career in Mississippi and Virginia. "If I had to guess, over the course of my career, maybe 200," Participant #10 said. "There could be weeks where I would cover a homicide, or murder, some type of death, like every day for weeks on end." Throughout their interview, Participant #10 shared examples of different stories relating to how often covering breaking news is part of their job.

Desire To Cover Breaking News

Some participants enjoy the thought of covering breaking news when called upon. "It's kind of [everyone's] in the same boat, like nobody really knows what's going on, and you have to go and find the story," Participant #1 said. "You're competing with these people to get this

exclusive interview... I really enjoy it. I really kind of like it. It's always exciting, it gets your heart pumping a little bit, you're running around and makes the day go by faster."

Participant #9 also spoke to personally loving covering breaking news. "I love the rush of it," Participant #9 said. "Getting there when the scene is happening, figuring out the pieces. It's almost like a puzzle every time you turn a story. Breaking news is really when we put our journalistic hats on, and we are the ones that are in the community maybe getting some details from officials. For me, breaking news is finding those elements and getting the facts right. And of course, getting it before the competition, but doing it correctly."

However, other journalists like Participant #5, do not seek out breaking news as their go-to assignment when working as a TV news field journalist. "Breaking news is not my favorite," Participant #5 said. "I want to avoid breaking news. I like doing investigative, in-depth stories. Stories that you really get to build from scratch and kind of really cultivate yourself. Breaking news is a situation where it's happening right now, you go and you report what everybody else is reporting, but investigative and in-depth reporting kind of gives a little bit more freedom with your story pitches, who you want to talk to and building those sources. I would say, if my next market was like, 'You're going to be the breaking news reporter,' I would probably say no, I would not want to do that."

Participant #5 added to not having a desire to constantly covering breaking news because of stress related to the assignments. "Breaking news, it's moving so quickly," Participant #5 said. "You're already on a tight deadline as it is, and you're trying to confirm information. Sometimes, it doesn't exist, and you still have to be on-air and say something, and sometimes you're like, 'What am I even going to say?' It's very demanding."

Participant #5 also went on to add about the weight from breaking news assignments, even when coming off the workday. “You come home, and it’s still kind of weighing you down. It’s kind of hard to escape the craziness of your workday,” Participant #5 added. “It’s not like you just log out, you close your laptop screen, and then you just go out with your friends or go to dinner and forget about the day. You carry that with you throughout the rest of the evening. Sometimes, I dream sometimes about crazy workdays, and then wake up thinking about the next day. It’s hard to just shake it off.”

Participant #2 also talked about carrying the weight of the stories when they’re out on assignment. “I think, in some ways, we can act as a buffer so that the viewer doesn’t feel the full weight of that emotion as we’re feeling,” Participant #2 said. “It can be heavy, because we’re right there in the thick of it and just feeling all things.”

Memorable Breaking News Assignments

Along with asking how often they cover breaking news, I asked participants in this study any particular type of breaking news events that stand out to them. Participant #1 immediately recalled covering the 2019 mass shooting in Virginia Beach, Virginia. “I will never forget the eerie quietness of that area. The only thing you could hear was, because we were right by the building where it happened, was like the other journalists doing their live shots, and then distant rumbles of thunder.”

Participant #4 covered a wide variety of breaking news events impacting their local and national communities throughout their career as a photojournalist. These events included the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida, and the Marjory Stoneman Douglas school shooting in south Florida. “It’s just kind of part of the business,” Participant #4 said. “As much as those are tragedies, those are the stories why people get into

media. They don't get into media for the regular story and say, 'I'm going to wait. Let me let that phone ring.' They want to kind of be on the front row of history. They want to experience that and tell those stories.”

I asked Participant #4 more about their experience as a local TV news photojournalist covering 9/11 at the Pentagon and in New York City. “Everyone else is seeing a hole in the Pentagon on TV and pictures, and then I'm seeing it for myself. I'm seeing the helicopters land, I'm seeing the people sleeping, and I'm talking to the people that are coming by,” Participant #4 said. “The same thing [went] for Ground Zero. We couldn't get terribly close, but I know I got within three or four blocks of it. when I sent my camera in and zoomed, it was like, 'Holy smokes!' You just kind of get a new perspective for how big the damage was, how significant was like just seeing rubble that was seven eight stories high, And being like, 'Is this real?' When you see it, and with your own eyes, as opposed to on TV, you just got really just a different perspective of things.”

Participant #5 talked about the emotional impact of covering a shooting at a local college in Virginia. “It was just heartbreaking. Two officers died there at that college, and it impacted the whole college campus,” Participant #5 said. “Every student, every staff member that we spoke to was extremely shaken up by what happened. I got to eventually build relationships with the family of one of the officers and get to know them and hear their stories. The immediate aftermath of that breaking news, I think, is something that I will never forget. The images of just being on that campus, seeing the crime tape still up, and talking to students who are impacted by what happened, it's something that you'll really never forget.”

For Participant #8, the breaking news event that sticks out to them was the “craziest story” they ever covered in southern California. “There was a man, he was in like a trailer park

situation, he shot a guy in the face before taking a pregnant woman hostage in his car, leading police on a chase while he was high on crystal meth.” Participant #8 said. “He’s on Facebook Live during the whole thing before he crashed into a ditch where his grandmother lived. I got out there, I arrived on scene like right after he crashed into the ditch, and police were there to arrest him. You never know what you’re going to get in this job.”

Participant #9’s breaking news story that stands out to them was a deadly crash involving a child on a Christmas Day. “There was a family that had bought their, I believe two or three children, ATVs they’ve been wanting it for a while, and they’ve been pushing back on it,” Participant #9 said. “They finally bought it for them, and then Christmas morning, one of the kids went out for a ride, got too close to the road and was unfortunately hit by a car and passed away. I was there from the beginning. I was super polite. Obviously, it’s bad time for the family. But, eventually they called me back saying they would like to share their story, and I was the only news outlet they reached out to which was really great. As far as the trust factor goes with our station, and the family invited me and me only to be there for them explaining what happened, to vigils in the community, to the funeral even and beyond that they’ve kept in touch, which is great. “It’s interesting to see how, you know, just one day, which resulted in multiple days, but one day in your reporting career can develop into that trust and that relationship in the community.”

Participant #10 said talked about one instance of breaking news while working in Virginia that’s stuck with them. “We heard over the scanners about someone being shot and killed in Newport News. We load up in the news van, we’re on the way, we’re gathering more information, and we learned that it was a mother, who heard gunfire outside of her door, and ran outside because her kids were playing outside,” Participant #10 recalled. “She ran outside to try

to protect her kids, and she wound up being shot and killed. When we got to the neighborhood, and to the scene where police were set up, there was police tape, and we look in the courtyard. I literally can still see it. Her body was in the middle of the courtyard, and she must have been a very tall woman because the sheet they put over her didn't also cover her feet and her feet were exposed. My heart sank. I remember running into a reporter from a different station. I looked at her, we looked at each other, and we were both speechless. It is something that I will never forget. I thought about how she was just trying to protect her babies, and now her body is in the middle of a courtyard and her feet are just exposed.”

Participant #10 went on to talk about the emotional impact of this one experience with me. “I still get a little teary thinking about that. That was one where you ask yourself [and] you start to think about everything, not as a journalist, but just like as only as a human being. That was a difficult thing to push through.”

After other experiences of covering breaking news, Participant #10 talked about the relationship between humanity and job duties as a TV news field journalist. “The humanity in what we do was trumping the professional part of just relaying the information,” Participant #10 said. “I think that was the point where I decided that they could coexist. I wasn't going to not be a human being. As I told stories, if something was sad, and if I felt sad, I wasn't going say it. If I started to tear up, I wasn't going to pretend like I wasn't crying because something was sad. I was just going to tell the viewers, ‘Give me a second. As you can imagine, this is really difficult to process.’ I wasn't going to pretend like I was a robot because we're not. We're human beings who tell stories.”

For Participant #2, they remember covering a heartbreaking breaking news event involving two men who drowned in a river Buffalo, New York. “I was out there for days

covering the search for them,” Participant #2 said. “At first, there was hope that maybe they hadn’t passed away, and maybe they just were caught somewhere further down the river. I think I was out there for like 10 or 12 days, because it took a while to find them. That was exhausting physically, but also just mentally, because you’re going through this rollercoaster of emotions where there’s that hope, you’re seeing family members out there, you have to talk to them, and you’re like, ‘I really hope we get the answer I know you want.’ Then, by about day six or seven, you could kind of feel the energy shift out there where it was like, this is no longer a rescue, but it’s a recovery. That was such a heavy place to sit in, but still having to be out there and do your live shots and talk, but just knowing that this family didn’t get the outcome they wanted. That’ll always stay with me.”

Impacts on a TV News Manager

Participant #11, a TV news manager, shared a couple of back-to-back breaking news experiences, and how it’s impacted them personally. One involved a helicopter crash that happened right outside one of the TV news stations they worked at during their career. “We quickly went into breaking news mode, but that was a traumatic experience,” Participant #11 said. “Just hearing the son of the chopper photographer calling who was also on staff, as a photographer, calling to ask about his dad. His dad died in the crash. I was the one who picked up the phone and could hear him shouting and screaming on the other side, ‘Please, not my dad! Not my dad!’ I asked him to come to the station. That’s all I could say. The funeral was that Saturday, I was in, and that was the same day we had the landslide that killed 41 people, and it wiped an entire community off this earth. But the traumatic experience was just hearing the calls for help, the screaming from residents, because you can hear them over the scanners screaming and yelling, and all of the first responders were yelling for all helicopters within the region of

Oregon, Idaho, all equipment in Washington, and then in British Columbia, since we were so close. I think the thing that really affected me, as it did a lot of others, was just the two to three weeks of just constant stories about the families and the survivors that lost everything and how the community was coming together. But, when you hear of the loss of life of this magnitude, it really hurts.”

Participant #11 went on to say in their interview with me that one thing they believed to stand out to them, was that they believed to have been in a “constant, depressed state” at the time. “As a journalist, you’re just pushing through. Towards day seven, mind you, we just went through the helicopter crash, now it’s the landslide. I was the on-call manager when it happened, and I didn’t stop until probably a week and a half to two weeks later. The traumatizing part, I guess that kept playing into my head, was just hearing these people’s stories, talking to family members. My news director, at the time, put me in charge of the coverage for all the funerals. So, I was deeply invested and deeply feeling everything. I remember going to my news director and going, ‘I don’t know why, but I just have this feeling of crying all the time.’ That’s when she said, ‘Oh, you’re probably deep, deep into it.’ And, I’m like, ‘I know and I don’t know what to do.’ But I ended up getting on meds, and that helped.”

Participant #11 also shared a personal story they said isn’t necessarily news related, but, as they stated, helped them become who they are today. “That’s witnessing my nephew, who accidentally shot himself in front of me, and having to call first responders and really turning into, ‘News [name omitted],’ getting everyone in the truck and calling for help. I was also the one to call my sister-in-law. My nephew’s mom and my mom to tell them, ‘Hey, there’s been a shooting, an accidental shooting, you need to get to the hospital.’ I didn’t realize at the time it was affecting me, but when I tried to go back to work that Monday, because it’s happened on a

Saturday, I wasn't able to work. I would just shut down and just start crying. I remember, again, going, 'What is going on?'

Impacts of Breaking News

When it comes to impacts on TV news field journalists from covering breaking news, Participant #2 said it got to a point to where they felt burned out after stints working in Texas and New York. "I didn't have anything left to give. It was a lot," Participant #2 said. "I was working the morning shift, and my body just didn't react well to being up that early in the morning. But, it just was a grind. I mean, [in] Texas, there was a lot of breaking news, I didn't realize how busy of a place Central Texas was. That was my first job out of college. So, I was covering a lot of like heavy crimes, shootings, and gruesome crime scenes. There's nothing like when you're just out there, those first crime scenes and it's just a lot to take in. Then, I hopped from that into Buffalo where I was taking on an early morning shift, doing a lot of breaking news, doing a lot of coverage. By the end of two years in Buffalo, which would have made three years in the business, I was just burnt out mentally, physically, emotionally, I needed a break. Even though I love this job, I wanted to do this since I was 10 years old, I made the decision to not renew my contract and kind of step away and just take a beat and regroup mentally."

Participant #2 ended up working in public relations in Ohio for a year, before wanting to get back to being a TV news field journalist. "I said, you know if news is for me, I'll come back to it. I do love it. I just know [that] I need to take care of me first, because I didn't have anything else to give after that," Participant #2 said. "I missed it. My office... we were right across from the statehouse, and there was always crazy breaking news stories or big news coming out of the statehouse. I would see it and sometimes I would get to report on it, I guess from a PR standpoint, but the excitement, just that rush made me miss it. I just realized that my passion

really is storytelling, especially when it comes to like video storytelling. I was just like, ‘I’ve got to get back in.’ I miss it too much. Now, that I think I had taken that year... and I had some tools on how to help myself and help prevent burnout a second time, I was like, ‘I feel like I’m ready.’”

Participant #2 also mentioned the importance of having tools and resources, especially to help with mental health, for their second career stint as a TV news field journalist. “Knowing who to call, knowing what to do, knowing how to really be present in my body, and be like, ‘Alright, am I feeling anxious? Am I feeling those signs of burnout again?’ And knowing what to do with those feelings if I do feel that. We all know that trauma and burnout comes with the job, but it’s about recognizing those things and taking the appropriate actions.”

Participant #11 said they ended up seeking help and shared how those experiences helped them in their news manager role at stations. “Out of all of that came this great conversation I had with my news director at the time, who said I’ve been given a great gift. That’s the gift of compassion and empathy, and using that to help others, especially from the position in the title that I hold. So, ever since then, I’ve been able to switch things that have happened to me in a negative way and turn them into positives that have helped me. All of that to go that’s why I am the way I am today. It’s through those experiences in the newsroom, and outside of the newsroom, who have shaped me into a leader that leads with empathy, that leads with compassion, that leads with inspiration versus the flip side.”

Severe Weather

Frequency of Covering Severe Weather

Within this research project, the vast majority of all TV news field journalists interviewed for this study said, throughout their careers, breaking news outweighed severe weather coverage. However, those like Participant #1, had different severe weather coverage experiences as a

whole. “Fortunately, weather events haven’t been so bad. I’ve covered a couple hurricanes and tornadoes here [Virginia],” Participant #1 said. “In Michigan, I feel like the weather events weren’t too bad. Maybe a tornado here or there, or like really bad snow.”

Participant #2 told me they covered blizzards, which was a first for them, originally being from Florida. “I moved to Buffalo, New York, and had not experienced blizzards and snow like that in my life,” Participant #2 said. “I was a morning reporter for the majority of my two years there. I was covering so much snow, a lot of severe weather, and I think that the majority of my severe weather experience in my career came from Buffalo.”

Participant #4 told me they had a lot of experiences specifically covering hurricanes when working in both Florida and Virginia. “That’s just an all hands on deck mentality,” Participant #4 said. “When the storm comes through, it’s time to cover it. You just kind of go out, you do your best, you look for we call it the ‘cone of death.’ The hurricane cones on the models. You’re monitoring that, but you’re always prepared.” Participant #4 also went on to say they covered so many hurricanes in their career as a photojournalist, they kind of “bleed together.” “It’s such a mindset when you’re going into a hurricane you want to be prepared. You want to have the right equipment. You could be staying in motel rooms with no power, living off granola bars for four days,” Participant #4 said. “I feel I’ve done that multiple times, and I couldn’t even name you the storm when people talk about, ‘Oh, I remember this hurricane.’ I’m like, which one was that? What year?”

Participant #6, another photojournalist, said they believe their experience covering severe weather is on a “monthly” basis. “Whether it be from severe thunderstorms, to flooding, blizzards, hurricanes, the aftermath of tornadoes, certainly, I would say monthly.” Participant #6 also mentioned their own interest in weather when covering severe weather assignments. “With

an interest in weather already, I think I enjoy covering the storms,” Participant #6 said. “I think it’s obviously important that we cover both the storms and the aftermath, including any damage, to show the totality of what happens with each storm.”

Memorable Severe Weather Assignments

For at least a couple of participants in this study, #1 and #6, they each stated the severe weather assignment that sticks with them the most is covering Hurricane Dorian in 2019 while working in Virginia and North Carolina. “I actually asked to go to the Outer Banks for that, because I actually really enjoy severe weather coverage,” Participant #1 said.

During our interview, Participant #6 mentioned they had been injured while covering a hurricane during their career but did not want to disclose exact details for the sake of staying anonymous for this research. Participant #6 did speak on their experience covering of Hurricane Dorian. “The planning going into a hurricane, it can be very logistics minded, which is good. Pre-positioning crews, getting them where they need to be before the storm hits, I certainly believe that helps to alleviate some of the front-loaded stress of dealing with what can be a damaging storm,” Participant #6 said. “In terms of Dorian, it was an issue where we knew this storm had caused just a massive amount of damage in the Caribbean. Even though models showed that it was going to weaken when it got to us, a Category 1 or Category 2 storm is still a serious storm. That ended up almost nearly 100 mile-per-hour winds when it hit us in our market. Being able to see the storm coming for days, and see what it did, and other places, it makes you kind of concerned for your area that you’re serving, and you’re trying to get the information out of what a storm can actually do. But, I think the planning part was important because we were able to pre-plan very well for that storm, and get people and equipment in place so that we didn’t have to worry, when the storm got closer, where we needed to be.”

Participant #4 recalls one occasion, while working in North Carolina, covering a blizzard in the Outer Banks. “That was just a little surreal. Just driving through Kill Devil Hills, and the Outer Banks, and it was covered in a foot of snow. And it’s like this is just weird, especially when you’re down there used to being down there in tank tops and swim shorts, sitting on the beach.”

Another example of severe weather coverage from Participant #4 was when they almost lost a work truck to the Atlantic Ocean when covering a hurricane in the Outer Banks. “I was with my reporter. We were out, we had some time between our live shots. We’re out driving around, I’m driving, and all of a sudden, we’re on this one stretch on the beach road where there’s no houses, so it’s just beach. All of a sudden, a wave hits, I looked over and it’s literally halfway up on my car,” Participant #4 said. “If the window was down, we would have had water pouring in the car. It picked up my car and moved us off the road, and it settled us back down. The front tires were off the ground. I pushed the gas and we’re not moving. So, I’m ready to bail. I’m ready to like, let’s get the equipment, let’s just bail.”

Participant #4 and their crew were able to get out and pull inland from where they were, but eventually, they noticed something else as the waves kept coming up. “At one point, these kids come through, and it’s a white Range Rover. They pull down the window and they’re like, ‘Oh, this is great.’ They’re laughing, having a good time joy riding, [and] my report and I are like, ‘You guys need to go home now. We almost lost our car.’ They’re like, ‘Oh, we live down here. We know what we’re doing,’” Participant #4 said. “We get back. We catch our breaths; we go into the Weather Channel truck where we had been working out of, and maybe close to about 45 minutes or an hour later, the Weather Channel has a shot of a white Range Rover consumed by the ocean. I looked at my reporter [and] I’m like, ‘That was the truck we saw!’ Those kids

lost a Range Rover to the Atlantic Ocean. But, I never forget that being swept off the road, and being like, ‘Holy smokes!’ Just kind of being extra mindful, but that one sticks in my head just from that particular moment that that trip was a bit more memorable, because we were actually like pretty much that was when we were right in the eye.”

But it wasn’t just hurricanes that participants had experience covering. Participant #7 shared their memory of covering a derecho in 2012. “I remember being the nightside reporter that night. Basically, I drove out to go meet the derecho, because it was moving from west to east,” Participant #7 said. “I drove from D.C. to basically Loudoun County, Virginia. It was pretty close to the West Virginia line. Just waiting to see, what to explain to the people what it’s like to sit through the derecho, because it was coming towards you. I just remember hunkering down in a 7-Eleven gas station, [and] I remember seeing the top of the gas pumps, I remember seeing on-air it was bending, like wrenching like a bendy straw that you have in your drink. Then, just like all these people, rushing into the 7-Eleven to hunker down. I remember one shirtless guy coming out of a minivan, [and] his wife yelling at him to get the baby, and just the chaos of people trying to get out of the storm. I think, to this day, I’ve never been in a storm as powerful as that one.”

For Participant #8, severe weather coverage consisted of covering extreme heat and wildfires in California. “The extreme heat in Palm Springs, life threatening temperatures, 120 degrees, seeing the impact on communities there, and how that intersects with poverty and the different types of neighborhoods that you see out in the desert,” Participant #8 said. “We have the wildfires [and] there’s nothing crazier than wildfire stories. It’s such a cycle. It’s the fires, and then you have rain seasons, you have the mudslides, and just seeing all those emergency

systems in place, whether it be rain, mudslides, fires, it's all the SoCal weather. We cover that constantly. It's always super intense, but also very rewarding.”

Impacts from Severe Weather Coverage

After sharing experiences with covering hurricanes in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, Participant #6 spoke to more on the impacts of covering severe weather events, like named storms and tornadoes. “It can certainly be difficult to see the aftermath of tornadoes, after a hurricane, but then Tropical Storm Isaias coming through various states there were tornadoes spawned that caused damage,” Participant #6 said. “[It] wiped houses. Mobile homes just completely wiped clean, and debris scattered everywhere. I think, when you see the images that come out of the areas that are damaged, if you're a human you feel for those people. You see their houses blown away. You've seen that people have been injured or killed. In news, we cover a lot of difficult things [and] a lot of difficult stories. A lot of them are unexpected. But, when a storm is coming, and it can be difficult, and then you see the damage afterward, it can certainly affect you, especially seeing people's lives strewn about a road, or their family members gone.”

So, after talking with research participants about their personal background of covering breaking news and severe weather, how do field journalists react when covering these events in real-time?

Cognitive Appraisal Theory

After asking participants about their careers, how often they cover breaking news and severe weather, and how it has impacted them personally, I wanted to ask questions framed around the cognitive appraisal theory with how field journalists act and react when covering breaking news and severe weather. This includes how they react at scenes they're sent to, any

stressors that commonly come up, whether they exhibit any emotional responses, and how they assess and cope with situations.

Acting and Reacting to Breaking News and Severe Weather Scenes

When it comes to breaking news and severe weather, TV news field journalists can be sent to a variety of different assignments at a moment's notice. Whether that's at the beginning of their shift, or even midway or towards the end of their day after they've been working on a story for the past 8 or 9 hours. Participant #1 brought up the notion of compartmentalizing breaking news situations they're sent to. "My very first thought is, I need to get this job done. I need to tell the story. I need to find the story. I need to make sure that whatever information our viewers need to know, I have to get that job done," Participant #1 said.

Participant #5 said covering breaking news can be "chaos." "It's kind of hard to explain," Participant #5 said. "Your mind is racing like a million miles a minute. For someone who's never covered breaking news, just imagine the most anxiety inducing situation to you, and whatever that is, but to make it like 1,000 times harder. You have to then get on camera and tell thousands of people who rely on you for information about that very anxiety inducing thing. It's something that's hard for, I guess, just the general public to understand unless you work in this business. But really, it just boils down to utter chaos."

Participant #6 also talked about being sent to a scene with partial information, while trying to confirm details and get the full, confirmed picture to tell viewers. "We're not going to know everything until we get there, and even then, it may take quite some time to learn more than 50 percent of the story, just because it takes a long time for information to come out, not just from official sources like police, fire or EMS, but because a situation may be so chaotic and that it's difficult to get accurate information," Participant #6 said. They also talked about the

disconnect of how viewers at home may not see what is going on behind the scenes to get breaking news reports on-air. “We’re constantly in a society now where we want to be served immediately. We love that immediacy of news and information. But, sometimes, you just can’t get that when you arrive on the scene.”

Many things go through field journalists’ mind when sent to a developing situation. What’s my deadline? What are the expectations for our on-air and digital products? What elements am I able to get at the scene? How safe is the scene? Participant #2 explains this notion further of what goes through their mind when they’re sent to a scene. “Something that I really learned in my year off was just to put humanity at the forefront,” Participant #2 said. “I think sometimes we can get caught in the hustle and bustle of grabbing elements, getting sound, getting the interview, getting the shot, and getting up and doing your live shot. The breaking news involves people. These are humans, and human lives that have been disrupted. [I’m] making sure that as I’m hustling to get the work done, then I’m being mindful of the humans that have been impacted, and that these are real people in real lives that we’re talking about, and treating people with dignity. I think sometimes, especially earlier in my career, I might have been a little less empathetic. Sometimes, I now I pulled back and I’m like, ‘If this was my cousin, how would I want a reporter to approach them? How would I want somebody to approach me if I was going through whatever?’”

Participant #4, a news photojournalist, also talked about being mindful of the people impacted by breaking news while at scenes while covering it for their station, especially if they’re the only news crew at a scene. “I don’t shoot people crying,” Participant #4 said. They even recalled one instance of covering a breaking news crime situation and telling their colleague they were not going to get video of someone crying. “I’m not in the business of shooting grief.

I'm just I'm not doing it. I don't like that. This is the worst day of their life, and to just to have a shoot that and televise that. I've just never been a big fan of that out. Now, if I'm on scene, and the other three stations are shooting that, I don't have a choice. I have to shoot it. But, if it's just me, there have been many times I've told the reporter, 'No, we can work around that. I'm not shooting that.'

When I talked with Participant #8, one constant factor that goes through their mind when being sent to a breaking news is knowing their surroundings for their own personal safety. "I am always on edge and very self-aware," Participant #8 said. "I'm always very untrusting of people around me. You think about, just being a woman, who could be targeting you? Who could be stalking you? Who has a gun? Who has a weapon? Who's out to harm you? Who's out to get you?" Participant #8 also added they have a sense of "heightened anxiety" when they're about to go live on TV for a breaking news situation. "I was covering a SWAT standoff the other day, there was a guy in a house, it took him for nine hours to come out. He finally did come out, he got arrested, and then we're going live about 30 minutes later. As we're going live, this car is slowly creeping up towards me. I'm doing live shot. I'm very focused. This is a big story. I'm trying to process answering a Q&A with the anchor... my mind is simultaneously answering a Q&A with the anchor about all these very specific details about a standoff and also thinking to myself, who's in this car and what do they want? Are they going to harm me? Is this a buddy of the guy who just got arrested and he's pissed that I'm airing the footage?"

Participant #8 also recalled another situation while working in Palm Springs, California. "I was doing a live shot, and I remember it was 5 in the morning, [and] a guy in a skull mask jumped out of the bush next to me and into my live shot. That puts me on edge," they said. "They know where you are, you're on television with a locator. If you're doing a morning show,

they know where you're going to be for two hours, or three hours, depending on where you work," Participant #8 added. "I think there's an element of gender here. By nature of being a female, you always have to think on the defense, not that everyone doesn't, but there's just this added element of you never know who's out to get you, or harm you, or who has some ill intent, and we're kind of a sitting duck at times."

Stressors and Breaking News and Severe Weather Scenes

I asked participants if they encounter any stressors when sent to breaking news and severe weather scenes. For Participant #1, their big stressor is making sure they don't let their news station down when covering breaking news. "They're relying on me," Participant #1 said. "They're sending me for this coverage. I really want to make sure that I do as good of a job as I can and that I do everything that I can to make sure I tell the whole story and tell it in the best way possible."

Participant #3 said they believed the most stressful part of breaking news is gathering information and getting ready for their live report. "Trying to deliver one-minute live hits, with just little to no information, sometimes it kind of stresses me out," Participant #3 said. "I'm just like, 'Oh God, what am I really going to say, right now?' I just got to the scene literally five seconds ago, and my live [shot] is in one minute, what do I do? What do I say? But, once we get the, once I get the ball rolling, I start talking and it starts to flow, and the stress kind of goes away."

Participant #10 shared with us the main thing on their mind is finding the person who's impacted the most at a breaking news scene, and other field journalists competing for the same story "You hate that you even have to think about it, but is someone from a competing station going to get the interview or get information that, even despite your best efforts, you didn't get?"

And then, how is your news manager going to react to that? Are they going to be understanding and know that sometimes things just happen? Or they are going to degrade you, and say you're not good enough? Why didn't you get that interview that the other station got," Participant #10 said. "It would be great if that was something we didn't have to think about. But the reality is, if you're on a story that several other people are on as well, unfortunately that's a part that you think about. The key is not to let that part make you inhuman or inconsiderate."

Both Participants #6 and #9 emphasized the stressor of the unknown of breaking news and severe weather situations for field crews. "You can be called to a shooting, and the first thing you see when you pull up is somebody who had been killed, a body laying in a parking lot, or a driveway, or in a car. You may not be prepared for that, that may be the very first thing you see when you pull up," Participant #6 said. "For some, it can be quite jarring to see somebody who was just alive a few minutes prior."

Participant #2 pointed out the context of the story can be a stressor. "I've noticed anytime, especially if it's like a tragic situation involving a child, those stories has always seemed to get to me," Participant #2 said. "Sometimes, I have to take a second and pause before I even get out of my news car and just collect myself, because those are super heavy." Meanwhile, when asked about any stressors when they arrive to breaking news and severe weather scenes, Participant #4 said there was none for them. "I feel like it's easy to detach a little bit, because you have a task at hand," Participant #4 said. "You have to get a shot. It becomes very task oriented. You don't really have time. If you think about the emotion of the moment, maybe a little later, but in that moment, yeah, you're sad. You're thinking about it. But, you've got a job to do, and you've got a story to tell."

Exhibiting Emotional Responses

During our interview, our field journalist participants were asked whether they exhibited any sort of emotional responses when at breaking news and/or severe weather scenes, and if so, how those responses were shown? Participant #2 shared with me the importance of showing emotion and empathy when not on the air. “I’m not crying in my live shots, but I absolutely, especially if I’m talking to somebody who has gone through something that warrants breaking news, and often times it’s tragic, I empathize with them,” Participant #2 said. “I think that that’s something that we really need to be mindful of as journalists. We’re talking to real people. We’re not robots, and they’re not robots. This is somebody who has experienced something traumatic. There’s been some stories where I’ve cried with the folks. I think empathy, just getting down to a human level with people, to me, I think has made me a better journalist.”

Participant #5 talked about showing emotions on a story, but perhaps in a semi-private setting with colleagues. “If I’m in the car with my photographer, and it’s just us two, I’ll vent some frustrations, or tell them how I’m really feeling,” Participant #5 said. “When you’re on the scene, and you’re talking to officials, or witnesses, or people who are probably in a pretty bad situation, there’s no room to express yourself. I feel like I’ve done a pretty good job at keeping my emotions controlled in the heat of the moment, especially when you’re preparing to be on-air, because the viewer has to trust you. At the end of the day, you know, the person on the other side of the TV wants to look at you and not see someone who’s frazzled and doesn’t know what they’re talking about. They want to rely on the information that you’re giving them.”

Meanwhile, Participant #6 believes it’s OK to show emotion on-air if it’s natural. “If you feel emotion, then show it, whether you’re on-air, behind the camera, because we have one life to live, and we need to show people who we are,” Participant #6 said. “It makes us vulnerable, but

it also makes us human just like every other person that will be reading this study. Just like every other person who will be working in a newsroom, or working in the field, or doing any other job. We're all human. We have emotions to a point. It's not a bad thing to show them, especially when a reporter may get choked up during a difficult time. That's not bad. That means you were human. People need to see us like we're not robots. At the end of the day, we are just as human as the viewer watching."

Participant #6 also pointed to a personal tragic experience, and how that's impacted them emotionally while working as a field journalist. "I've had an experience, unfortunately, with suicide in my immediate family," Participant #6 said. "Soon after that, I had a story that I had to cover about suicide. A lot of suicides. I made myself vulnerable to my reporter at the time, and I was not afraid to do so. Because, again, I'm human. It affected me. I told my reporter that I may have a very difficult time getting through the story, either gathering the video, reading the scripts about the suicides, just talking about it, or hearing it. It was a lot. It was a very difficult time getting through that story, and subsequent stories, but I allowed myself to be truthful and transparent to my reporter. I think that's important."

During their interview, Participant #9 also emphasized the role of journalists being human beings, first and foremost, before any job title. "If somebody's family member just died, again, you've got to be a human," Participant #9 said. "For example, yesterday, I was reaching out to some people who lost a loved one. To start off, as a human, I apologize for their loss. You don't want to just get straight to business. It's tough to turn off your feelings. When you're hearing, you're in the environment of what happened in that case, whether it's breaking news, or whether somebody's house flew away, you're seeing the impact that it left. But it's really just being professional and letting people know that you're there to tell their story or get the answers.

Maybe showing a little bit of emotion isn't a bad thing, but at the same time, you almost have to help them understand why you're there."

Finally, Participant #10 shared an example of a turning point on showing emotions when covering a story about a homeless person who died in Norfolk, Virginia. "That was my personal moment of, 'I'm not going to suppress that anymore. And, if my news director doesn't like that, then can get somebody else to work here.' That's how I felt about it," Participant #10 said.

Coping with Breaking News and Severe Weather

When looking at the relationship between emotion and the cognitive appraisal theory, de Hoog and Verboon (2020) explore this in their study on the influence of daily news exposure on emotional states. de Hoog and Verboon (2020) said, "when exposed to news facts, primary appraisal takes places, wherein someone assesses the severity and relevance of the news facts that in turn affect the emotional response." (p. 168). This notion can also be applied to journalists when exposed to breaking news and severe weather scenes, assessing the severity of the scenes, and affecting their emotional response.

When it comes to coping mechanisms when dealing with consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather, they vary amongst the field journalists interviewed for this research. "I'm leaning on my faith," Participant #3 said. "At the end of the day, if something happens, it happens. You can't control situations. But, at least for me, if I beforehand just pray and ask for safety, it makes me feel at ease."

For Participant #5, music is their main method of helping cope with covering breaking news. "If I'm having a rough day, I come home, and just strum some chords on my guitar, my piano, just singing some songs," Participant #5 said. "I've found [that] is a really good way of [a] release, because you're bottling up all these emotions. When you're actively working on the job,

it's not like you can just like release outwardly what you're feeling about what you're covering. So, when I'm here, home in my apartment, and I'm done with this stressful workday, that's a good way to kind of get a little bit of the load off your chest."

Therapy has been a coping method for Participant #6 after covering breaking news and severe weather situations. "If you're at a scene, you've got to focus on what you're doing. Unfortunately, it can become overwhelming in certain instances," Participant #6 said. "For people that may know the victims on scene, for people that may run in the same type circles of those affected, it can cause you to sometimes internalize what you're saying. But, after the fact, therapy is incredibly important. While everything's happening, it's hard to really cope because you've got to be focused on what you're doing."

Participant #9 told one way they cope with breaking news is acceptance of circumstances surrounding their assignment. "My mind almost accepts that it's going to be a tough day, so I'm not dwelling on it too much," Participant #9 said. "I think it goes back to other days where I take my own time, or my own space, my days off where I unplugged. Those mental health breaks are so important." Participant #9 also emphasized the benefit of having a safe space to express emotions, if needed. "Our cars are our office, especially as reporters or MMJs (multi-media journalists). That definitely is a time to decompress. If you have some thoughts about something, I wait until I get back into the car to maybe even express it to my camera person."

Participant #10 said they often cope with reassurances of their personal well-being while on the job. "I always remind myself... that I will go home, and I will be safe when this is over," Participant #10 said. "That thought gives me peace of mind that I will not be in a highly emotional, highly stressful scenario forever. I'm there in the moment to serve my community and serve the people who are hurting in that moment. But, at some point, I will get back in the news

car, and I will go home. Knowing that I will be able to go home to my family is the part that keeps me sane and not frazzled.”

Assessing Covering Traumatic Events

For many of our field journalist participants, I asked how they assess or make of covering breaking news situations that can be traumatic. Both Participant #6 and #7’s answers included a common response for a variety of questions in this research: It’s part of the job. “Whether we’re affected by it or not, we have to show people the power of Mother Nature,” Participant #6 said when referring to covering severe weather impacts. “We have to show people, unfortunately, the worst of the world, because information is power. There are still important stories to tell. If there’s a shooting homicide, stabbing, a mass shooting, [a] tornado rips through and destroys the neighborhood and kills some people or injures people, or even people aren’t injured or killed, but their houses are taken. It’s important to tell their stories. It does weigh on me. I don’t want to speak for others in the in the in the industry and the TV news industry. But it does weigh on me. It can be more difficult. When you’re trying to do your best, when you’re trying to get the most accurate information, and set aside your feelings. Set aside your emotions. But, when you come home, or have a day off, and you think back to the stories you’ve covered in the past week, the past month, in the past quarter or a year, they all start to add up. The bodies, the damage, the loss, it can really add up. But, at the end of the day, we still have to tell the stories.”

“If it’s something that I felt was so detrimental, that I couldn’t do it, I would probably look for a different job,” Participant #7 told me. “I’ve never been at a station, thankfully, where management has ever pushed myself, or anyone to do something you don’t feel comfortable with. So, if there’s a situation [where]I said, ‘I don’t feel comfortable doing this. I can’t do this. It’s just not safe,’ They say no, your safety comes first and foremost.”

Participant #2 also noted their newsroom management is mindful of individual field journalists covering breaking news. “They try to rotate so that one person isn’t being tapped to go to breaking news all the time. That’s been really helpful as well,” Participant #2 said. “When I was in Fort Myers, though, I was what was considered like a senior reporter. Because I had more seniority, I was tapped to cover a lot of those bigger breaking news stories more often, which was great for the experience. But, after a while, I started to feel those burnout feelings again. I spoke to my management, and I was like, ‘Listen, I am so grateful that you guys trust me to do this work, and do it well, but I think we need to kind of divvy up the responsibilities because I’m starting to get that feeling where I’m feeling more anxious at breaking new scenes, [and] where I’m feeling like dread.’ They were pretty receptive to that, and they were able to implement a system where there was more rotation. But again, it’s really about assessing yourself. I feel like I see my career in two halves: having experienced what I experienced in my first half of my career, and then going through that period of taking a break has allowed me to just be reflective, taking those moments to pause and check in with myself. How are you feeling right now? Are we good? Are we ready to go? Or do we need to pause and maybe decline the assignment, or see if there’s a way somebody else can cover what you’re being asked to cover?”

Participant #11, our newsroom manager interviewed for this study, emphasized their personal philosophy on mental health in their newsroom after sharing their own personal experiences. “There is no stigma around mental wellness with me,” Participant #11 said. “It’s sometimes you don’t know what you don’t know. And for whatever reason, some journalists may have a different mindset, where it’s like, ‘Oh, I don’t need help. That’s for others. Oh, I’m not weak.’ Mental wellness is not a sign of weakness. It’s a sign of courage. It’s a sign of, ‘I’m raising my hand, because I need help.’ There’s nothing wrong with asking for help.”

Participant #10 shared with me when they first heard the term “secondhand trauma” when they started going to therapy. “I wished that earlier on in my career, there were more discussions about mental health, and that it’s OK to be affected by the stories you cover,” Participant #10 said. “I think we’re much better now. I’m a member of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ). Each year at our convention, we have several sessions that are geared toward mental health. I spoke at one recently at our convention in Las Vegas to talk about my experience, but it’s like chipping away. It’s chipping away at a dam until it busts loose. You may not notice it’s happening over time, but that one last flick, and the whole thing goes. And so, I think the goal for us, if we really care about the journalists who are doing the work and not just about journalism, is to fortify the dam before it breaks.”

During their response, Participant #9 raised concerns of personally seeing TV news field journalists leave their careers due to mental health reasons. “I’ve seen so many people leave the industry, whether it’s a reporter, a photographer, anybody behind the scenes, we’re all kind of exposed to the same kind of content, maybe of different degrees, but we’re absorbing it constantly,” Participant #9 said. “It’s not just what we’re covering. There are always people, the viewers, somebody’s going to always be upset with you, no matter how hard you work that day, or how well or unwell you deliver the product. Then, there’s just so much behind the scenes of news and so many uncertainties of what the news future is going to look like. It’s not so much with the content that gets to people’s mental health. It’s kind of our own futures. What is the future of journalism right now? It’s not the glam that it once was. It’s not the big paychecks that it once was. A lot of reporters don’t get paid a lot, and they have to put up with a lot. A lot of other people that I know from my personal experience have really just sat down, and while this was their passion maybe at one point, they’re looking long term for their own personal health,

their own mental health. While this is something that they do have a passion for, maybe that's not the best path for their mental health. So, they chose to be happy. They chose a different outlet that that was more on board with making them healthier mentally along the way. Because, if somebody is struggling with covering breaking news every day, could they see themselves doing that for the next 30-40 years? Maybe, but what are the consequences of that? I don't know if I've ever talked to a reporter or a news person that left the industry that said they've regretted it. So, it's kind of something that sits on my own mind is like, 'Man, what, am I missing out on something out there? You've just got to do what makes you happy. I think the tough battle is people see leaving news as failure. This was their choice of major. Their choice of career. And I think the healthiest mentality is to say that you did it. You accomplished it. You did it for however long you did it, and then, it was time for the next chapter. That's not a bad thing.'

Moving Forward

Finally, after speaking about their experiences covering breaking news and severe weather, how they act and react when covering scenes in real-time, I asked our participants if they trauma training at any point during their career, as well as if there were any areas of opportunities, they believed could positively impact the mental health of TV news field journalists who consistently cover breaking news and severe weather.

Trauma Training and Current Resources

As mentioned in the literature review, there's an absence of trauma training amongst journalists (e.g., Weiss, 2013). Amongst the participants in this study, there were mixed answers as to what type of training, if any, they've received before or during their careers. Participant #2 said they received trauma training, but not through their employer. "I'm a member of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ). They have national conferences every

summer. I had been to a few webinars in the first chapter of my career, and since then, where that topic was discussed about the trauma that we experience on a daily basis, because often what we're talking about is traumatic as journalist, and just ways to take care of yourself," Participant #2 said. "I had a little bit of that earlier on in my career, but I don't think I really had a full grasp of the weight of what we experienced on a daily basis, especially with constant breaking news and severe weather coverage."

Participant #2 added the importance of offering trauma training to new journalists in the field just starting their careers. "I wish there was a way that those tools could be made available to journalists and that employers can stress the importance of mental health and taking care of yourself and understanding the impact of trauma, being trained on how to assess your own trauma," Participant #2 said. "If you're at a breaking news situation, have you had to check in with yourself? How are you feeling? Is this normal? Do you need to kind of raise your hand and say, 'I'm not OK?' I think we're only just now getting to a place in the industry where it's OK to say you're not OK. I think, at a certain point, you just kind of have to suck it up and do your job. I think now we're at a place where people can raise their hand and say, I don't think I'm OK. I don't think I should cover the story. I don't think I'm in the mind frame to do this work, and I wish we saw more of that in our industry."

For Participant #3, they shared how they didn't receive any of that early on in their career. "When you actually asked me now, it sounds crazy, right? That I didn't get that," Participant #3 said. "I feel like that should be something that reporters should have in their first market, or maybe even like a course in college before you actually get into the field. When I graduated [from] college, and I started my first market, I was thrown in there like, 'OK, you're covering these stories, do your best job.'"

The same goes for Participant #5 and is an advocate for it being implemented in newsrooms across the country. “I would love to hear from a mental health expert about this is how you should be preparing yourself when you’re on the way to a breaking news situation, and mental health experts who understand our jobs as journalists and what we go through, and kind of giving us different mechanisms to prepare, cope, and handle yourself when you’re in a very stressful situation,” Participant #5 said. “I can’t imagine any journalist who would be against wanting this type of training, or at least some conversations and discussions, even if it’s like peer discussion just about how we can all kind of cope through the coverage of breaking news.”

“I think that especially, with our generation, mental health wasn’t either accepted or as mainstream as it is now,” Participant #9 said, when also talking about not receiving trauma training. “From my perspective, I don’t think I did. I don’t think there was ever, ‘If this is happening, or if you’re feeling this way, you’ve got to take a pause. But I think it’s so great that the generations now, or just everybody now is advocating mental health so much that people’s minds are so important.”

Participant #4 said they recall their newsroom management being mindful of offering trauma training resources when they covered the 2021 Surfside condominium collapse in South Florida. “Prior to that, it was pretty much non-existent. I don’t remember them ever offering anything,” Participant #4 said. “Also, there was never an event I covered where I felt like devastated and needed it.” Participant #4 added their current station under The E.W. Scripps Company and others are more proactive about this subject. “I like to see it,” Participant #4 said. “I would say that’s relatively new to the last four or five years.”

Participant #7 spoke to trainings for covering breaking news and severe weather while with The E.W. Scripps Company. “Here’s the things to look for, here’s the things you don’t want

to do, here's what to do, if you don't feel safe," Participant 7 said. "I know they have resources available of mental health experts that you can talk to. It's not something I've ever been to the level where it's like, 'I need this type thing.' If I have a stressful day, [I] talk to my wife or talk to my colleagues, and typically that's enough that I need." Participant #7 also talked about one specific training video they watched while employed with The E.W. Scripps Company showing what to avoid doing while covering a story. "It was... they [the TV news crew] go to this deadly shooting, there's grieving family members there... and the reporter and the photographer [are] literally getting right up in those people's faces with the camera and aggravating the situation. It's like, 'Why would you do that? It is not worth that potential soundbite for angering a grieving family type thing.'"

Participant #6 did mention current resources offered to employees at The E.W. Scripps Company. "Scripps does offer some resources... they offer resources for you, either in person or mobile therapy sessions," Participant #6 said. "It should be anytime. And, as many times as we need it throughout the year, there should be someone in house at each station to provide for that."

Participant #10 said they did not receive trauma training while in college and talked about how conversations regarding mental health have evolved since they were in school. "I graduated from Florida A&M University, where I received a stellar education in journalism. I graduated in 2007. If you think about the era, we were not having conversations about mental health in journalism at all 15 years ago," Participant #10 said.

Participant #10 stated they believe The E.W. Scripps Company, "Provides a pathway to mental health professionals," but they have not utilized that in their time with the company. "I have had my own therapist for the last 11 years," Participant #10 said. They also mentioned their current station under The E.W. Scripps Company has been helpful for providing mental health

days to employees. “I think the culture of more people speaking up about, ‘Hey, I need a mental health day,’ is more acceptable. I think that means our news managers are not taken aback when they hear it and are more willing to make adjustments so people can be well.”

Participant #10 also added an absence of trauma training, particularly amongst journalism students, has impacts on the TV news industry. “The absence, I think, explains why we have so many people leaving the field of journalism, especially younger journalists in their 20s and 30s,” Participant #10 said. “You think, ‘Oh wow, I’ll be fine,’ and if you’re not prepared for the level of secondhand trauma that you’ll face or even aware that you’re going to take home some the emotional weight of many of the stories you cover, this generation is not for it. They’re like, ‘Oh, no, I’m out,’ and they will figure out another way to serve their community and try to be effective. I think, because we have not been candid about that, or forward thinking about that, that we are losing people. Good people. I think we have to have maybe a class on mental health in journalism schools early on, to talk about the signs of anxiety and depression, the signs of secondhand trauma. And most importantly, how do you get to therapy? What do you do in an emergency situation? But, if you get into a good therapist at that moment, it can help set you up well. You can be fortified right and continue to serve your community.”

Areas of Opportunities

The last portion of my interviews with the TV news field journalists involved participants being asked if they felt there were any areas of opportunities. These elicited a wide range of responses. Participant #4 believes areas of opportunities for TV news field journalist mental health resources should be looked at on a person-by-person basis. “Everyone’s different. Everyone’s got a different mindset, and just having the options there,” Participant #4 said.

“Maybe don’t treat all the reporters as a lump. Just kind of be mindful of the different strengths and what you see and being more targeted in that when you when you offer it.”

Participant #1 shared the thought of having regular mental health check-ins, perhaps in a group setting, particularly for those who regularly cover breaking news. “I think that needs to be discussed, because so often, I feel like people, they’re suffering probably pretty silently, probably more than I am,” Participant #1 said. “You talk to people who are in the business, and everybody’s just so tired and so exhausted, and you can kind of get the idea that everybody’s kind of in the same boat a little bit, maybe some worse than others. If there is any sort of room where people can literally talk about how they’re being impacted by this, without fear of being accused of being lazy, or not doing their job. If there would be a space for that, maybe do some sort of roundtable thing, or just any situation where you can bring the walls down and be honest, I think that will be really helpful, especially for the younger folks.”

Participant #3 talked about the current mental health resources The E.W. Scripps Company offers their news employees, including therapy sessions mentioned earlier by another participant. “I think the free therapy sessions that Scripps offers, that was very helpful for me. That was helpful for me when I had to utilize that at one point in my career, and I was just happy that my company offered those resources, and the therapists had a listening ear,” Participant #3 said.

Along with The E.W. Scripps Company’s current mental health resources, Participant #5 believes there’s also an opportunity for in-house support at the company’s stations throughout the country. “It would be nice if we had someone in person who understands the unique challenges and obstacles that our newsroom in Richmond faces and knows the unique stories that

journalists in Richmond cover and could help us sort through that and walk us through that,” Participant #5 said.

Participant #5, like Participant #1, also brought up the idea of peer support groups. “Getting together groups of journalists to talk about what it is that is upsetting us at the moment, whether it’s we had a really hard week of coverage, or we’re just doing kind of like a weekly, bi-weekly, maybe monthly check-in with everybody to kind of get a grasp of like, ‘OK, what challenges are we all facing right now? What can we do about it together? How can we cope through it together? And are we at a point where we need to collectively kind of bring these concerns to management or corporate and say, hey, we’re all feeling really affected by A, B, C? Here’s how we think you could kind of step in and offer some support. I think that would be kind of a good way for us to connect with one another on a human level,” Participant #5 added. “If you’re trying to recruit new people to you, why not go ahead and offer that robust support?”

Participant #10 believes there’s four areas of opportunities that newsrooms can implement to help field journalists’ mental health: four-day workweeks, increasing paid time off (PTO) specific wellness days for mental health purposes, on-site mental health professionals, and better pay. “Most journalists are not working eight-hour days, we are working 10- and 11-hour days, easily,” Participant #10 said regarding the push for four-day workweeks in newsrooms. They also talked about the need for more PTO specific wellness days for mental health. “If you’re looking at a bank of PTO, and you’re struggling mentally, but you have a trip planned to see your family and Christmas, you have to decide, do I go see my family at Christmas? Or do I take this mental health day? Or will I tough it out,” Participant #10 said. “When people tough it out, that’s when the dam breaks. Companies need to assess, including my beloved Scripps, additional PTO for its employees. I guarantee because every journalism company is experiencing

a mass exodus right now. People are leaving because people are choosing to be broke over being burnt out. The only way to address that is if you acknowledge that with a four-day work week [and] increase PTO.”

Like Participant #5, Participant #10 also brought up the idea to have a locally sourced therapist for field journalists at TV news stations. “I know we [Scripps] have the virtual resources for therapists, which is great. I think it would also be good to identify like one or two therapists in each town that can be available to serve journalists in the building to have in-person appointments, and someone who is trained specifically, in secondhand trauma,” Participant #10 said. “For example, we had a fairly young reporter who was recovering who was covering a rally or a vigil, and then there was a shooting while she was there. Thank God she took some days off and our management approved that [and] didn’t give her grief about needing that time. But how great would it have been if she were to know there was a person she could call who was on-call, and she could be in their therapy office the next day?”

Participant #10, like other field journalists participating in this study, referenced personally seeing other journalists leave the TV news industry for mental health reasons. “Several good people. The weight of it was too much, and there wasn’t enough balance to make it make sense anymore, and when I say balance, I mean balance in terms of time off [and] in terms of compensation,” Participant #10 said. “What I think we’re seeing is people feel run into the ground. So, at some point, they have to decide, do I do this thing I feel like I was born to do? Because many of us as journalists, we feel like we were born to do this. Or do I figure out a different pathway to do it where I can have better balanced mental health? That’s the decision people are making.”

After being organically brought up by some of the study's participants, I asked other participants in the study about the thought of ideas, such as more PTO mental health wellness days and a local therapist affiliated with a TV news station.

In terms of more PTO days specifically for mental health purposes, Participant #3 was all for that idea, suggesting perhaps 7-10 days to be used throughout the year, along with already allotted PTO days. "We need that, [there's] no doubt about it," Participant #3 said. "I personally feel like you shouldn't have to use vacation days as a mental health day. I feel like there should be allocated time in your bank for sick days, vacation days, [and] mental health days. The CEOs and Presidents of these big corporations, they need to hop on the wave."

Participant #8 agrees with the thought of having more mental health specific PTO days, even pointing to a recent example of a breaking news story they worked on. "I actually worked an extra day on my day off to do a story. I got an extra day off the following day to compensate for that, but that was a really intense story," Participant #8 said. "I honestly probably could have used an extra day after going through that."

After speaking with the TV news field journalists who participated for this research, Participant #11, our news manager, was asked about the thought of more PTO days for mental health purposes. "It's a delicate balance," Participant #11 said. "For some, you have folks who are, 'OK, well what happens if I decide not to take that mental wellness? Do I still get to add it to my PTO bank? Or is it just not there for years? You may have someone else who says, 'Oh yeah, I need it all the time. It is what it is.' From that standpoint, I would be hesitant because I would think some would abuse it. That's what I think leaves are for, when you're asking for a leave of absence, all these different things. I don't think we're there yet with adding more PTO because, from a business standpoint, you have to look at how it's affecting the business and the bottom

line. From an HR standpoint, I could see that as a great resource to offer employees. I can see multiple perspectives. I can see the perspective from the business, I can see the perspective from HR, I could see it from a recruiter standpoint, 'Hey, this is a great recruitment opportunity for us to use to get people.' I see the employee perspective, 'Hey, I need help. I should be able to take time off when I want to.'

While for the idea, Participant #9 also brought up the question of whether employees would abuse the privilege of more mental health specific PTO days. "Are there people that are going to abuse the privilege? I'm sure. There's really no way to avoid that. But, [it's] risk versus reward," Participant #9 said. "Would you rather have a few people that are going to take advantage of the system for the benefit of people that genuinely need it? I think that's a good option. A lot of people, even if people are sick, they show up because they don't want to lose their PTO days. So how do they justify their mental health?"

When it comes to the notion of a local therapist being affiliated with TV news stations to help field journalists' mental health after consistently covering breaking news and/or severe weather, Participant #8 is open to the idea. "It would be nice to have somebody plugged in and specially trained with the news industry," Participant #8 said. "Kind of like an HR [representative], but someone with less of a HR field. Someone who's actually just a therapist on-site. You don't feel like it's going to have a conversation with management, but now I got an actual confidential therapist."

Participant #9 believes this idea would be great at stations when looking at it from a point of consistency. "It's tough to open up to a stranger, so establishing a set mental health resource at a news station where it's the same person constantly that understands what you're going through, what maybe other people are going through would probably be the best way for you to kind of

unload, honestly,” Participant #9 said. “I think a lot of people try to keep our ‘big boy’ [or] ‘big girl’ pants on, when in reality, to really unload, you have to be honest and vulnerable, which is tough sometimes.”

When asked about the idea of a local therapist for employees from a news management, Participant #11 likes the idea particularly from a group setting point of view. “When I was in Denver, I was working with a psychologist there that would help students. I would talk to her about stories in the news, getting her take, and sometimes having her on the air to help other parents navigate some of the challenges that they’re hearing and seeing in the community,” Participant #11 said. “But, as far as maybe coming in and talking to employees, sure. But, maybe not in a closed one-on-one, but maybe as a group. I would be open to that.”

Overall, Participant #11 said they always believe there’s more opportunities to better serve employees with mental wellness. “Sometimes, maybe it’s just a mental wellness gut check,” Participant #11 said. “What’s been the response for those journalists who have witnessed the worst of the worst, and yet the best of the best with humanity and compassion when communities come together? I think it’s a balance. What we can do, though, is be better about opening up the lines of communication, to check on your mental well-being. Because a lot of times, you’re just going to get surface level answers. But, I think if you can make resources available, or just remind folks, especially after big events, bad events, that there’s something there.”

Participant #11 also shared being a big supporter of mental wellness and resources, including therapy. “You can’t be your best unless you’re going in for checkups,” Participant #11 said. “It’s like a car. You’ve got to go in and get your tune-ups. This is someone who is trained to help get in there. It’s part of your well-being, and that’s where I go. You just need a tune-up.”

DISCUSSION

What are the mental health impacts TV news field crews experience from consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather? The answers within this study vary. When looking at the responses from the 10 TV news field journalists and TV news manager in this research project, it's believed that TV news field journalists can encounter a wide range of mental health impacts (i.e., burnout) when covering breaking news and/or severe weather on a consistent basis. One participant talked openly about taking a break from their career due to effects from burnout while on the job. Another brought up the notion of secondhand trauma while covering breaking news for their TV station. Also, through the lens of the cognitive appraisal theory, this study gained insight into how TV news field crews assess, react, and act emotionally when out on breaking news and severe weather scenes. Other participants talked about seeking mental health resources within their parent company (The E.W. Scripps Company) or outside of their parent company (i.e., private therapy) due to stories they've covered. Each interview brought a unique perspective about how breaking news and/or severe weather has shaped their life, either personally or professionally, how it has impacted their mental health, acting and reacting while on breaking news scenes, coping mechanisms, and exploring areas of opportunity.

One point of discussion from this study is a conversation of having more trauma training available, especially for newer journalists either studying the craft in college or just starting their careers in their first TV news market. This study has an opportunity to serve as a resource for colleges and universities, as well as networks and station ownership groups like The E.W. Scripps Company, to start talking about how trauma training is currently being applied, and if there are any areas of growth to add more instances of trauma training to prepare journalists for

consistent breaking news and severe weather coverage throughout their careers. Tara Pixley looked at the argument for trauma-informed safety training with journalists, even interviewing visual journalists about particular training they've had that's helped them in their careers. Pixley (2022) spoke with photojournalist Vanessa Charlot, who told Pixley her training as a NextGen fellow was, "super holistic in that it talked about our identity and also covered things other safety trainings do, but what I found so important was the trauma informed aspect. After you cover the story, how do you take care of yourself and how do you decompress?" (Pixley, 2022, para. 5). Pixley (2022) also cites a 'personal resilience toolkit' from another photojournalist, Rosem Morton, that Morton offers to colleagues in the journalism field to help their mental health and overall well-being (para. 16). The toolkit is named, 'RESPECT' (Pixley, 2022, para. 17:

- R (Relaxation: Finding a way to calm and relax the body)
- E (Education: Understanding the mechanics of trauma)
- S (Social: Making and keeping supportive social connections)
- P (Physical: Coming into contact with our physical body)
- E (Exercise: Staying active)
- C: (Creativity: Activating the creative part of the brain)
- T: (Thinking: Challenging the negative thinking that can consume the mind after a trauma)

Morton's toolkit that Pixley elaborates on should be a standard resource in all TV newsrooms to help journalists who consistently cover breaking news and severe weather.

I also believe this study can also help spark a conversation regarding a new lens of how companies, like The E.W. Scripps Company, can enhance current benefits, as well as introduce new resources to help journalists' mental health. A vast majority believe two key resources could

be individual stations affiliating with a local therapist familiar with the immediate area to help administer care to TV news field journalists after breaking news situations, along with the current therapy options the company offers. Also, perhaps more PTO days to be added each individual field journalists' time off bank specifically to be used as wellness days for mental health purposes. That way, employees feel they are not strapped for resources if they need a day to decompress, and don't have to choose whether to use a day for mental health purposes following a breaking news event or save it for a particular holiday or event later in the year.

Limitations

There are some critiques of this study. While there are arguably many strengths to semi-structured interviews for qualitative research, there are also weaknesses. One being the possibility of data loss when interviews are not conducted face-to-face (i.e., through online video conferencing tools) or written interviews (Kakilla, 2021). Also, it's not ideal for group settings because the method requires active listening (Kakilla, 2021). Therefore, this is why interviews were conducted individually. I would've liked the chance to interview more TV news field journalists from other stations across the country, as well as speak to more journalists about severe weather coverage. However, given the time constraints for this project's completion, I feel the quality and quantity of these interviews were sufficient. I do believe there's a potential for more similar studies after this. One, a study can look at other newsroom positions, particularly TV news producers, of how breaking news and severe weather coverage impacts their mental health. Also, a study geared more towards severe weather coverage with meteorologists in the field could be beneficial since breaking news outweighed severe weather in terms of coverage experience within this study. Finally, a study looking at retention in newsrooms after major singular breaking news events of recent memory: How has newsroom staffing been impacted

from these singular events, the weight of individuals' mental health on the results, and the station's/company's response?

Conclusion

Pixley (2022) also stated, "In order to continue doing the important work of journalism, news media producers have to protect themselves from burnout by practicing self-care," (para. 6). I couldn't agree more with her on this. Journalism is one of the most important professions to help keep the public informed and aware of their immediate and overall surroundings, and to ensure the public is getting the best quality work, we need to take care of the content creators so they can deliver upon what's so vital to our society.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Personal Reflection

This project has led me to reflect on my decision to pursue a master's degree in journalism at the University of Missouri. One of my goals with MU's master's program was to work on a project where I could feel accomplished and proud, and hopefully could make a difference in the field I've spent nearly a decade of my life in. Looking back on these past two years, and more specifically this research project, I feel that those goals have been met. The issue of mental health amongst TV news field journalists covering breaking news and severe weather consistently is the area I wanted to explore right from the start with MU's Journalism master's program.

For nearly 10 years, I've encountered different newsrooms, companies, geographical areas, and communities with all sorts of stories. That's one of the many benefits of this career: the ability to meet people from all walks of life and to collaborate with different skillsets to inform a community. While stories can range from a wide variety of different backgrounds, breaking news and severe weather seem to be two prominent subjects for newsgathering. These are stories that are developing in minutes, if not seconds, and possess information viewers need to know to be aware of their local surroundings and to stay safe.

Throughout my career, I've covered different breaking news and severe weather stories. Severe weather stories have revolved around hurricanes, tornadoes, snowstorms, and wildfires. Meanwhile, a few breaking news stories I've covered that still stand out to me include two mass shootings in Virginia, a deadly tour bus crash in California, and a high-profile court case of a California family torturing, abusing, and imprisoning their children. While it has been years since I've last covered some of these stories, they all impact me today from a mental health

standpoint. I've come across other journalists who have similar thoughts and feelings about covering these types of stories, as well as the more regular breaking news stories (e.g., shootings, murders, crashes). When I started meeting and talking with these people in the field, and found out that I wasn't alone, I knew this was an area that had to be explored. This project further confirmed to me common experiences and feelings expressed by others across the industry.

I, like many others in this industry, have a passion for this business. Over the course of my career, I've seen many people leave the industry due to mental health reasons. As journalists, it's our modus operandi to do good by our community. We help our communities stay informed, put an investigative lens on certain topics of public interest or areas that may not be widely known, and we share inspiring stories of our neighbors. For us to keep doing this, our journalists need to make sure they're taking care of their mental health, and companies need to make sure they're providing as many tools and resources as possible to employees to help with recruitment and retention in this industry. This project also confirmed an argument for a conversation amongst TV news station ownership groups to assess their current mental health resources and see if there's any room to add more help for their employees.

I can relate academic research in a way to being like investigative reporting. You're working on a long-term project, interviewing different sources, and compiling it all together with hopes of better informing the public, providing greater understanding of an issue, and hopefully can spark change. I'm confident this research can do that for the greater good of individual journalists and the entire industry.

Appendix II: Participant Information Table

Participant	Current Role	Gender	Years of Experience
Participant #1	Anchor/Reporter	Male	10
Participant #2	Reporter	Female	6
Participant #3	Reporter/Multimedia Journalist	Female	3
Participant #4	Photojournalist	Male	23.5
Participant #5	Reporter	Male	5 (1.5 years as a Reporter)
Participant #6	Photojournalist	Anonymous	5
Participant #7	Reporter/Multimedia Journalist/Fill-In Anchor	Male	6
Participant #8	Reporter/Multimedia Journalist	Female	5-7
Participant #9	Reporter	Male	7 (All with The E.W. Scripps Company)
Participant #10	Anchor/Reporter/Investigative Reporter	Female	16
Participant #11 ¹	TV News Manager	Anonymous	25 (4 years as TV News Manager at The E.W. Scripps Company)

¹ Participant #11 was an employee of The E.W. Scripps Company when they agreed to do the interview during the research project proposal. Shortly after that, they left to work as a news manager with another TV news company.

Appendix III: Participant Interview Raw Transcripts (Transcribed via Otter) ²

PARTICIPANT 1 ZOOM RECORDING RAW

01:31

I've always been a reporter or anchor or or both in some way. I mean, MMJ, I guess, too. And so I yeah, I've worked here for almost six years. Before that I was in Flint, Michigan, at the ABC station there for two years. And before that I was in Lansing, Michigan, at the NBC affiliate there for two and a half years.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:56

And for those who may not be in the know, like us, I mean, what type of responsibilities come with the jobs that we have? And the jobs that you've had? Specifically here? Oh, man,

02:07

um, a lot. I think, you know, fortunately, I feel like it's gotten a little a little bit less since I've moved up in my career. When I first started working, I mean, you know, you're, you're coming up with so many story ideas every single day, you're, then you're going out and you're, well, you're making calls, and then you're going out and you're shooting your story or shooting interviews, and B roll. And then you are coming back and you're writing your story. And then you're editing it all in time. For my first show. Yeah, we had a four o'clock news show. And our meeting was at 10. So all in a matter of six hours. That was kind of wild. In Flint, I was lucky enough that they did not have him MJS somehow for market 70 or whatever it was they I only had to come up with story ideas, and then write and edit my story, but I didn't have to shoot it. So that was cool. And then, then when I came here, since we are mm jays, again, it's kind of the same thing. I think I have less responsibility in terms of like MMJ things than maybe some of the non anchor reporters at our station. But I think when you're an anchor, and it's a leadership position, and you take on other roles that aren't official, like writing web stories, or, you know, making decisions or, you know, helping produce the show.

Zak Dahlheimer 03:26

Sure. I mean, it's a gamut of lots of different features throughout your career, your responsibilities. Yeah. I you know, and I know that we've talked about this, but you know, for for this, for the record here. What made you want to get into journalism?

03:43

Yeah. So I will say like, as a kid, I was the normal kid in the sense that the news was boring to me. However, the people on the news were not boring to me. Does that make sense? So, like, I used to, like, watching the news with like, my parents at six o'clock, like for WD IV in Detroit, I remember that. I think the six o'clock was called, like news beat. And, and I just remember, like, being so fascinated by that. And because then then if you said up to the 11pm, it was called Nightbeat. And I was like, I'm gonna, I'm gonna stay up, and I'm gonna watch Nightbeat I wonder what that's all about? Turns out, it's the same as news beat. It's just five hours later. Yeah, and so I just, I don't know, I really liked that. I liked the idea of, I mean, in Detroit, they

² Certain identifying information has been omitted from transcripts to help protect the research study's participants.

were local. They were celebrities, you know, our news people. Yeah, I mean, they, they were, I wouldn't even say they were local celebrities. They were celebrities to us, you know. And I just thought that was such a cool thing. And Detroit's a great news town. So being able to like tell these stories and be in the know on things and be able to ask as many questions as you want. That's like your job. I think that was the coolest thing to me because I love asking questions, whether I'm working or not. And then when it came time, so I I applied to school. And I applied to Michigan State. And they said, you know, there was a, like a drop down thing and said, Hey, what's your major that you want to be? And I honestly didn't know what I wanted to be. I mean, I knew I thought journalism was cool. And so I was kind of like, I saw journalism, and I'm like, Oh, those broadcasters, that is pretty cool. I think I could do that. And so that's how I kind of got into it. And then I got through, like, the intro classes in college, and I was like, I don't know about this. And then I got to the actual broadcast stuff. And I'm like, Okay, this is pretty cool. Yeah, and I think that's, that's generally it, I didn't do it in high school or anything like that, I kind of just didn't use it and kind of stuck to that. And then once it came time to really choosing a career path, that's the one I chose within. And fortunately, it stopped.

Zak Dahlheimer 05:47

So you had that connection, you know, when you were a kid when seeing the people on TV, and then also then getting the interests of like, wanting to know what's going on and ask the questions. And you kind of revisited that when you try when it was time for you to choose a major in college. And you're like, This is what I want to do.

06:03

Yeah. And I really loved watching things that they would do in the community too. So like Detroit, the International Auto Show, they're huge deal. Obviously. Car Motor City. Yeah. And I remember one of the stations would sponsor it, and they would dress up in gowns and tuxes and get to be like, you know, VIPs and do like a whole broadcast from the car show, you know, and I thought that was so cool. I thought, I don't know, I just I just loved that aspect of it, too. I like to be able to be in the know, ask all these questions like, and then also being able to be in the community and do fun things. And I just, I just thought it was the bee's knees, which I've never said, could be the

Zak Dahlheimer 06:41

bee's knees. I like that. Well, I want to go now to I want to start asking you about your personal experience covering breaking news and severe weather and how it relates to mental health since this is what the research project that I'm working on is entailed. First, I want to ask you, you know, you have more than 10 years in the business, postgrad. Throughout your career, how often would you say you've had to cover breaking news and severe weather in the field?

07:14

I think a lot more when I was working evenings. So that was my first two years at news three. And then I also worked two years in Flint, exclusively nightside. And then, you know, I was nightside. At some point, my first session, I don't really remember. So probably about half the time I was like in those shifts that was like every single day was going to be a good chance for some sort of breaker are something that I had to go to. Fortunately, weather events haven't been so bad. I mean, I've covered well, you know, I've covered a couple hurricanes and tornadoes

here. And in Michigan, I feel like we didn't really have the weather events weren't too bad. Maybe a tornado here or there. Or like really bad snow.

Zak Dahlheimer 08:04

Yeah, I think it was like here in the Outer Banks in southeast Virginia, I think I think it was Dorian, that you had covered, right?

08:12

Yes. So yeah, the most significant severe weather event that I can think of was, I want to say it was Hurricane Dorian in 2019. And it was a borderline almost category two hurricane that was just off the coast of the Outer Banks. And I actually asked to go to the Outer Banks for that, because I actually really enjoy severe weather coverage. And breaking news, actually, what,

Zak Dahlheimer 08:36

how do you I was gonna say, what, what, what do you make of enjoying it so much, both of those,

08:42

you know? I don't know, I just love when it's, I just, I feel like everybody who's going to report on it. It's kind of in the same boat, like nobody really knows what's going on. And you have to go and you have to like find the story. We're all in the same boat. It's not one of those things where, you know, it's like this, this ongoing story and you're like competing with these people to like, Oh, I'm gonna get like, you know, this exclusive interview, like, and the storms are unpredictable. And I don't know, I just I really enjoy it. I really kind of like it. Like, you feel like a real reporter when you're in that stuff. And I don't know, it's it's always really exciting. And it gets your heart pumping a little bit. And you're running around and makes the day go by faster. I don't know. I feel like it's a terrible answering. I'm so sorry.

Zak Dahlheimer 09:32

No, no, no, no, I mean, it's like an adrenaline rush kind. It

09:35

really is though. You know? It definitely it is especially because like the stuff that I cover Sophie Cherie so often, you know, which I really enjoy. But it's like it's nice to be able to get out and, and you know, when a hurricane is coming to be able to like, be the one who's in it safely of course. But, you know, I it's just you you really don't know. I mean, the story is right there. And I think that's part of it too is you're not coming in with Like, what story idea? Am I going to do? Am I going to be to make these calls like the story is there it is happening you're like the the extraneous stress of like trying to, you know, find story ideas, find context do all this other crap is kind of pushed aside and the story is right there. And it's what you make of it, you know, and I, I just really love it.

Zak Dahlheimer 10:21

So you're kind of in the camp of like, because I know that I've talked with others who, you know, it's it's like you you know, some have said, Yeah, you know, I really thrive and really, you know, look, look to cover breaking news, severe weather, others not so much. But you're

kind of in the camp of, hey, if it's happening, like, I'll go, I want to go. I want to be out there on the front lines.

10:41

Oh, yeah, absolutely. You know, and I just think, yeah, really, it's true. I just, I think, because I've been in the in the backline. So like the previous quote, unquote, hurricane, which ended up missing our area largely, was Florence, to Wilmington. And the folks who went to the Outer Banks at least still saw something like tropical storm force winds, maybe if I remember, right, they sent me to Newport News. It was a drizzle, and a lady was collecting driftwood behind me in my live shots. You know what I mean? Like that? I don't know, I haven't really felt more useless. I think so. Yeah, I like to be the go to guy when it comes to stuff like that. I like to be, I like to be in it. I like to be where the actions. I think that's kind of how I live my life, though. In general. Like, I like to, I think I have like, really bad FOMO? You know, fear of missing out? In general? Yeah. I think that that might be part of it. Actually, it might be this underlying issue of, maybe don't be worried so much about what other people are doing. But it's like, I don't I don't want to miss it. So well.

Zak Dahlheimer 11:49

You know, looking at severe weather, since we've talked about that a little bit, you know, and I know I brought up hurricane Dorian. And that was kind of like the one where you were like in the thick of it. Would you say that? That's when it comes to severe weather. Like that's the event that that stands out to you? Because you were like, really in it?

12:06

Yeah, and especially because I didn't grow up with hurricane. So that was a first time thing for me. And then yeah, on top of that, actually being in it, and like, you know, being in like hurricane force winds and being like, hit hard enough by the wind to be like, You know what, I think I need to walk back inside. Like, while I'm live on TV, you know, I think that that was just, that's an adrenaline rush, man. It's crazy. You know, and no one like your family is at home watching like back up north. Like they're not dealing with this like, and yeah, and I'm the person that people are turning to to like, be like, This is what it's like outside. And I just think, man, now I'm thinking back to it. So it's like, I'll come back. Just the fact that we got there the day before. And there was like, no wind, and it was a blue sky. And just like the development over time, and really and just like a matter of a couple of hours, like going from like, oh, it's windy out to like, I'm blowing away. Yeah, it was really cool. What was your question?

Zak Dahlheimer 13:02

No, I was gonna say, um, that that that answers the question about it's, it's a significant event from a severe weather standpoint. But

13:09

what about from my sorry, from my standpoint, I would say it is the most significant severe weather we covered a tornado. I got Emmy nominated for once a few years. Yeah, it was in Chesapeake. But I don't think I mean, like I had covered tornadoes before. You know what I mean? So it was cool. We got nominee for like, a team coverage me, you know, so that was, that

was awesome. Yeah. But, you know, that wasn't that that was an event that something of the like, that I've covered in the past. So

Zak Dahlheimer 13:37

back up in Michigan? Yeah. Yeah. You know,

13:42

it was crazy. It blew up part of church. It was wild. That's where they sent me. Yeah. And so it was a crazy night. And trust me, I had fun with that. But the hurricane was, was was a first time thing for me.

Zak Dahlheimer 13:54

Sure. What about when it comes to breaking news means they're in your career? When from a breaking news standpoint, is there a particular event that stands out to you?

14:04

Um, a couple of them. The earliest one would be like, okay, so I worked in Flint from 20, we'll say 15. I got there like December 14, but 2015 to the end of 2016. And so, nine months into when I got to Flint is when the Flint water crisis really broke out. We had a press conference at the big hospital there. And the head pediatrician at the hospital came out and said, so you know, you guys have been concerned about them finding blood in the water. Well, guess what we found it in your children's blood to in the blood samples we've been taking. So that was like, that was when the water crisis really, like just blew up. And we had to be live like that night with that. So that was a pretty big breaking news moment. Not so much in the sense of like you think of like, weather or fire or shooting just different, you know, because like at the same time, I was also 25 and I didn't know So, what that meant that that makes sense, you know, I didn't really know.

Zak Dahlheimer 15:04

He's still pretty, pretty young in your career, you know, pretty young in my career and like, Yeah,

15:09

I knew lead was bad. Like, don't get me wrong, like I knew that. But like, I didn't realize the magnitude of the impact this would have. But I don't think anybody did. And so that was a big one. And then I would say the mass shooting in Virginia Beach in was on May 31. of 19. I think, yeah, I wasn't there for the actual night that it happened. I was already off. But I came in the next morning and reported. So I guess it wasn't technically maybe breaking at that point. But I mean, it was still unfolding. And I will never forget, like, the eerie quietness of like that area. So like, the only thing you could hear was, because we were right by where the building where it happened was like the other journalists doing their live shots, and then like, distant rumbles of thunder. It was like, other than that, silence those crazy

Zak Dahlheimer 15:57

Wow. Well, there's so the Virginia Beach mass shooting here. And then, you know, the the Flint water crisis, you know, up in Flint, if you could speak to either one of those or both of those if you'd like. But why do they Why do those two stand out to you? I mean, I know that you

mentioned flau, because you're seeing the families with the pediatrician, maybe and just seeing their reactions in real time as being a very emotional problem. Yeah,

16:24

I just I just remember, you know, there were hints that it was gonna be a big problem, you know, because they were finding it in like the water testing, you know, in homes and certain homes. You know, we didn't know it was in people. I mean, we knew, but we didn't, you know. And I just think looking back, I think that was one of those things where maybe in that moment, I didn't realize how big of a deal it is. But then I look back at the next year and a half of my career, like the last 18 months, in my contract there were almost exclusively reporting on that, you know, yeah. And it really, I think, you know, it became memorable, when you first when you really started getting out into the city and actually talking to like, real people, you know, going to their homes, or, you know, we had one of our anchors, follow ladies to doctor appointments, they like, you know, they were like having kids or whatnot. I mean, like it so it was, I think that sticks out just based on like, what developed after that. And then the mass shooting, I just, you know, I mean, that was just, it's a cliché at this point, because I feel like everybody, nobody's going to be surprised if it comes to their community anymore. But I think, you know, it's just one of those things where, like, wow, like, they'll just the way it happened, you know, being off work, and seeing emails about like a possible shooting at the courthouse. And, you know, we didn't have anything confirmed right off the bat of like, how many people were even hurt slash dead. But like, you kind of knew, based on what you read, like, Oh, this is gonna be really bad. You know, and then I'm, we're at a friend's house have a barbecue. And when they put the press conference out that a dozen people died. And it was that's just wild. I mean, you know, that was something that so many other people have had to report on and deal with, then all of a sudden, it's like, in your own community. I live in Virginia Beach, you know? Yeah. And all of a sudden, you have people asking you, Hey, are you okay? Folks who live out of town, and I just think that that was such a, you know, it was always something that I read about, or I or I, you know, reported about from a distance but never wasn't in my own community. So that really does stick out. Another one. Katherine, another one. Sure. Yeah. Oh, yeah. I'm just thinking, I'm trying to make sure I give you my first job within like the first two months. So Michigan, so Lansing is the state capitol there and Michigan's governor was signing gonna sign I think, a bill into law to make it a right to work state. So basically, you know, the unions all union folks, which you can imagine in a state that is known for UAW, United Auto Workers, and like, all these other locals and unions, it was not a lot of people who are not excited about it. Right. So that was one day, there were literally like, 12,000 people just surrounding the capital protesting the signing of this bill. And that was something I had to cover, like, I came in, in the morning show and like, covered it all the way. And that was my first time I think ever reporting and like a massive crowd protesting at the state capitol. And that was like, a taste of like, whoa, you know, like, you kind of realize just like, how big some of the stuff can end up being and you know, I'm at that point 22 And I'm like, How did I get here? And why am I the one that they're trusting? You know, you kind of that that was an event I feel like like that was that made me feel like a very small fish in a very big pond.

Zak Dahlheimer 19:47

Kind of like you just it just hits you right there because you're just in the moment and all of it.

19:51

Oh, yeah. You know, and it's like, you know, they tell you oh, there's me a lot of people there and then you just kind of see people gathering and gathering before you know it. It's just this chanting like you're stuck in the mud. It'll be like 1000s of people chanting at the door of the Capitol. You know, I remember they like walked up these these like makeshift gigantic rats with with like the governor's name and like couple other people's names and like walked up to the door and I'm like, what is happening right now?

Zak Dahlheimer 20:19

Why Wow.

20:20

Yeah, so that was a pretty big one too that one I had to think about. But

Zak Dahlheimer 20:26

what about? So has this kind of like a two part question here has consistent coverage of breaking news, the severe weather on the job impacted you personally, but has it also guided your career path? I think it's,

20:43

I think it's like when you say guided my career path, like, led me in a certain direction. Yeah, build my career or,

Zak Dahlheimer 20:50

like lead you to certain direction build your career, kind of like a was it like your your your your niche for a while?

21:00

Well, I mean, I was, I guess the breaking news like morning reporter for like six months when I first got the morning show here. And then they moved me to features not because I was bad at breaking because I just didn't want to do it. They offered me features. Sure. I would say I don't think like the breaking news itself and weather events, like takes a toll on me. You know, I mean, physically, yeah, you're exhausted at the end of it. You know, I think that the moreso the everyday stress of the job is something that I think has very much affected me mentally. But breaking news, I think. I don't know, it just kind of it just kind of depends, I guess, you know, like the Virginia Beach mass shooting was really hard. You know, because that's just I don't know, I'm really good at compartmentalizing, I guess if that makes sense. You know, I'm really good at not being so in the moment where it really affects me emotionally. And, and so sometimes I wonder if that's like unhealthy a little bit, you know what I mean? Like, if it's like, almost like, I'm too disjointed and disconnected from it, but it's just one of those things where I've, I don't know if that's, that's just how I am I just try not to like, let myself, you know, fall into the moment. But yeah, I would say I mean, I would say that more so the, the everyday stress of the job has definitely impacted me, especially mentally, you know, breaking news, if it's not, you know, back to back to back, it's not so bad. But it is exhausting. I'm always really like, you know, you know, you've been on those trips, like, you know, yeah, you got to the Outer Banks, and you're gone for three days, and you come back and you just you're just tired mentally,

Zak Dahlheimer 22:46

physically and physically, emotionally, maybe. Yeah, a little

22:49

bit. Yeah. I mean, if you are, you know, telling those kinds of stories of people losing things, you know. And I think that that's, yeah, I think especially now with the pandemic and everything, too. I mean, like, on top of all of it. I mean, I think we're just all exhausted.

Zak Dahlheimer 23:08

It's kind of like, it's like, it's like a wake up call for all of us kind of like, yeah, last couple of years. I mean, I've had people tell me that like, as far as for mental health standpoint? Oh, yeah.

23:17

For sure. You know, and as somebody who has, like, a way of like, or who somebody who's struggled with that, like, really my entire life, I mean, I think that it's really, you know, it's I, it's really important for me that when I'm done with work, like I disconnect, you know, as much as I can, because I just, I can't take work home with me that much. Or it's gonna it's gonna affect my life outside of work. So would

Zak Dahlheimer 23:43

you say because you mentioned compartmentalizing, you're pretty good at is that like your main method as far as when it comes to coping, and assessing, you know, breaking news situations that you are sent to?

23:53

Yeah, I would say so. You know, I would say so my very first thought is, I need to get this job done, I need to, you know, I need to tell the story. I need to, or I need to find the story, or I need to make sure that whatever information our viewers need to know, they know, you know, I have to get that job done.

Zak Dahlheimer 24:10

That's what's immediately going through your mind when you're going through a scene. Yeah. Oh,

24:14

for sure. For sure. You know, and it's always almost a little bit jarring. When you do run into then. Sometimes those scenes are very emotional when you get to them, or they become emotional over time. And then, you know, that almost like and it snaps me out of it, sometimes you know what I mean? Because you're so business and so like, hyper focused on something. And all of a sudden, you know, a mom arrives at a scene and is told that her son was shot and killed, you know, and that and that can be pretty brutal.

Zak Dahlheimer 24:45

Do you exhibit emotional responses when covering breaking news and severe weather regularly, like in your time doing that?

24:53

Um, I think it just depends. You know what I mean? I think you Yeah, if you know if it involves a person that's hurt or like, worse, you know that I think sometimes that yeah, that can come through, you know what I mean? Generally, I've removed myself from the situation like, I'm not going to be, you know, if somebody's the whole family is crying because their loved one is dead. I'm not going to be standing there very long, longer than I have to be, you know? Yeah. Because I just, in my mind, I just can't go there. Yeah, totally. Because then it'll, I have a really hard time then forgetting about it when I get home, and it's gonna, I'm gonna bring it home with me, and it's gonna affect my life outside of work, you know? And so I don't, you know, and I don't want to be insensitive. I think that I think you can you can, you can kind of separate yourself while still having empathy. It's hard, but I think you can do it. Well, and so

Zak Dahlheimer 25:53

well, and I was just gonna say, I mean, it's like, I've done it. And I've talked with other people for this study, you know, it's like, I think there's a feeling like when you're out there, you know, when you're getting ready to go on air, it's like, you got to be all businesslike and like, you know, just be focused and dialed in. But then maybe you get to a car, like you get back into the car with you know, and you can take a break. And that's when you can kind of release any emotions out there for your, if you want to, I mean, but that's what I feel like, that's what I've, you know, I've noticed too, and it's some other people have told me,

26:26

Yeah, honestly, I don't know that I've ever had like, a major release of emotion in the car. You know what I mean? I've never, I don't think I've ever really, really cried or anything, I might have teared up, you know, when you talk to folks, but I think no, generally, I feel like my method of separating myself from the situation. Sure, mentally works pretty well. I mean, there might be some other problems down the line. You know, I think there's probably only been a couple of times where I really can't where it's been hard for me to separate myself. From that. I think. One would be like the Flint water crisis, there was a day I remember specifically where we went, I can't remember what the story was, we went to a church. And it was like, these kids were all like singing and it was like a, like a, it was like a Catholic mass for like healing or something, maybe. And remember, these kids were all singing, they were all from Flint, and I could not for whatever reason, it really struck me that these kids were, you know, living through this is like little children. And yeah, and then But then singing about joy. You know what I mean? Like that. That to me was just so I read that dad kind of closed myself in my editing bay at work. And sniffled was like, yeah. Unfortunately, people left me alone, you know, but I mean, other than that, I think that man, I think generally, yeah, I think I think I'm able to keep it together pretty good. That doesn't mean it's always going to be that way. But I also, I think I've been very strategic about my career moves. So that I'm not constantly in those situations.

Zak Dahlheimer 28:06

Gotcha, because, and I want to get back to that intuitive just a little bit. But, um, so when looking at like, particular stressors, you know, mental emotional drain strains. Are there any, like, would you that maybe like, that come to mind that you experience on a consistent basis, like if you're sent to a breaking news scene, or are in severe weather,

28:33

I think the big stressor sometimes is just making sure that I don't let down, you know, the other people that are at our station, really, you know, what I mean? Like, they're relying on me, they're sending me for this coverage. You know, in some cases, the other stations, like we send sending their best as well. And I think that it's, you know, I really want to make sure that I do as good of a job as I can and that I do everything that I can to, you know, make sure I tell the whole story and tell it in the best way possible. Sure. And I think that striving to be, you know, exceptional, I guess, in those situations can be Yeah, can can weigh you down quite a bit. You know, and I think especially so, when I was, you know, when I was having the night shift, you know, I went and I was sent to these things a lot more regularly. It was it was it was sometimes I would dread it, you know, going into work and just that feeling of the pressure, man, I have never, I've never been somebody who like, I feel like I get things I get it done. But in terms of like the toll it takes on me, I do not handle pressure. Well, that makes sense. No, I get her internally. You know, my work is fine and in the end, and I think that that's because I'm like committed to like doing a good job but it within it's like it can tear you apart that the pressure of you know, not only being correct in everything that you put out but then also making sure you do it. Well.

Zak Dahlheimer 30:03

It's a big pressure cooker, especially, you know, if your, say on the night shift, and you know, you're being sent to breaking news scenes for three, four times five out of five times a week.

30:14

Yeah. You know, especially, it can definitely take a toll like that feeling of adrenaline of like being sent to something once in a while, all of a sudden can turn into, like I, you know, I just need a break.

Zak Dahlheimer 30:25

Yeah. Which kind of leads into my next question. is, you know, looking at all that, I mean, how would you assess constantly going to cover breaking news or severe weather events that can

30:39

be traumatic? How would I assess them?

Zak Dahlheimer 30:43

How would you assess, like, constantly going to cover all of that, especially some events that they really can be traumatic?

30:50

Like, how would I like, how do you make, like, what do I

Zak Dahlheimer 30:55

make of it? I would say, Yeah, what do you make of all that, especially to those who may not be in the know, and like, people like us that like do this, you know, consistently?

31:05

I think, I mean, first and foremost, is part of the job. So I think, you know, when you when you sign up for this, you need to know, and hopefully your instructors will set you up for this. You know, and I think that that was something I learned in college like they I think they were pretty good about telling us Look, you're going to be underpaid for what you're doing, you're going to be stressed a lot. You know, so I feel like I can always boil it down to like, well, it's not like nobody told me. You know, but I also think that I would hope that people understand that the impact that this can have on journalists, you know, there is so much pressure from the public, from your co workers from other stations from your yourself, you know, that that it can, it can be overwhelming sometimes, and it can really take a toll on your mental health, you know, we are trained to be to not get emotionally involved. I mean, to a point, I shouldn't say that, because No, I think emotion plays a big role in having empathy. And let's be honest. Sure. Oh, yeah. However, I think that, you know, at the end of the day, you can't be a blubbing mess on TV, you have to tell the story as it is, including the emotional parts, you know, but it's hard sometimes I think with anybody, when when they present themselves as having it together, you know, all the time, I think they often get overlooked. What's going on inside? And I think, yeah, I mean, if you're having a couple of breaking news and breaking weather events, four or five days a week, I mean, unless you really, really, really love it. And I'm sure there are people who do. It's, it's how can it not take a toll on you, you know, and I feel like now we're getting to the point where I think managers and higher ups at news, at least at our station, I feel like they're starting to take that a little more seriously. And they did really, I noticed it after the mass shooting. And I think, you know, when I when I first got in the business, I mean, only 10 years ago, it's not that long. I just remember feeling thinking, like, nobody really cares about how this is making me feel. Yeah, I remember like, like, classical. I always laugh when I say it, because it is it is funny, but like, like crying in the shower. About You know, just whatever either happened at work or having to go into work because of the anxiety of it all. You know, I just, and, and just having to pick yourself up and just do it do the job, you know, and then but people not really caring about, like, how are you doing? You know, and I think that that fortunately, has, has gotten a little bit better. And I feel like especially in these last few years, I've really started to value my mental health a lot more. You know, when I had I had issues like my first year living here, and you know, finally like talk to a doctor about it, because depression was something that I always kind of dealt with all through my life. Sure, very with varying triggers. And, you know, kind of fell into one of those depressed states for a few months, I would say when, like, when I first my first year here, and I think it was that constant pressure of, you know, maybe not just breaking news, but just hard news and story ideas and doing all this stuff. And, and that really, I think wears you down after a while. So, got on depression meds, started going to therapy. Did that for like six months, you know, until I could work myself through all this and kind of have a little bit of a healthier outlook. But yeah, so it's nice to see than that. I feel like station like it. Like if that were to happen again. I feel like that I would have the support from the station to get better.

Zak Dahlheimer 34:47

No, I mean, I could speak to that too. I mean, when I came in, you know, two news three back in March of 2020. You know, who knew what was going to happen, you know, just days out from When that happened, I felt that that was the first setting to where I had a news manager tell me

like, take mental health days, it's okay, like, mental health is real, like, definitely take care of yourself.

35:13

Right. And I've taken mental health days, you know, if I have the extra PTO, and I just feel like I just can't bring what I need, you know, to the station, and maybe there's nothing super pressing, waiting for me at the station. You know, then I feel like, okay, you know what, actually, I'm not gonna go in today, I don't think I don't have it in me. Now that said, what I just said is if there's nothing super pressing at the station, so there's still kind of like a give and take there, too. So it's like, you know, Am I really that free? Then if I'm like, Well, I'm not gonna be that busy, or there's not too many emails I have to respond to. So yeah, I can take a mental health day, because maybe that's not exactly very healthy, either. Well, a therapist,

Zak Dahlheimer 36:01

that too. Um, well, you know, you kind of you kind of touched on this a little bit earlier to talking about, you know, now that you are in the mornings now, and you're covering more features often. So would you say I mean, has consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather in the field? Particularly before, like, where you are now like, as you know, you're in mornings, you're anchoring the weekend mornings, you are reporting in the mornings? Has that consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather, especially throughout the majority of your careers, helped shape you as a journalist and impact your career in any way?

36:42

Yeah, I think so. Because I think that, you know, it's helped me figure out, you know, what my needs are and, and you know, what shifts I'm going to go for, and maybe I won't have to cover that as consistently, you know, and it's, I think it's taught me to speak up for myself a lot more, I think when you're you first get in, it's, sometimes it's hard, because you're the new person, you want to make sure everybody's happy with you. And it's hard to kind of speak up for yourself. So I think, as I've gone and learned and learned how these covering these events, make me feel, you know, I think that I've definitely, the reason I'm on mornings is because from the moment I got to news three, and they put me on nights, I said, Please don't make me be on nights. And every, like, few months, I would go into the office of the managers and be like, Can I move now? Can I move now? Can I move now? And so finally, two years, and they were like, well, we have a spot on mornings? Do you want to do that? And I was like, Sure. I mean, it was morning breaking news, let's do what we're talking about. But it wasn't, it wasn't the same. Like, same kind of coverage of breaking news, right? So a lot of stuff would have maybe already happened. Or if there was breaking news, it would be a little more seldom during my shift. It wasn't like the constant running and gunning of like keeping up at night. And so that was better than they when they were like, hey, our feature reporters leaving, you know, if you want you're doing good, I'm breaking news. But if you want you can slide to the Enterprise feature reporting. I was like, Okay. And yeah, so I've kind of, you know, I don't know, I think I think when you do it long enough, and all of a sudden, you're like, this isn't working, you know, either, either. I'm going to make a change, or I'm just going to get out of the business entirely. Sure. And I haven't done everything that I've wanted to do in the business. So how can I make this work? You know, and for me, that was, what shift can I get that it's going to make this bearable? And so I'm happy to say for the last four years, that has largely been bearable.

Zak Dahlheimer 38:46

That's good to hear. What about trauma training, because you had mentioned this kind of a little bit, that your professors were pretty good about it in college? And that, you know, of course, at our station, and they've been pretty good? Did you get any trauma training, like in college before your career started, or anytime throughout your career to help you with covering breaking news, severe weather? Or? And if you could speak to like any resources that have been available to help you, you know, with your mental health? You talked about a therapist as well.

39:18

Yeah. So, um, trauma training? I would say no. And I don't want to, you know, that's not an indictment on Michigan State. I just don't know that. 10 years ago, even I mean, yes, mental health was starting to be talked about, but I don't think that there was much action taken in that regard. When I say that my professors prepared me they literally would, in class would tell us during you know, hey, you're doing this for your time. Oh, and by the way, when you get a job, it's gonna be way worse. You're gonna make way make way less money. And that was like, pretty much it. It was offhand comments over and over again. So you're like, okay, so clearly, I'm not gonna make a lot of money and I'm gonna be stressed. You've said it a bunch of times, but it wasn't like an official career. Kill him or anything like that. So I yeah, I don't, I don't? I don't think so. I mean, like they teach you how to like interview people and then teach you how to be, you know, sensitive to that stuff, I would say. But I mean, you have so have to have it in you naturally to some point. And then the second part of your question was

Zak Dahlheimer 40:17

any resources, because I know you talked about having to go into a therapist for a little bit. But do you have resources, maybe now that you have to help with,

40:26

I know that they're there. So when I went to therapy, I was 2017, you know, they may have had the option. But I was, I feel like just kind of so out of my mind that I literally just went to my doctor and was like, I need help. I need meds, and whatever else you can do, and she was like, Okay, well, I think one, I think medicine is a good idea. And also, but you'd have to mix it with therapy here. Now, here's the name of therapists that I know. You know, and that's kind of how that worked. Sure. Now, by the time I was done with that, then I remember, gosh, was it I think it may have been with the mass shooting that they were like, Oh, and by the way, you know, we have this, we have this thing through our health insurance, you can get like five free sessions of of therapy, if you want, you know, so I think I started to kind of once we were starting to tell a story that was having a traumatic effect on a lot of people. I think that they were like, hey, reminder, if you haven't seen it, we do have mental health services. So I know. And I know, we still have resources, I can't remember exactly what they are there. If I were to need them again,

Zak Dahlheimer 41:32

sure. I want to go back to trauma training, because just so you know, the other journalists I talked with that was actually a common answer that no trauma training was received, like, either in college or at any point during the career. What do you make of that? And do you think that that might be an area of opportunity to maybe look at for people in the field? Yeah.

41:53

Yeah, for sure. I mean, what do I make of it? It's almost like something until you asked about it. I don't even think about it. You know, I want to say, I feel like we have so many trainings through scripts that we may have had a trauma training, I don't remember. Clearly wasn't very impactful. But yeah, no, I think that that will be a great thing. I think, especially when you're, I think, especially when you're in college, you know, because I feel like what you take out of that, I mean, can help you in so many things in life and jumping from college to real life afterwards is very hard. At least it was for me. Sure. And I think that, you know, anything that you can do to set folks up mentally for success? is great, because I mean, you know, yeah, they're setting you up for, you know, you need to be able to find and pitch a story Nemo, right, you need to be able to shoot, you need to be able to edit, you know, do all these things to make sure you get your job done. But what about you, you know, so I yeah, I agree. And I think it's, it's surprising, also, but it's not to hear that you said that others were kind of in the same boat where they're like, No, I didn't have any trauma training. But especially with just the heaviness of the stuff we've covered, and I feel like especially lately, you know, I think that that's something that there's definitely room for that, especially with the emphasis emphasis on mental health that we have now compared to way back

Zak Dahlheimer 43:12

when? Well, in my last question, looking at areas of opportunity, are there any areas of opportunity you'd like companies like Scripps, for example, but just industry wide across the board to explore when it comes to helping the mental health of field journalists like us who, especially you know, those who have covered consistent breaking news and severe weather?

43:36

Yeah, I just really, I think, you know, if companies can build in opportunities, I think for people, journalists to talk to, like their managers talk to the people who are making their schedules who are assigning them these stories, I think that you have to have these kinds of like mental check ins, if you can, maybe don't call him that, but like, I think that that needs to be discussed, because so often, I feel like people, yeah, they do, you know, they're suffering probably pretty silently, probably more than I am, you know, what I mean, depending on, you know, who knows, you know, I think, I think, you know, one common thing, you know, you talk about you talk to people who are in the biz, and everybody's just so tired and so exhausted, and everybody can kind of you can kind of get the idea that everybody's kind of in the same boat a little bit, maybe some worse than others. So if there is any sort of room where like, you know, people can literally talk about, like, how they're being impacted by this without fear of, you know, being accused of being lazy, or not doing their job. And I'm not saying that, that people are like that, necessarily, but the environment kind of

Zak Dahlheimer 44:41

creates that feeling a little bit, kind of like a stigma.

44:45

Like if I'm not if I'm not keeping up with everybody, yeah, stigma. I mean, like, that's society with mental health. I mean, let's be honest, but like, Yeah, but like, like, if I'm not doing every

single thing and getting everything of myself, somebody else is therefore I'm failing. You know, and I, that's just so unhealthy to think that way, I think, you know, and, but it's true. I mean, that's, that's the mentality that I think I had for a very long time and still do to this point is, well, if I'm not going to do it, somebody else is doing it, they're doing it better. And then I guess I just suck, you know, I mean, I don't know, it's, it's sad as it sounds, but that's. So if there, man I yeah, I just feel like, if there were more, there was more communication and the communication industry, maybe people wouldn't feel like that as much. Or maybe, hey, maybe this person can take a break from doing breaking news, and somebody else could do it, you know.

Zak Dahlheimer 45:44

But kind of also, like, I think you bring up a good point. And this was something that, you know, I've found in my, my, my study, so far is it's been brought up before is kind of like having maybe like a round table or like just like a sit down or like a support group, you know, like, you see, like support groups, maybe for people going through certain health conditions or something like that, but maybe having just a support group like opportunity for maybe within certain stations? Or how would you make How would you see him? And what would you like to see out of it,

46:18

maybe, I think that would be really nice to have kind of like an open door with because some of them my favorite times is when you're with your other when you're with your coworkers not at work, and you're just talking and you realize, oh, wow, we're all kind of going through the same thing. You know, and maybe we don't talk about it at work, because we don't want to seem weak, or we don't, we just don't have time. You know, so I think, you know, if there is, if there would be a space for that, you know, maybe do some sort of roundtable thing, or just any situation where you can bring the walls down and be honest. You know, I think that that will be really helpful, especially for the younger folks. And like the folks who are new, you know, I think that it's, it's really as a struggle when you're new to a station. And if you're young and new, it's even harder, you know, and so it would be nice to be able, I think, to just have those discussions of, you know, here's how I'm struggling and not have to worry about being judged in just being accepted for who you are. Sorry, I don't get interviewed very often, you know, no, no,

Zak Dahlheimer 47:26

that's that's good, man. That's good to hear. Let me just hit stop.

PARTICIPANT 2 ZOOM RECORDING RAW

01:03

I was previously a nightside reporter here at ABC Action News. And I've done this job for it'll be a year before I switched into this in depth, position end of September. So I'll be an exit reporter for a year here at ABC Action News. Previous to that I was an MMJ. I kind of oscillated between being a one man band and sometimes having helped and being, I guess, a general assignment reporter for WFTX. In Fort Myers, there also a script station. Before that actually was in PR I'd left the business for a year and I was in PR in Ohio. And then before that, I was in Buffalo, as an MMJ for Spectrum news Buffalo. And then my first job before that was in Waco, Texas at KX XV news channel 25. And I was also an MMJ. That station wasn't owned by Scripps at the time, but it is currently owned by Scripps right now.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:54

Gotcha. So, right now, of course, it's safe to say that your focus is more on reporting. You know, obviously, like, Well, we do you know, reporting for broadcast and digital. But then when you were an MMJ, you were your own standalone journalists where you're shooting, writing, and every you're pretty much doing it all for so to speak.

02:17

Yeah, and I will say in this in depth job, I'm kind of a hybrid, again, kind of like I was in Fort Myers, where I will be MMJ, some of the times, there's certain stories where I have my own gear, and it just makes sense for me to shoot certain elements on my own. I'll do that. But I also will have photographers on hand that if I need help on a certain shoot, I can kind of call them in. So I'll be doing a little bit of both from this new role.

Zak Dahlheimer 02:36

So, I know that we graduate around pretty much the same time. So would you say I guess that'd be seven years total

02:46

six, ish, six and change? Because I did take a year off. There's a year gap when I was in PR. So a little over six years, but yeah,

Zak Dahlheimer 02:53

perfect. Well, I wanted to ask you, because I know that we go way back, you know, it's back to the University of Florida. But for this, what would you say made you want to get into a career in journalism,

03:05

you know, have wanted to be reporter since I was 10. Since I was a little kid, the news was just always on in our house. I grew up with parents who just like, you know, they talk about the nightly appointment, right? Like, my family ate dinner pretty early. And then we sat down and watched the six o'clock news. Like that was just like a thing. And it wasn't until I got older that I realized not every family did that. But I thought that was normal. We just all sat down in front of the TV, and watch the you know, the nightly news. My dad liked one channel, my mom liked

another channel. So sometimes we would switch but the news was just always on. And I just remember watching these people, you know, it just felt like magic. Like he would turn on your TV. And these people appeared. And they would just tell you about all these crazy things that had happened in your you know, in the day while you were in school, or playing or sleeping, they would tell you all these things. I thought, how do you get that job? I want to do that. I think that's just the coolest thing. And so I remember when I was 10, I turned to my parents and I was like, I want to do that we were watching the news. And they're like, sure, you know, because I was 10. Like, I wanted to be probably like a doctor the week before a fire, you know, whatever. So they were like, sure we support you and whatever you want to do. But I was serious. And then I grew up and did it. And they were like, Oh, you really wanted to do this? And I was like, yeah, so I don't know, I just think I think the idea that we have a job where we're getting paid to be curious. And I'm a naturally curious person. We get to tell people in the community about important things that are happening around them. We get to be kind of the eyes and ears for people because people are busy. They're at work. They're raising kids, they're doing other things. And so it's our job to kind of watch out for the community and then tell them hey, here's what happened and here's an issue you should be paying attention to. Here's something that's coming up on an upcoming election coming up on your ballot that you should kind of research I think that that's a great responsibility that I don't take lightly and I just think it's the coolest job ever. I feel lucky but this is my job.

Zak Dahlheimer 04:49

Very cool. And you know, it's funny too. I was 10 years old to what I want to do and so we got that little chair thing in common I liked it say Is that coming of age? Is that 10? That 10? Yeah, age, it's like, you know, you know exactly what you're going to do.

05:05

I'm going about 10.

Zak Dahlheimer 05:07

Well, thank you, Michelle, I want to, you know, now get kind of into the crux of what we're doing with this study. You know, as you know, we're talking with journalists across script stations around the country, talking about their experience covering both breaking news and severe weather. And of course, the big overarching conversation is related to mental health. So I want to first get into your experience covering breaking news and severe weather. In your career so far throughout it, how often would you say you've had to cover breaking news and severe weather in the field? Would you? And also would you say, is it lean more towards one or the other? Or have you equally covered both breaking news and severe weather? Would you say?

05:52

I think in the entirety of my career, it's definitely been more breaking news than severe weather. But I think, from area to area, you know, from station to station and has changed, I did a lot of severe weather in Buffalo. You one thing again, we share in common I know we're both from Florida, I moved to Buffalo, New York, and had not experienced blizzards and you know, snow like that in my life. And I was a morning reporter for the majority of my two years there. And I mean, I was covering so much snow, a lot of severe weather and that I think that the majority of

my severe weather experience in my career came from Buffalo. But overall, my career, I think it's been more heavily breaking news.

Zak Dahlheimer 06:29

Gotcha. So it's a little bit, you'd you would give the edge more to breaking news over whether it's accurate to say, yeah, you mentioned you know, the snow cover jump in Buffalo. But in your more than six years professionally, since you've been doing this? Is there a particular news event, perhaps breaking news, since you cover more of that in your career? Between the two? Is there a particular news event that stands out to you

06:54

for any particular reason? Or for just like, just in general?

Zak Dahlheimer 06:58

Yeah. I mean, if you have to reflect back on your more than six years, I mean, was there like, a story or a breaking news situation that has kind of like stuck with you all this time? Or you just what do you think about covering? It's like, yeah, that's that's one, it's really stuck with me for a while.

07:14

Yeah, I will say in Buffalo, there was a really heartbreaking breaking news event where we had there was a pretty big and swift river that people would sometimes fish in. But they were there were signs everywhere, cautioning people to not swim in it, because even though the surface looked kind of calm, there was a really strong undercurrent, and two guys, one guy hopped in there to, I think he was trying to get some driftwood, he was an artist and wanted to use some wood for a piece and started to drown. And another guy hopped in after him to try to save him, and they both ended up drowning. And I was out there for days covering just, you know, the search for them. And at first, there was hope that maybe, you know, maybe they hadn't passed away, and maybe they just were caught somewhere further down the river. So it just was a I mean, I think I was out there for like 10 or 12 days, because it took a while to find them. And that was exhausting physically, but also just mentally, because you're going through this rollercoaster of emotions where there's that hope. You know, and you're seeing family members out there, and you have to talk to them. And you're like, I really hope we get the answer I know you want. And then by about day six or seven, you could kind of feel the energy shift out there where it was like, this is no longer a rescue, but it's a recovery. And that was such a heavy place to sit in, and just have but still having to be out there and beyond and perform and you know, do your live shots and talk but just knowing that, like, this family didn't get the outcome they wanted. And that'll always stay with me, that was a really heavy one to cover.

Zak Dahlheimer 08:37

I was gonna say, I mean, is it is it the the gauntlet of like covering it day by day by day, and you're personally hoping that they get the answer they want is that the reason why and just the mental health impact from that, if you could speak to that is why does that particular news coverage event? Would you say? Is that why it stands out to you? Or why did

08:59

they? It's a big part of it for sure. I mean, number one that was just I think that that was also one of the longest outside of Gaby batido I think that was one of the longest like ongoing back to back breaking news stories I had covered like we're, we were talking about the same thing for days, like days and days and days and days and days. I think Gabby Potito was eclipsed that because I mean, we were talking about that for like months at a time. But I mean to talk about a story for 12 days straight. It's pretty unusual for a local story like that. And so I think just it stands out in my mind for the longevity of the story. But yeah, the emotional toll like I said, it just I felt like as a as a reporter, but just as a human. I was on that emotional roller coaster with the family because they came out every single day. And you know, you're there bearing witness to them experiencing every single update. And you see the hope, you know, transition from hope to despair and to grief and you're just, again, like I said earlier, we're the witness for the community. So I'm there witnessing that, and it just was heavy. So I think it stands out for a multitude of reasons but the emotional part definitely I

Zak Dahlheimer 10:00

mean, you're out there with the the first responders possibly and you mentioned the family. And, you know, obviously the the public, the viewers are viewing it through their televisions, or they're viewing it through their phones or their computers. So they're, you're kind of like the the conduit from what's happening in real time to get and disseminate the information to the viewers.

10:22

Yep, absolutely. 100%. And I think in some ways, we can act as a buffer so that the viewer doesn't feel the full weight of that emotion as we're feeling. So it can be heavy, because you're again, to your point, we're right there in the thick of it and just feeling all things. Sure.

Zak Dahlheimer 10:39

Would you say kind of looking like post UF graduation, you know, you've been doing this for you know, a little more than six years has consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather on the job. You say more So breaking news, you've covered? How, how, how has that impacted or repairs that consistent coverage throughout your career impacted you personally?

11:04

Yeah, well, I've mentioned earlier I took a year off, that was why I was actually burned out. So after Texas in Buffalo, I didn't have anything left to give it was a lot. I mean, number one, I was working the morning shift. And my body just didn't react well to being up that early in the morning in Buffalo. But it just was a grind. I mean Texas to there was a lot of breaking news, I didn't realize how busy of a place Waco and Central Texas was. I mean, we and that was my first job out of college. So I was covering a lot of like heavy crimes and shootings and gruesome crime scenes. And that was just, I feel like you have prepared us definitely. But there's nothing like when you're just out there, you know, when those first crime scenes and it's just a lot to take in. So I covered a lot of that I did cover some severe weather, Texas gets a lot of flash flooding, so covering things like that. So that was a grind. And then I hopped from that into Buffalo where I was taking on an early morning shifts, doing a lot of breaking news, doing a lot of coverage, like I told you about between severe weather and just like heavy breaking news stories. And by the end of two years in Buffalo, which would have made three years in the business, I was just

burnt out mentally, physically, emotionally, I needed a break. So even though I love this job, I wanted to do this since I was 10 years old, I made the decision to not renew my contract and kind of step away and just like, take a beat and regroup mentally. And we're I worked in PR for a year. And I said, you know if news is for me, I'll come back to it. I do love it. But I just know, I need to take care of me first, because I didn't have anything else to give after that. And sounds

Zak Dahlheimer 12:29

like I mean, as far as from mental health impacts, if you don't mind me, you know, kind of, you know, getting on that burnout was kind of like the big impact that that you fell from consistently coverage. Breaking news, yeah,

12:42

100%. And it's a weird feeling. Because you go from you know, you leave college and you're all pumped up, and you're excited, and you love this job. And then I found myself a little bit slower getting out of bed in the morning, you know, not as excited to do the work that I know I love to do and I'm so passionate about. And that's when I was kind of like something is off. This isn't like me, you know, and it was burnout. What kind

Zak Dahlheimer 13:05

of what was you know, you had that year in PR, what kind of made this switch go off in your head, say, hey, you know what I want to get back into this.

13:13

I missed it. So I was working in Columbus, Ohio, and Columbus is the capital of the state. And so there was so much breaking news. And my office, I worked for the Ohio Hospital Association, we were right across from the statehouse. And there was always like, crazy breaking news stories or big news coming out of the state house, and I would see it and sometimes I would get to report on it, I guess from a PR standpoint, but the excitement, you know, just that, that that rush made me miss it. And I just realized that, you know, my passion really is storytelling, especially when it comes to like video storytelling. And that wasn't really a big part of my job and the PR job I had. And I was just like, I gotta get back in. I miss it too much. And now that I think I had taken that year, and I wasn't therapy, you know, and and I had some tools on how to help myself and help prevent board burnout. A second time I was that I feel like I'm ready. And I think the next time I jumped back in I know that I'll have the tools to recognize burnout a little bit earlier. I'll be able to set boundaries I'll be able to talk to management of I feel like I'm struggling like I just felt prepared to handle news again. And I missed it. I really missed it.

Zak Dahlheimer 14:20

Absolutely no, I mean so I mean kind of and correct me if I'm taking this out of context but consistent coverage of breaking news, I guess kind of guided your career path in a way because you were covering it constantly but then you decide to go into PR for a little bit but then after you know take focusing on yourself and and getting you know, looking at that getting resources you decide to come back to where you've been in Fort Myers and then now in Tampa

14:49

Yeah, yeah, and like I said, I think the biggest thing for me was like if I'm gonna step back into this I have to sit back in it one healthy but to again with the tools and Reese sources like knowing who to call knowing what to do knowing how to really be present in my body and be like, alright, am I feeling anxious? Am I feeling those signs of burnout again, and then knowing what to do with those feelings if I do feel that because we all know that, you know, trauma and burnout comes with the job, but it's about recognizing those things and taking the appropriate actions. And once I got I once I was about, I would say, like six to eight months out of the business, I felt like I was at that place. And I was like, alright, like, let's go. I'm ready to go. I was itching to get back in. Yeah. All ready to tell. I just knew I had more stories left to tell. So I was ready to jump back in.

Zak Dahlheimer 15:32

Oh, I like that. No. And I'm personally Glad you're back in the business too. Yeah, no, I, and I'm glad you mentioned resource I do want to get to to that later. But I now want to go to talking to you about kind of like, what goes through your mind when you're concerned when you're on the job in the moment at breaking news scene. So let's say you're sent to breaking news. at your current job in tamp. I know you're in you're transitioning into a new role. But from this past year experience as nightside reporter in Tampa, let's say you're sent to breaking news and assignment like that in the field. What immediately goes through your mind?

16:15

Well, while you're definitely thinking about I mean, timing, depending on how close it is a deadline, you're like, Ooh, how are we going to get this done? Right, you know, so you're definitely thinking about Alright, what do I need? What what's being asked of me that they want to package a live shot live? What's being asked of me? What will it take for me to accomplish that request, right? So who do I need to talk to or my contacts, but visuals and audio do I need to grab those were kind of the first things going through my mind. But something that I that I really, I think I've always been this way, but something that I really learned in my year off was just to put humanity at the forefront. And so even I think sometimes we can get caught in the hustle and bustle of grabbing elements and getting sound and getting the interview and getting the shot and getting up and doing your live shot. We're just remembering that these are nine times out of 10. The Breaking News involves people right, and maybe there's a shooting or a fire like these are humans and human lives that have been disrupted. So just making sure that as I'm hustling to get the work done, then I'm being mindful of the humans that have been impacted, and that these are real people in real lives that we're talking about, you know, sure. And treating people with dignity because I think sometimes, especially earlier in my career, I might have been a little less empathetic, right? And the thing sometimes I now I pulled back and I'm like, this was my mother going through this thing. If this was my cousin, how would I want a reporter to approach them? How would I want somebody to approach me if I was going through whatever breaking news, you know, and so keeping that I think this made me a better reporter. So it's a juggling the hustle and bustle of the job and getting my job done with also making sure that I'm putting humanity and empathy at the forefront of how I move and interact with people in that space of breaking news.

Zak Dahlheimer 17:49

Absolutely. And you kind of I think, elude to my next question, too, which is related kind of a little bit to that first one. We're talking about particular stressors, emotional drain, mental drain, or strain, so to speak, when you go to and you arrive at a breaking news scene, are there any particular stressors that come to mind that you experience on a consistent basis,

18:14

I wouldn't say on a consistent basis. But I've noticed anytime it's especially if it's like a tragic situation involving a child, those stories has always seemed to get to me. And so sometimes I have to take a second and like pause before I even get out of my news car and just, you know, collect myself, because those are super heavy. And I already know I'm probably gonna have to talk to a family member, you know, they're gonna want sound right? So I'm gonna have to talk to somebody who knew this child, a friend, a family member, a parent. And that's heavy that I think that's heavy for anybody. But those stories about kids seem to get me so I think on the drive over, I'm kind of already collecting myself mentally and emotionally, but even more so if it's a child. But otherwise, I think the stressors are pretty generic. It's just, it's that time crunch, right? Because nine times out of 10, if it's breaking, they want to live shot, right? So you're again thinking the back of your head, okay, if I'm going out, I got an hour to grab these elements, write a script and get up. And so I think those are just the generic stressors, we probably all feel recovering. Breaking news,

Zak Dahlheimer 19:08

you mentioned gathering your thoughts. I mean, is how do you would you say assess and cope with situations of breaking news? Is that one of the ways are there other ways you assessing cope with situations?

19:19

Yeah, I mean, it's for me, stillness, and like, reflectiveness had been really big for me. So again, I'll do that sometimes before I even get out of my car. But if I'm at a breaking news scene, and I feel a little bit overwhelmed, I will actually if if, I mean sometimes you don't have time, but if I have a second, I might pull myself back and just I'll just be quiet, you know, I'm just kind of they're just taking taking a moment and then I can get back into it if I feel myself feeling anxious or being overwhelmed or things like that. That level of refract reflection, excuse me, just helps me to refocus and then get the job done.

Zak Dahlheimer 19:51

How about because I've had a conversation with another journalist and to study to about it, exhibiting or showing emotions, you know, we We talk about, you know, we have to be ready and be on camera and all that. But do you regularly exhibit emotional, emotional responses when covering breaking news?

20:11

lately? Yeah, I think it's part of the humanity. Now, I don't necessarily get on TV, and I'm not crying in my live shots. But I absolutely, especially if I'm talking to somebody who has gone through something that warrants breaking news, right. And oftentimes, it's tragic. I empathize with them. I think that that's something that we really need to be mindful of as journalists is like, again, like I said, earlier, we were talking to real people, you know, like, we're not, we're not

robots, and they're not robots like, this is somebody who has experienced something traumatic. And so there's been some stories where I've cried with, you know, the folks because what they're saying, or just what has happened to them is just so awful, you know, sometimes I'll come to them and say, Hey, I hate that I'm having to, I've never met you before. And I hate that I'm meeting you under these circumstances, you know, I wish that this was a different story. But here we are. And if you're open to talking to me, I would love to be able to share more about your loved one, or about what you're going through and things like that. And so I think just again, that empathy, just just getting down to a human level with people to me, I think has made me a better journalist. And I do I do, I don't think I've ever I don't think I've cried in the live shot. But I definitely empathize with folks, I think behind the scenes as I'm doing that news gathering.

Zak Dahlheimer 21:21

No, and I'm a big believer in empathy, too. I mean, you have to show that, you know, hey, I mean, and I say, you know, yes, we're journalists. But more importantly, and first and foremost, we're humans. We have to keep that in mind. So no, I mean, I, I appreciate hearing that, from your personal standpoint. Assessing, you know, how do you assess or make of constantly going to cover breaking news that can be traumatic, especially being on the front lines? Yeah,

21:50

it absolutely can. And that was something I don't think I've experienced that here. at ABC Action News, my desk, my management is pretty mindful of that. And they try to rotate so that one person isn't being tapped to go to breaking news all the time. So that's been really helpful as well. They're very light on it. When I was in Fort Myers, though, I was what was considered like a senior reporter. And so because I had more seniority, I was tapped to cover a lot of those bigger breaking news stories more often, which was great for the experience. But after a while, I started to feel like I started to feel those burnout, you know, feelings again. And so I spoke to my management, and I was like, Listen, I am so grateful that you guys trust me to do this work and do it well. But I think we need to kind of divvy up the responsibilities because I'm starting to get that feeling where I'm feeling more anxious at breaking new scenes where I'm feeling like dread. Sometimes, if I get the call, like, Hey, you have to go go and cover this shooting, or this murder or this, you know, whatever, I'm starting to feel dread and not like, I don't say excitement, but just not positive thoughts, I guess about covering war. And they were pretty receptive to that. And they were able to implement a system where there was more rotation. But again, going back to what I said earlier, it's really about assessing yourself. And I think, having experienced, I feel like I see my career in two halves, having experienced what I experienced in my first half of my career, and then going through that period of taking a break has allowed me to just be really reflective, taking those moments to pause and like, check in with myself, how are you feeling right now? Is this Are we good? Like, are we ready to go? Or do we need to pause and maybe decline the assignment or see if there's a way somebody else can cover what you're being asked to cover? So it's really about just pausing and reflecting for me.

Zak Dahlheimer 23:31

So really making sure that you are taking time for yourself? If you're making sure like if this is something you're not comfortable covering, maybe go into your managers and saying, Hey, is there any way we can? Have we divvy this up or all that and then also making sure that you have

your people to call, you know, or talk to, you know, kind of like you said, you have those now, versus the first chapter of your career that ultimately led you to go in and get burned out and have to take a break? Yep. Well, I really thank you enough. Thank you a lot, for talking about all that. And I know what to talk about. And this is something I'm really interested in hearing from the journalists. This is more of a moving forward, like what's next, what would you like to see? You talked already about how the consistent coverage of breaking news in the field has already shaped you as a journalist and impacted your career. But now I want to talk with you know, trauma training. I know that you and I went to University of Florida. So I think I have an idea of what you what you may be experienced at us when it comes to this, but maybe during your career. Did you receive any trauma training before or during your career to help you with this type of coverage of consistent breaking news?

24:48

I did, but it wasn't through my employer. So I'm also a member of the National Association of Black Journalists and they BJ and I've attended many you know, they have like conferences, national conferences every summer So I had been to a few webinars in the first chapter of my career and since then, where that topic was discussed about the trauma that we experience on a daily basis, because often what we're talking about is traumatic as journalist, and just ways to take care of yourself. So I had a little bit of an idea of that earlier on to my career, but I still didn't really I don't think I really had a full grasp of the the weight of what we experienced on a daily basis, especially with constant breaking news and severe weather coverage. But yeah, I got some it just wasn't through employers. So I think that I feel like I know what you're hinting at. And I would say that that's something I think that as an industry, we should really, especially for those who new or green, or journalists who might be a little bit blindsided to all of this, I would I wish there was a way that those tools could be made available to journalists and to be stressed like and that employers can stress the importance of mental health and taking care of yourself and understanding the impact of trauma, being trained on how to assess your own trauma, right? If you're at a breaking news situation, or whatever, have you heard to check in with yourself? How are you feeling? Is this normal? Do you need to kind of raise your hand and say, I'm not okay, I think I think we're only just now getting to a place in the industry where it's okay to say you're not okay, I think at a certain point, you just kind of have to suck it up and do your job. And I think now we're at a place where people can raise their hand and say, I don't think I'm okay. I don't think I don't think I should cover the story. I don't think I'm in the mind frame to do this work. And I wish I wish we saw more of that in our industry,

Zak Dahlheimer 26:27

I was gonna say, and I'm gonna get to that in a second. What are the resources that you have that that are available to you to help your mental health when covering breaking news consistently,

26:40

I have a therapist. So that's, that's my like, number one go to is I have a therapist that that's somebody that I debrief with, not on a daily basis, I don't talk her every day, but that I kind of work through if there's something going on that is relative to work or relative to trauma, or burnout, you know, perspective to work. Those are things that we talk about, and we work through, and you kind of helped to reinforce some of those tools that I already came with from your break. But outside of that, it's just for me mindfulness, like, again, I know I keep repeating

myself, but that's a practice that I think it's so important. saltley just being quiet, and like still stillness has been really good for me as well. I have friends and family members that I also can debrief with and just sometimes vent, you know, or just to share with and things like that. And then also something that I didn't have a good grasp on early in my career was just boundaries. And so making sure that like, when I'm off of work, I kind of am able to separate work and take time to myself to do things I enjoy. So I might go to Zumba, or go take a walk or take a nap or play a video game, you know, or whatever, and just have making sure that I'm pouring into myself outside of work and having boundaries between work and personal have also been really helpful for me to just keep my mind in the right place.

Zak Dahlheimer 27:49

I like that. Well. Last question, Michelle. And we really and I really appreciate again, all your time. Areas of opportunities. Are there any areas of opportunities you'd like companies say script since we're doing we're interviewing scripts, journalists, or just any companies in general, from a, an industry wide standpoint, areas of opportunity you'd like to see companies explore when it comes to helping mental health field journalists who have covered breaking news or severe weather consistently.

28:21

I think there should be I don't know if it's like on a call therapy or what but I think there should be an opportunity to where, after any breaking news event, you should be able to contact a therapist kind of like BetterHelp or like talkspace. But it's covered by the company, where you're able to just debrief if you don't have that person, that family member, your own private therapist, where you can call and just talk about what you've experienced how you're feeling if you're not okay. I feel like that should be covered by all employers in the news industry. Because I think a lot of times we're asked again, to take on a lot of trauma in our job, and I don't think oh, you know, the resources kind of Max the trauma sometimes that we're experiencing, often on a daily basis. And I think on a bigger scale, if we're covering heavy stories like a Gabby Potito, that was a lot. I mean, to be honest, even after you've all day, I had to take a day off because I couldn't talk about those children. And for another day, we've been talking about it for a week straight. And I ended up taking the day off because it was just too like I could it was too much. I just needed a break from just sitting in that heaviness. And I knew when I came back Monday, I'd be refreshed and ready to tackle that story again, but I had to take a break. And so I think having set maybe seminars or workshops where journalists are told about resources, maybe they're offered mental health days that are separate from PTL, that if you're struggling after covering a major event that you have a few days a year that you can just take and it's not you know, you don't have to use a vacation day. This is just a mental health day for you to just be okay. And come back ready to you know, ready to go. I feel like that could be an opportunity.

Zak Dahlheimer 29:52

So having a pool of mental health day set aside that don't dip into your general PTO.

29:57

Yeah, because that's hard because sometimes and I've heard people say they that were where they're struggling, but maybe they have a vacation coming up, you know, like, or they're like, oh, you know, if I take this day, then maybe I won't be able to go see my family or go to a

wedding and but they're also struggling. So what do you, you know, what do you do? So if that could be separated, and those are just kind of like, and I don't want to put a number on it, but just a pool of days for that, I think that'd be extremely helpful. And then letting people know the resources. I think a lot of us are guilty of right? We do the stories about mental health, we do the stories about suicide prevention, and we share those resources on air. But I think if you quiz people in the newsroom, what's the number for this? You know, what's the number for that? We probably don't know, because we're just hustling and bustling and moving. And it's on to the next that it's kind of like we say, and then you know, we're thinking about the next door, the next thing and so I think just making sure those resources are more present. And we're constantly reminded of those things, whether it's on the homepage of the Scripps, Scripps, or whatever company's website or you know, whether there's a quarterly workshop where there's a check in from management something but just making sure that we're reminded of the resources that are out there in company and outside I think that'd be helpful as well. Okay.

PARTICIPANT 3 ZOOM RECORDING RAW

Zak Dahlheimer 00:42

Perfect. And how many years would you say you've worked in, in TV as a field journalist says like a reporter MMJ.

00:55

Three, three to four years. I had to think about it for a second, but yeah, it's been I think it's been three years that I started in 2019 When I graduated from college.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:10

Gotcha. So three to four years. And reporter MMJ, those have pretty much been like, the job titles that you've had in your career safe to say.

01:20

Yeah, I've always been a reporter.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:25

Oh, okay. Gotcha. Um, are you okay with it? Are you driving right now?

01:33

Yes, but I'm at my destination. I'm at the park.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:36

Okay. Yeah, I'll I'll wait to the park because I just want to make sure that everything is good to go.

01:48

I apologize. I'm just running a quick errand before I have to go in. No worries. Probably like I said, like, I'll still be able to talk to you. But I'll probably turn my camera on for like five minutes because I got to run into this running to Kroger and pick up something real quick.

Zak Dahlheimer 02:05

That's fine. I'm okay. Well, what other so if you could speak to kind of, you know, you've been a reporter MMJ for three years, you were saying? You know, we know, you and I know, obviously, of course, what comes with, you know, responsibilities for it. But what for those who may not be in the know, like us have, what types of responsibilities you think, would you say come with being a reporter and an MMJ?

02:38

That's a loaded question is its Act actually a lot of responsibilities. You're actually this is not your typical nine to five job. You're definitely working outside of work constantly. Because as a journalist, you have to be in the know, of everything, you know, locally and nationally. So, you're, you're always, you know, on social media, you're, as I work for a CBS affiliate, so, you know, always looking at like CBS Evening News, or like CBS Morning News, or like, you know, staying up to date to see like, what CBS journalist or, you know, correspondents, whatever

the case may be, are talking about, you have to set up stories, you have to look for those stories, you have to pitch your stories, you have to be out in the field reporting the stories and that everyone wants to talk to you. But you still have to find a way to make the story work because at the end of the day, there's a newscast to be done and you have to deliver a brief synopsis

Zak Dahlheimer 04:04

you have to wear many hats and have responsibilities of course.

04:08

Exactly.

Zak Dahlheimer 04:10

Well, what would you say made you want to get into journalism as a career

04:16

um, so I think it started off when I was like a little I will always my dad will already be at work because he had to be at work super early in the morning so when I was younger, my mom is obviously like waking me up, getting me prepared for school and you know, every time I will wake up she always had in like on the Today Show, or an activation was over. So turn to our local news. And being from Hampton Roads, I was either watching my art my current station that I work for now or waiting To be 10, just depending on like, the morning, and I liked the On Air presence that I will see locally, and nationally. And I was just so intrigued by the morning anchors and the reporters, I was like, I think I like that. When I got older, I was just always watch like late night news or like late night talk shows. And then fast forward when I got into high school, I was like, let me just dip my feeds into like, you know, playing with cameras, and, you know, being in front of the camera, and I liked it. So I was like, let me go to school for this.

Zak Dahlheimer 05:47

And would you say it's been, you know, rewarding, you know, your three years into your career has been pretty rewarding for you. So far.

05:57

It has been rewarding. I think the most rewarding aspect is me setting a goal. So I was like, when I was younger, I'm like, You know what, I want to work for the station I grew up watching. Oh, I have fulfilled that goal. So it's very rewarding, you know, going into work. And, you know, working alongside the anchors, the accurate watching and working for that station.

Zak Dahlheimer 06:29

Sure. Absolutely. Well, I want to get into more of you know, now that we've learned more about you personally and about your career. This study, of course, is about experience covering breaking news and severe weather on a consistent basis, would you say throughout your career, how often would you say you've had to cover breaking news and or severe weather in the field? How often do you do that?

07:01

So honestly, at my first he gave me one second sec. Oh, yeah. Once that, man, I apologize.

Zak Dahlheimer 07:09

No worries.

07:17

This line is like so long. But um, so in my first market, I really didn't cover a lot of severe weather.

07:28

I hope you can hear me okay. Can you hear me? Oh, yeah, yeah,

Zak Dahlheimer 07:30

I got you good.

07:32

Okay. In that first market, I really didn't cover a lot of severe weather. My new service you're just honestly didn't believe like, we should. He should take a lot of his food anchors to cover severe weather. That's because he has meteorologist for that. I don't know, that was just his take. But going into my current market where I'm at now, I've only done severe weather maybe a couple of times, I don't. I haven't really done in a lot. I've covered like one snowstorm. But when it comes to going live frequently at breaking news, that's a constant thing. Because being a night sky reporter crime is always sadly happening. So I always have to adjust or change gears or if my producer or my boss wants me live, I have to be live. It was just a situation earlier this week, I believe. I was working on a story. And a massive fire happened not too far from our station. And I had to switch gears and go live with little to no information. But I mean, that's just the that's just the life of a journalist.

Zak Dahlheimer 08:52

Yeah, no, I know, personally, just from you know, our experience working together. I mean, you are, you've been one of the reporters that have been covering a lot of breaking news constantly. And you do it? Well. To add to that, would you say, because I know there's been quite, there's some events, because we work closely, of course, on the weekends that you know, come to mind of breaking news events that you've covered or have experienced or witnessed. But is there a particular breaking news event that stands out to you in your career? Whoa

09:36

does it have to be from this market? Or can it be

Zak Dahlheimer 09:40

it doesn't have to be from this market. It can be from any time in your career. It can be from this market, whichever. Like if you had to think about you know, one time to where you were covering breaking news that you know, it just pops into your head constantly the whole time. It's it's just stuck with you the whole time. Is there An event like that that you know that first comes to mind would you say?

10:04

Yes. Let me honestly answer this when I get in the car has this is a question that I really want to be like sitting down for.

Zak Dahlheimer 10:14

Oh, yeah, yeah, absolutely. Yeah for sure. Catherine

10:40

I enter. You're almost done stepping out.

Zak Dahlheimer 10:45

No worries. Take your time

10:58

my mom, this is just off the record.

Zak Dahlheimer 11:02

Let me let me pause. Let me pause the recording then hold on.

11:06

Okay. Okay.

11:15

Oh, that's a good setup. Yeah. Okay, awesome. So, to answer your question, what like breaking news do are like remember that like, vividly or?

Zak Dahlheimer 11:29

Yeah, yeah. Is there an event that like went first, like, for what if it's impacted you personally? or what have you, that stands out to you that you cover? And why is that so?

11:41

So I don't want to necessarily say this specific event has impacted me. But what really still stands out for me was my very first and you remember this to my very first weekend shift. And that chaotic shooting happened at MacArthur mall in Norfolk, I got the call from my assignment editor and was just like, Hey, you gotta head to Norfolk, there's been a there's been a shooting. And it was really the scene that still replays in my mind to this day, because you cannot. There was you cannot park, you know, anywhere close to MacArthur mall, police had everything blocked off. There was so much caution tape, so much of a heavy police presence. And, you know, as you obviously know that Norfolk Police has a huge vacancy right now. So to see so many Norfolk Police Officers, at that one crime scene, I was just like, whoa, so many residents and shoppers, and probably tourists, because a lot of people, you know, come obviously to Hampton Roads and touring the city tour the area was like coming up to me. Like, what happened to someone died, someone died. And I had to say, Yeah, someone passed away. And you know, being on the scene alongside my competitors. And the police chief at the time he came out the mall and I will just never forget his face. He just looked completely done. Like no disrespect to the former chief, but he just was out of it. I could tell he was just very fed up. And that's just like stuff that still resonates with me now because I'm just like, we just have so much

crime, sadly, here in Hampton Roads. But you know, this fatality happened at the mall, where a little kid shop, you know, teenagers had their first jobs like, you know, in the mall, you know, grandmothers, grandfathers, grandfather's in the mall shopping and like, just to know that the shooting took place in a popular Mall. It was just just a sad situation. And obviously, I'm on the scene, you know, gathering the details covering the facts telling viewers like, hey, this just happened. Be aware of this. Crime in Norfolk is rising. Yeah,

Zak Dahlheimer 14:39

totally. And I know that you've mentioned that this particular event didn't impact you personally. But when it comes to thinking about your consistent coverage of breaking news, in looking at the totality of everything would you say that's impacted you personally in any way

14:58

can be an attack So just for like, your mental health because covering so much crime, and you know, I think a lot of my colleagues, we sometimes get a lot of our shootings confused, like, oh, like I apologize that they're short talking about the shooting that happened on Killam, or this shooting that happened, you know, on monitor Monticello, like, we get so much we cover so much crime and sometimes it just all starts to mesh and, you know, feel the same and just always reporting, you know, after the scenes always, you know, telling folks like, you know, what happened, connecting with police connecting with community activists connecting with the parents or the Guardians, who lost their loved ones like, that can be very impactful, especially when a shooting just happened less than five hours ago. And you have to be the one to get in contact with family members and, you know, see if they are willing to share with you what happened or see if they want to be willing to share with you their loved one that just just died not even 24 hours ago.

Zak Dahlheimer 16:21

Well, and yeah, I know that a lot can go through your mind at that point. And you brought up a good point, you know, it can be you know, taxing to one that one's mental health, especially when crime blends in together. I want to ask to like say you're sent to a breaking news assignment, when you're on the way what's going through your mind and then when you get to the scene, are there any particular stressors or mental emotional strains that come to mind that you consistently experience on a consistent basis with breaking news?

17:03

Repeat the last part.

Zak Dahlheimer 17:05

Oh, yeah. So like, so first, you know what's going through your mind when you're getting to the scene like when you get the call to go but then like when you get to a breaking news scene, are there any particular stressors that come to mind that you experienced on a consistent basis that scenes like this

17:23

and well, I think all depends on the scene. If I'm going to a scene and you know someone just died the crime the crime tape is still up books are gather outside and police are saying that the

shooter is still you know, at large there presumed to be armed and dangerous. I honestly just have to I just have to pray that I'm like, I'm just praying that nothing happens to me out here I'm I'm praying that you know, God covers me and my photographer out here. And I just honestly just try to do the job diligently and quickly, while still trying to gather like the goods you know. But that's like in that situation. The most recent situation like I mentioned before, of that fire that happened on Church Street, I'm going in I went into that situation not knowing anything, there was no details at all given to us. So as I'm heading to that situation, I'm like, Okay, I'm just thinking like what the scene is like we see the black smoke the heavy black smoke actually I just have to talk about what I see what I smell checking going checking my emails going on Twitter to see if Norfolk Fire Rescue posted any updates, or any like notifications, I'm really just having to get into my mind Okay, at this point, you can only record what you're seeing what you're observing what you're hearing around you, you know, putting viewers in the element I'm in now heavy smoke. It is a badly is a bad fire. There is firefighters on top of the building using the water hose. I don't know if that's the correct terminology, but the water hose to try to tame and tackle this fire. Um, so like I said before, I'm kind of being repetitive but just I think it just really depends on the scenario that I am in and to answer the last part of your question. Last part Your question was, say the last part again?

Zak Dahlheimer 20:02

Oh, yeah. Any particular stressors, like when you're at a breaking news scene, typically that you consistently experience any particular stressors that seems like that?

20:17

stressors.

20:20

Honestly, I think really the most just the stressful part is, you know, having to gather, gather all have this little to no information that we have, and you know, having to go live for I don't even, we just do we do with so much I don't even know how long we actually talk for but like, you know, trying to deliver a minute live hits, with just little to no information. So sometimes that's like, it kind of stresses me out. I'm just like, Oh, God, like, what am I really gonna say, right now, I just got to the scene literally five seconds ago. And my life is in one minute, like, what do I do? What do I say? But once we get the, once I get the ball rolling, I start talking and it starts to flow. And I think just the stress kinda goes away. God, I hope that answered your question.

Yeah, no,

Zak Dahlheimer 21:16

totally. So it's like when you when you're in the moment in the zone, and when you get everything going, it's kind of like, a way to where stress, the stressors from the environment that you're at, it goes away, when you're kind of like in the zone and getting everything going. Um,

21:34

by being in the field, you have to lock out and sewn everything out, around you and really just be locked in to, you know, the camera, the photons, like, you know, delivering the news?

Zak Dahlheimer 21:49

Absolutely. Um, you mentioned your faith to, like, you know, kind of, like you mentioned, you know, praying that you and your photo journalists, your colleagues that are with you are okay, especially as certain scenes. Is that how you cope with situations when you're out there? Or do you have any other coping mechanisms that kind of help you when you're out that these situations? For sure,

22:15

I'm leaning on my face face is definitely like my coping mechanism. Because at the end of the day, I mean, if something happens, it happens. Like you can't control, you know, situations. But you know, if you, at least for me, if I beforehand, if I just like pray and, you know, ask for like safety, and kinda, um, it makes me feel at ease. Gotcha. That's just me, like, personally. Well, and we've

Zak Dahlheimer 22:57

had, you know, a few other participants have said, like, faith is a big coping mechanism and something to really kind of get them through, you know, whatever situations they may be at. What about emotional responses, like, depending on the situations you may be at, I know, we go to a lot of heavy situations, Do you regularly, like show or exhibit emotions or emotional responses when covering breaking news?

23:25

I think is important. So as journalists, we've been trained, and taught to not put your feelings into stories, no matter how, like negative or positive, the story that you're covering is, however, we're human. And it's okay to be human. And I feel like it's weird. Personally, if you're not showing the emotions, you know, there's been several incidents throughout my years of being in the field and I'm at the scene and you know, Sally is just relating all back to crime. But you know, a mother just lost her Granddaddy. The big granddad was shot. grandbaby didn't even make it to see 10 years old. I'm talking to loved ones who lost their nephew. Not even not even, you know, five hours ago, when the incident happened. You know, I'm talking to preachers to sadly have to close the doors of their church because COVID hashes impacted them so much. And you know, the list goes on and on and on. But being in those situations you honestly feel for them, you know, you want to extend Your if someone died, you know, extend your condolences, you know, you kind of want to show them that you do care, can you show folks that you care? You build a relationship, you know, with these folks, and they trust you more, as a journalist, they, you know, they want to work with channel three, because I remember she showed compassion when she spoke with me, and none of the other, you know, reporters did that. So, yeah, I mean, I show it to a certain extent, but at the same time, you know, depending on the story, I sometimes do, like, just leave my emotions and, you know, out of it, because it's just not appropriate to show for that specific story that I'm covering? Well, it depends really like on what the story is.

Zak Dahlheimer 26:03

And you said you were taught was that like, in college, like when someone said, Hey, you shouldn't be showing emotions regularly or something like when you were being taught, you know, to get ready to go into this field.

26:15

Yeah, that's just something that I was taught, like, in college, like, when I was an intern, indies, and some reporters that I shadow, like, they told me that. And just to be clear, I'm not saying you shouldn't show like, you know, emotions are obvious. I'm just saying, like, for example, if you're a Democrat, and you're at a Republican watch party, and you're sad that your candidate didn't win. You shouldn't be showing or expressing, you know, your, your thoughts or your feelings or emotions like that. That's what I'm getting at. Sure.

Zak Dahlheimer 27:06

But from the standpoint of like, say, for instance, like you mentioned, you know, you're at a breaking news scene, you find out that a loved one was had been killed or died five hours before and a family's obviously in distress. Or it could be a lot of, you know, a heavy stuff around then you're saying it's okay to show motions from that standpoint, especially from breaking news.

27:30

Yeah, for sure. You want them to know that you care. And, you know, just as a human being, I mean, it's a sad situation. So, although not you personally, that decision what should happen to me just as a human being, show compassion?

Zak Dahlheimer 27:51

Absolutely. Um, well, I mean, you mentioned, you know, a couple of instances, I mean, going and talking to family members, you know, five hours after they found out their loved ones were killed or had died, a pastor having to close their church because COVID is just impacting them. What do you make up? Or how do you assess constantly going to cover breaking news events like that, that one could say can be traumatic?

28:33

Just

28:35

as tough. I just feel like when you sign up to, to do this job, you're going to be covering a lot of traumatic situations. Not everyone can be a journalist. So I, there's so many traumatic situations that I've that I've been I've been in, and it sucks, but it's, this is kind of what I signed up for. So it's like, it's that I have to?

Zak Dahlheimer 29:13

Yeah. Well, I appreciate your time, too. And I just have a few more questions I want to get to, um, when it comes to trauma training, Did you receive any before like, say when you were in college, or before you started your career, at any point during your career, did you have trauma training to help you with this type of coverage?

29:40

What do you make of that?

29:44

When you actually asked me now it sounds crazy, right? That I didn't get that. I didn't get it, but I feel like that should be something that reporter should have in there. First market or maybe

even like a course in college before you actually get into the field. At least for me, I don't know how others experiences are. But, you know, when I graduated college, and I started my first market, I was like, thrown in there like, okay, like, you know, you're you're covering these you're covering these stories like, do your best do their job I didn't get I didn't get trauma training. So if I'm at the spa, bad a barricade situation, or, you know, I'm at literally at the scene where the dead body has still not been covered. Is like it just is kind of what it is. Which you, I wish I got that. Well,

Zak Dahlheimer 31:00

you mentioned that like companies offering like a course or like a seminar for like new journalists, especially like maybe their first market. So that might be an area of opportunity you'd like to see companies explore to help journalists who consistently cover breaking news to help their mental health.

31:17

Yeah, yes. So now like, you know, being at my current station, and prescript skirts offers a lot of like horses and you know, like, like mental health trainings, you know, stuff that reporters or, you know, any on air talent can do to alleviate, will try to help alleviate any, like mental health concerns or things that you're going through at the moment, they have, like I know of, like free therapy sessions that you can utilize. So I think like, luckily, like my company is like, big on that. But like, starting in this field, I didn't have that

Zak Dahlheimer 32:10

was well, and I was gonna say it leads into my next question, you know, the, you mentioned the stuff that Scripps offers with those mental health therapy sessions, your faith, you said was a big one for you, especially when going out to the scenes, um, are there any other resources, if any, that have been available to help your mental health from covering these events, breaking news that you could speak on.

32:37

Um, I think the, the free therapy sessions that Scripps offer offers, that was very helpful for me. That was that was helpful for me when I had to use when I had to utilize that at one point in my career, and I was just, like, happy that, you know, my company offered those resources and the therapists had a listening ear and you know, I can just really vent to them about this is stuff that goes on and my hair is every day is not peaches and cream, like viewers may think it is because there's a lot of stuff that goes into this job. And, you know, people just see a minute and 30 news report but they don't know like the hoops and bounds that we had to jump through to even get all this.

33:43

So

33:47

yeah, that those those therapy sessions were helpful for me.

Zak Dahlheimer 33:54

And that's good to hear too. And you mentioned the one areas an example of an area of opportunity with those beginning big like courses for new journalists coming into the field like in their first market, I want to get your take because other participants have like mentioned this and this has actually become like a common answer when I asked about the areas of opportunity, and many have said that they would like to see a therapist or a counselor that is a is local like on the ground where the stations at and then it could be a direct partnership to where they can come in and meet with the staff like the field journalists and it's you know, someone that's in person and that is familiar with the area that they're covering. So that would be a big help but also a wellness days or PTO days that could be set aside specifically for mental health more PTO days, that wouldn't be a direct hit into the general PTO bank so you're not having to choose whether to use PTO days for or vacation or like your, your sick, you know, maybe like a cold or flu or whatever have you you have like days set aside for you to help you with that. What do you make of those two ideas?

35:25

So, honestly, to answer your first question No, no,

35:33

if I'm just I'm like real big on my on my privacy and kinda like a separate like, I'm big on like, separate, like separation of things.

35:50

Sure.

35:51

You wish honestly to be truthful view, if we had like mental health, um, like therapists probably like, at my current station, I don't know if I will go just because it's just like, like, I don't know, I don't know about well want to utilize it. I more so like driving somewhere like going to their office as not, like, on the ground. So just HR, like doing like a zoom call? I know that sounds crazy, but I don't think I will like necessarily utilize it. But for others, that could probably be very useful to folks who work at the station. Well, all right.

Zak Dahlheimer 36:39

Well, I was just gonna say I'm sorry, if I may. Let me I was kind of let me just restate kind of like where I was getting i So wouldn't be at the station on the grounds, it would be like say a partnership with say like, for instance, like with wt, KR, it would be maybe a therapist or a counselor in Norfolk or Newport News or someone that is familiar with the area and that can partner directly with the stations that way. There's someone that is familiar with, you know, journalists, you know, what they're going through, and is familiar with the area, it would be off site, it would be a partnership, it wouldn't be kind of like, you know, oh, yeah, it's down the hall or something like that. But that would be versus say, someone that's a therapist that's in Ohio, or in Washington State or something like that.

37:30

They're familiar with journalism, like the courier. Oh, oh, sorry. I misunderstood your question. Okay. Sorry,

37:36

didn't make my so clear. The I feel like that's

37:39

beneficial. We're folks who know what journalists do when the ins and the outs and, you know, knowing that is not a glamorous job, and it can be stressful. I think that I think that will be really beneficial. Like I said before, a lot of people really don't know, what journalists do. I mean, for example, like, viewers are just watching the newscast, but they don't know, like, the ins and outs, like, Oh, my story got canceled at 230. And I'm in the brook lock shows, I have to, like, make something work magically like, but they're just seeing the end result. A lot of times, I feel like, we have to explain like what we do. And when people are like, and people are like, Oh my god, like, wow. And I'm like, Yeah, so I think like, folks who actually know, like, Okay, you're like, people actually know what we do. Like, we're looking for stories off the clock, we have to pitch them, not every story gets approved, you have to look for otherwise, like you have to do your research, do your calls. And at the end of the day, with this job, sadly, you're on everyone else's time. So it's like you have to be on other folks time. 24/7 So like I said, a person who just knows everything that we go through, and you know, being there to be a listening ear if we need them for like moral support, you know, you know, sessions, whether it's like, you know, if you just want to go to them for mental health reasons, or just really want to go to them because you know, you are having a good day, you just want to share that with someone, someone that understands like, I think that will be really, really, really helpful. Something that maybe, you know, a lot of stations should look at. And when it comes to your water second question.

Zak Dahlheimer 39:54

Oh, yeah, so the other thing that kept popping up that was a common answer. I just want to get your take on this too. What's your views. Yeah. So specific wellness, PTO days for mental health that wouldn't be looped into the bank.

40:07

I think that's, we need that. No doubt about it. That's something that we need. I personally feel like you shouldn't have to use vacation days, as like a mental health day, you shouldn't have to use your PTO. You know, because you're, you're sick, I feel like there should be allocated time in your bank for sick days, vacation days, mental health days. Now, I'm not saying that we should have like 20 Mental Health days, but you know, maybe like seven or 10 days out, we can just really use throughout, you know, 365 days, instead of using vacation days. I think that, you know, the CEOs and presidents of these big corporations, they need to hop on the wave. They need to hop on the wave, because everyone stresses about mental health when it's too late. I just read a post. I believe this week. I don't remember the anchors name, but she committed suicide. I mean, I'm pretty sure every day viewers looked at her, whether she was on you know, their morning, morning news, evening news, Night, night, night, nightly news, whatever the case may be. But they saw, you know, a big face, they saw her delivering the news, they saw her cracking jokes, probably were her co anchor. Um, but you know, once those cameras are all people are battling no serious stuff. And people never know until it's until it's too late. So yeah, I think that mental health days are prevalent. prevalent, we need that. And I wish that's something that you know, we had, but maybe we'll see that soon.

Zak Dahlheimer 42:16

All right, let me go ahead and stop this here.

PARTICIPANT 4 ZOOM RECORDING RAW

Zak Dahlheimer 00:32

Gotcha. And how many years in your total career as a TV news field journalist, have you? How many years total in your career?

00:43

Will December, let me say I started with just a studio job, I want to say in fall of 98. So I've been fully I've been employed and television since 98. So click in 24 years, and basically 23 and a half of those as a photo journalist of some type in the field.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:04

Gotcha. And so photo journalist, and then you said studio studio. Studio.

01:11

Yeah, the first three, four months of my peers running studio camera for the morning show just entry level position, and then a position came open and worked my way up.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:20

Gotcha. So for 23 and a half years, you've been a TV news photo journalist in the field. Yes, sir. What type of for those who may not be in the know like us? What are the responsibilities? Would you say they come with being a TV news photo journalist out in the field constantly?

01:39

Well, I always have a saying that we get paid to be nosy. So when you're kind of out covering an event, I've always looked at it, you're the eyes for the viewers, you know when garris of what it is, whether it's something happy or something sad, especially if it's something like a specialty event that if you don't see it and you don't capture it, then the viewers don't see it, the viewers don't get to experience it. So you really kind of have to kind of have your head on a swivel and know where the action is and know where to look for the action and know when the action happens, you know, who to pick the right people to interview, you know, uncertain scenes, like trying to get someone who witnessed something as opposed to someone who's just happened to be walking by. So really is just kind of you got to tell that story. And if it's a live breaking event, it can be you know, there's no redos, there's no retakes, there's, there's just what's happening. And you have to pay attention. And you have to get it to if you want to tell the story completely.

Zak Dahlheimer 02:40

What made you want to get into journalism,

02:42

I love sports, I wanted to become a sports reporter at one point, but then I got behind the camera and enjoyed that a little too much. And I also didn't like the fact as a reporter of not being able to pick all my stories all the time. I didn't like, like, I did some news reporting and i There were several times I just wasn't stories that I was interested in and stories I you know, maybe too much crime heavy stories that I did not care for. So it's a lot easier to be behind the camera on those stories, because it's kind of becomes more of a little bit more of an art, you know, telling a

story and paying attention and you don't have to maybe invest as much in the finer details, you know, of the intricacies of a story if you're kind of shooting the video and telling it that way. So that's kind of why and then I had an opportunity to go to Miami and shoot sports full time for a significant portion of my career. So that was kind of played into it too to be that close to big time top level sports was appealing to me.

Zak Dahlheimer 03:43

Gotcha. So really, it's from an artistic standpoint, you know, you're able to show the viewers you guys I mean, cuz you all are the first in terms of field journalists, you know, photo journalist reporters who and whatnot. You all your group photo journalists are the first line that really visually is cat is seeing what's going on as far as especially with breaking news and severe weather when it comes to that.

04:09

Well, I'm a bit of a video snob, I would say not the first line were the most important line. Because without us, it's radio. And, you know, these cell phones now are amazing what people can do with it, but that wasn't always the case. Now, it's just easy, you know, I mean, looking at George Floyd and other stuff like that in society, you know, these are generational items, you know what they can do? But that wasn't always the case, you know, upwards of, you know, even going back 10 years ago, 10 years and prior the cell phone cameras weren't you had to have someone out there who would know what they were doing, who know where to look, who know who know what they needed to do, who knew tendencies who had been in situations and knew where to go and what to look. And I think also the technology has also helped with the 4k and these, these cameras because the resolution now are through the roof. But you know, back in the day that way wasn't the case you needed that professional camera and you need to know what you were doing.

Zak Dahlheimer 05:03

Gotcha. And I know you mentioned Norfolk and Miami as where you've worked, especially as a TV news, field journalist as a photo journalist. Were there any other markets that you worked in? No, that

05:15

was it. I did intern at CNN OSI as a student, but that was back at Old Dominion days back around 97. But just Norfolk, three different stations and Miami. Wow, three stations total, two in Norfolk, one in Miami.

Zak Dahlheimer 05:31

Two in Norfolk, one in Miami. Okay. Well, I first want to say thanks so much for taking the time out of your day to talk with us and to be a participant in this research study. Now that we've know more about you, you know what this is all about? experience covering breaking news, and severe weather consistently. I want to get into your career as far as from those two aspects. How would you say throughout your 23 and a half years as a TV news field journalist photojournalist throughout your career, how often would you say you've had to cover breaking news and severe weather in the field?

06:07

Well, sir, severe weather first and foremost, you know, is obviously hurricane season for the two markets I was in, you know, and yeah, you do have random pop up storms, but that's really the marquee, hurricane season. So and that's just an all hands on deck, it's really mentality when the storm comes through, it's time to cover it, and you just kind of go out, you do your best, and you look for the, you know, unfortunate, we call it the cone of death, you know, the, the hurricane cones on the models, and you know, you're monitoring that, but you're always prepared. So, I've covered many hurricanes in the Outer Banks. I've covered some money in South Florida, though more in the Outer Banks with the recent trends. And as far as breaking news, I've been very fortunate and unfortunate some I feel some time is the wrong word. But I've been fortunate in my career to cover some pretty significant events. And, you know, you just kind of learn when you know the difference with with kind of regular breaking news. And then what's national breaking news, you know, from the beltway snipers covering that at tkr I guess 2000, early 2000s to Marjory Stoneman Douglas to part of the Pulse nightclub shootings in Orlando to most recently, spending so much time out that the surf side condo collapse in, in South Florida that dominated the news. A year ago. It was, it's just when it's time, it's, it's time to go. And it's just kind of part of the business. And I always say that, as much as those are tragedies. Those are the stories why people get into media, they don't get into media for the regular story. And let's, I'm gonna wait, let me let that phone ring. People don't get into this business, just to do the daily run of the mill run around. And let's talk to the mayor about economic impact stories people get in this story, because into this business, because they want to kind of be on the front row of history. And they want to experience that and tell those stories. So I've been fortunate enough to have opportunities to cover many of those things.

Zak Dahlheimer 08:14

And I mean, just that this is a sample of what you said. I mean, this is probably a huge understatement. But you've seen a lot.

08:21

Yeah, I've been very fortunate as on top of also I've covered I was at I called it Hillary's wake in 2016. I was in the Javits Center when she lost the presidential election, I had a chance to cover military operations during Operation Enduring Freedom after the attacks on 9/11. I was overseas for five weeks hopping on and off Navy ships. So it definitely gives you getting a front like that gives you just unique perspectives. You know, like I've never been in the military, but a little part of me has a taste of what it's like to be in it just from being on night ops and going up and down those stairs and being on an active tarmac, as you know, planes loaded with with bombs are taking off 15 feet from me. So it really does give you a unique opportunity to see people sometimes at their best and sometimes at their worst.

Zak Dahlheimer 09:12

Well, and of all the significant historical news events that you've been able to cover and severe weather events, too. Would it be accurate to say that when you have to weigh I mean, breaking news versus severe weather in your career? Would you say you've covered those equal leaves so far, like you've had 5050 amount of experiences, or does one outweigh the other?

09:36

No, probably more of the breaking news events, I've definitely covered more. Because sometimes the hurricane breaking news happens year round, and for at least for i for what I've covered, the weather is really more of a certain time of the year and, and even if you look at the weather patterns for the last 10 years, when I was in Miami, I think we covered one hurricane and 10 years, or maybe it was two and that was because they just weren't coming through. So With that, I would say definitely more the bigger news. The bigger news events.

Zak Dahlheimer 10:06

Gotcha. Well, I was gonna say is, is there a particular event breaking news, severe weather? Because you've named a bunch that you've covered. But is there a particular one, I'll be a breaking news, severe weather that stands out to you personally.

10:22

Well, I was fortunate enough to cover a 911 when it happens, so I was working for W tkr. At the time, I remember I was living at home, got the my mom freaking out saying they flew a plane into the World Trade Center, honestly, at first, at first thought I thought it was Cessna into the World Trade Center in downtown Norfolk, because I drove by that every day on the way home and that was the World Trade Center for me. And then I got downstairs and I remember seeing the second plane fly in. And I was like I called work. They said, pack a bag, you're going north, if anyone is so I hopped in the shower, I packed a bag. And so we were at the Pentagon by that afternoon, you know, so we're pulling up to the Pentagon around three o'clock, you know, with my reporter at the time, and we spent a couple of days there. We were there. And then we get to New York, Thursday morning, and we came back Friday, Sunday. So you know, trips like that just have little moments that are burned in your brain. You know, I have all of those stories loaded on YouTube. I wanted to put them on there just because I feel they are historical. And every now and then I'll rewatch them. But for most part, that trip is that kind of burns in your brain, you know, and I'd also throw on top of that definitely spending five weeks in Bahrain in the Persian Gulf hopping on and off Navy ships. Being on the USS Theodore Roosevelt, the USS Carl Vinson, like active aircraft carriers, was just just something you know, I remember my family being worried too, but telling them I said, I think I'm in the safest place in the world right now. I want an aircraft carrier. No one's gonna mess with an aircraft carrier. And just just being that close associate that and, you know, and just so many of those others just kind of I don't want to sound bad, but they kind of bleed together, especially some of the gun violence ones Marjory Stoneman Douglas, the polls, I wasn't on scene at the polls, but I was in the neighborhood where the shooter lived for a while. So kind of a secondary side story to that. You know, the shooters, the beltway snipers going up to that area when they were still on the loose, you know, you just kind of have some, some moments just burn in your brain a little bit more. And it's maybe not the whole trip, but at least certain moments. Do you know that you kind of keep with you and you take with you that I think make you maybe a little bit of a better journalist as you move on?

Zak Dahlheimer 12:41

Why do you think of the 911 stuff? Especially? I mean, it's been 21 years, it'll be 21 years, in about a week. Why do you think that stands out to you? So personally, because I know it's a historical event on the surface for everybody in America, but for you to be on the frontlines? I mean, why does that stand out to you personally?

13:03

Well, I first of all, when you when you're on premises, and you see it, you know, everyone else is seeing a hole in the Pentagon for on TV and pictures. And then I'm they're seeing it for myself, you know, I'm seeing the helicopters land, I'm seeing the people sleeping, and I'm talking to the people that are coming by. And the same thing for ground zero, we couldn't get terribly close. But I know I got within, I want to say for three or four blocks of it. And when I sent my camera in and zoomed, it was like Holy smokes, you just kind of get a new perspective for how big the damage was, How significant was like just seeing rubble that was seven eight storeys high. And like, being like, is this real? Like, it's just that Anil, age old adages is when you see it, and with your own eyes, oppose on TV, you just got really just a different perspective of things.

Zak Dahlheimer 13:57

Absolutely. I be kind of remiss, because especially, you know, with the career you've had, you've mentioned, of course, some big natural disasters, you know, that you've been able to cover to whether it be in Norfolk or in Miami. Is there a particular severe weather event that stands out to you that you've covered? And if so, why does it stand out?

14:19

All of the hurricanes kind of they hate to sound they kind of bleed together because it's really a it's such a mindset when you're going into a hurricane you want to be prepared. You want to have the right equipment. You could be staying in motel rooms with no power on you know, living off granola bars for four days like I feel I've done that multiple times and I couldn't even name you the storm like when people talk about oh, I remember this hurricane I'm like which one was that? Like what year and even then I'm like what so they do kind of those are kind of bleed together. I guess the ones that would stick out I remember covering a a blizzard in the Outer Banks. So that was just a little surreal like just driving through Kill Devil Hills and the outer of banks, and it was covered in a foot of snow. And it's like, this is just weird, you know, especially when you're down there used to being down there and tank tops and swim shorts, you know, you know, sitting on the beach. You know, I had one particular story, I remember I almost lost a truck, a work truck to the ocean during a hurricane. So that one sticks out in my head. I remember I was with my reporter, and we were out, we had some time between our live shots. So we're out driving around. So I'm driving, I'm driving, and all of a sudden, we're on this one stretch on the beach road where it's there's no houses, so it's just the beach. All of a sudden a wave hits I looked over and it's literally halfway up on my on my car. Like if the window was down, we would have had water pouring in the car, it picked up my car and moved us off the road. And it settled us back down. And the front tires were off the ground. And I guess it was a front wheel drive. So I pushed the gas and we're not moving. So I'm ready to bail. I'm ready to like, let's get the equipment. Let's there's a house here. Let's just bail. But my reporter was like No, put it in reverse. The wheels have popped down and then put it in drive and gun out and I'm like you do it. I get out of the car. I grabbed the camera, he hops in the car, he does it we pull up, we pull in inland a little bit. We drive around to try and find an exit. We can't find it. But we're like, okay, at least we're safe for now. But we realized the only way to leave is to go back through the way we came. So we're there. So we're there watching and we literally have a stopwatch, we are timing on our watches the way the big wave come up. So we realized we had about 40 seconds. At one point these kids come through and he's white Range Rover. And they

pull down the window and they're like, Oh, this is great. They're like laughing having a good time joy ride my report and I are like you guys need to go home now. Like we almost lost our car. They're like, Oh, we live down here. We know what we're doing. So whatever. So anyways, we time it, we get back. We catch our breaths, we go into the Weather Channel truck where we had been working out of maybe about a close about 45 minutes an hour later. And the weather channel has a shot of a white Range Rover consumed by the ocean. And I was like looked at my report. I'm like that was the truck we saw. So those kids lost a wide range rover to the Atlantic Ocean. But I never forget that like being swept off the road and be like Holy smokes, like what are we and it just came out of nowhere. So you know, just kind of be an extra mindful, but that one sticks in my head just from from that particular moment that that trip was a bit more memorable, because we were actually like pretty much that was one more year right in the eye. You know, and, and I also was proud of that trip because I remember I took a nap during the hurricane like I was outside working and we had like a half hour break. And it just made sense to stay where I was and to go all the way back in. Because it was like a 10 minute walk back to the truck. So it wasn't like a 10 minute walk to the truck, rest five minutes and then 10 minute walk back out to this scene or I could just sit down on the ground and put my head down and pull the rain gear over me and I fell asleep then an act middle of an active hurricane.

Zak Dahlheimer 18:03

You just felt calm at that point, I guess. Right?

18:06

Well, it was we were in a safe place. Like we were right on the ocean. And it was coming in pretty hard. And there were other crews around us. So it's not like I was alone under a tree. You know, it was several other crews and a lot of media in that area. So it just kind of my reporters right there. I literally had the cameras still connected underneath me. And I literally just sat down put my hands and next you know, I was I was asleep. So you know, I was in the right place. It wasn't a risky move. I felt safe. Sure. Sure.

Zak Dahlheimer 18:34

I know you said they all bleed together. And b Do you know was in Miami or was that a Norfolk?

18:41

Perfect. That was the Outer Banks because um, so yeah, that was that was the Underbase because I also remember that one I don't remember what how far down we went. I want to say Max head but I could be wrong. But I also remember that one too, because when when the skies cleared one of the piers was pretty destroyed. And the Today's show was there with Al Roker and it was they had a beaut the incredible equipment like a jib shot and they had all you know is quite an impressive shot, just the destruction. I also say this that I think it was that same trick trip the reporter I worked with at the time Mike Mather really made his own breaks because we were at the airport. And they had they were going to do a helicopter tour ride of the damage down in the southern banks because the southern banks, I think, want to say it was a Rodanthe it down around that area. The highway was washed over so there was no way to get down there. So we got to the airport, hopefully to get on a helicopter ride and the person who was coordinating the helicopter rides was really kind of being difficult and not really being helpful. So my reporter

who made his own breaks, comes running up to me and says Get your gear. We have a spot on the governor's helicopter. So at this point, the first helicopter left and they had a pool camera in it. So then all of a sudden I'm sitting next to the governor of North Carolina. Oh I forget the type of helicopter officers were the helicopters with the two rotors the military one, but not the Black Hawks up there, but the real big one like the transportation with the two propellers on top and like the little Yeah, they took the doors off. So I'm sitting here, the governor's right next to me and we're flying around and he's pointing stuff out we land. He's going up talking to people. I mean, we're getting great stuff. I mean, it was unbelievable. And then we fly back. And we get off the helicopter. And we're walking out with the governor and the lady, the PR lady who was really rude to us, sees us and was like, what were you doing? And we're like, oh, my reporters, like we got a spot. I talked to the governor, he got a spot on the plane on the chopper. And she goes, Well, you're the pool camera now. And he says, No, we are not. Because you didn't help me. And you're not going to do that to me. We got what we needed. We're leaving. And then we left. And then we later on saw the pool camera. And the pool camera was shot from the same style helicopter but they didn't take the doors off. So they had to shoot all the video through a little porthole window like this big. And here I am with the doors wide open strapped in. Like they're doing the turns and you're literally you know, they they have the chopper flying around at the angle. And we're just leaning over. And yeah, it was that was another one of those trips. That's probably obviously the most memorable just because we had so much. Yeah. So to be honest, those are I'd have to look those are in the tkr archive somewhere. I

Zak Dahlheimer 21:22

was I mean, someone I know you said they kind of all bleed together. Yes. So you don't remember which name that was or what year maybe

21:29

I could tell you the years. There's a three year window when I was there at tkr. So it's some time from I left tkr November of oh three, and I was there about three years. So sometime in that early 2000, whatever had the most significant damage. I just remember it was the most significant one where this wasn't a regular hurricane, there was significant damage

Zak Dahlheimer 21:52

in the early 2000s. Yes, gotcha. Well, thank you so much for all of that. I mean, before we move on to the next section, you know, have this, you've consistently covered breaking news and stuff and severe weather on and off, you know, through almost 24 years now. Has this consistent is a two part question has this consistent coverage of both of these on the job impacted you personally, and has it kind of guided your career path per se,

22:24

in any way? I don't think is guided my career path. I did do sports for a long time, it's kind of just part of the career, you know, because when a story is that big enough, you know, no matter if you're a sports shooter, or a special project shooter, or you know, a entertainment reporter, when significant news hits, especially life changing news hits, it's it's your turn, it's all hands on deck, you know, and, and just be and I think the only way I think has changed me, it's just being that close, when you're that close to those events, and you have firsthand knowledge of seeing what happens and knowing what happens. It just gives you a different perspective to apply not

just to future stories, similar stories, but just when certain conversations and current events come up, you know, you can really, you know, go back to, you know, certain like when talking. I know talking personally, when you talk with people about the gun control issues and guns in school. You know, I'm pretty well knowledgeable on what happened and Marjory Stoneman Douglas, because, you know, not only was I there on breaking news, I had later done some features edit in a podcast with a fellow reporter that got pretty in depth. So you really kind of get in there. And you get to know a little bit more than some of the broad paint brushes that some people get when they watch, you know, maybe just a generic report on it. They're watching one or two reports on it when you have produced 30 to 50 reports on it, you know, so you just kind of really get a deeper dive on stuff and, and really just get a different perspective on things that way. But as far as like maybe my career, I don't think it is really Yeah, I think it's just kind of shaped me more than it shaped my career. Because to me, that's just part of the career. That's just part of what you do.

Zak Dahlheimer 24:08

Yeah, this is the expectations of the job.

24:12

Absolutely. And like I said, all hands on deck. I remember when Surfside happened being out there with the entertainment reporter and she was even saying this is the first time I've done like hard news. I mean, she I think she said like since Gianni Versace died or something along that line. So yeah, cuz that's just kind of though, you know, usually have enough people but when it's something that's significant, and something so global and worldwide, you know, on that story, there were people basically, if there was a country that had a beach resort town, they had media there at Surfside. Then people from Argentina, Japan, China, all over the world, like what are you doing here? And the guy from Argentina was like, you know, we have beach places like this too. And if this can happen in America, this can happen anywhere. And I was like, man, you know, he's right. And it's an interesting perspective.

24:58

Yeah, it was very interesting. Because I actually got on a he was funny I was he was set up doing a live stream all by himself. And then the cops made a move. So he was by himself. So I'm helping him move his gear. And then he came up to me afterwards is very thankful. And then he said, he goes, You were just on Argentinian national TV, because I was getting some shots of you helping me.

Zak Dahlheimer 25:22

thank you for that's, that's a section of, you know, your experience covering breaking news. Now, I want to ask questions, you know, as part of the study, you know, these are more kind of, you know, what kind of goes through your mind when you get sent to a breaking news, or severe weather assignment, which is actually my first question, you know, when, say, whether it was in Miami, or now or in your other stint in Norfolk, say, your central breaking news or severe weather assignment in the field, what immediately goes through your mind right off the bat?

26:02

Let's see the fun. One, you got to first thing foremost, you got to get there and you got to get the action, or you got to get reaction, I was just having this conversation the other day, you got to get the reaction, like say, if it's a building fire, or something, or a crime scene with tape up, like the burnt building ain't going anywhere, you know, but that ambulance is, you know, the families, people, they're on the sideline grieving, they're gonna be gone. And sometimes when they see your camera, they're gone. And other times are but so that building, you know, that can wait, I need to find, turn my back to what's going on and look and see what's going on, I gotta get the reaction, like, getting that building is easiest thing to do. Because like, exactly, well, the next day or the day after and get the burnout building. But getting that kid, the four kids who are hurting the fire getting loaded into the ambulance, and going, that's what you gotta get. So really about kind of thinking, okay, you know, what do we got to get? What's the scene? What am I anticipating? Where am I allowed to park? You know, is there a media staging area? And how big is it? Do I need to go to the media staging area? Now? Maybe we already have someone there, maybe I need to go around the street for a better vantage point. You know, what do I need to turn in? But what do I need to? When do I hit? So oh, hey, this is breaking news. And the show's already started, we need a shot as soon as you get there, or it's breaking news at two o'clock, and we got till four. Okay, now I can maybe take a second and try and look for a different angle or a different location. So it really depends on what's going on and what you have to do in that moment. What are your immediate responsibilities. And then part of that, too, I think, is also just always being prepared, you know, having your your your food with you, if you're going to eat having a bottle of water, you know, having some of that stuff, they're always having a rain jacket, you know, even if it's even if the weather says it's 88 degrees, and it'll be beautiful, sunny, not a cloud in the sky, I bring my reindeer, I bring my pants, I bring my jacket, it's just part of the gear because you just never know what happens. And it could even be something where you're covering a fire. And all of a sudden, I need my rain jacket, because I'm a little close to the hoses being sprayed. So you never know. So it's really kind of that's kind of like a persistent mindset of what you know, of just kind of being prepared for anything, because you just never know what's going to happen. Being always ready kind of. Yeah. And also, like I remember reading an article too on the UN Special Forces on how they train UN Special Forces. And one of the things they trained them to do was the night before, if they had a big rain, or whatever, they did a big mission. So the night before they would tell them to visualize doing all the basic stuff they're going to do. So whether it's like pulling a pin from a grenade and throwing it, visualize yourself doing it visualize pulling the ripcord visualize reloading your weapon, all the stuff that you're kind of trained to do visualize yourself doing that. So in the moment, it's just second nature, it's a little more second nature, I don't need to worry about reloading it because I've already done that so many times, I just need to worry about doing this. And I tried to apply that to my job. So like, for instance, if let's say we get the call at 345 and near the top of the for when I'm driving out there, okay, what do I need to do? Okay, first thing I need to do I got to turn on the TV. Let me do the TV. Let me turn on the live remote unit now. Because that takes five minutes to warm up. You know, I gotta find a spot what so look at there's tripods down, let me get the tripod out there and camera up. Let me just get a picture up, you know, so trying to do that checklist in my head on what is the priority? You know, now if the priority isn't live, then okay, that can wait when the project is wait. There's they're they're evacuating kids from a broken school bus and drove into a ditch. I gotta get there and get shot to these kids. You know, getting off the bus or in an ambulance. So it's just kind of putting that checklist in your head on what's the most important thing to do and it changes depending on the time and the assignment

Zak Dahlheimer 30:00

This kind of leads into my next question to have any particular stressors, you know, like any mental or emotional strains that you consistently feel or experience on a consistent basis when you arrive at these breaking news or severe weather scenes?

30:19

No, not for me, because I feel like it's easy to detach a little bit, because you have a task at hand, you know, you you have to get a shot. You know, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, you got to get a shot of the school, you got to get shot of, you know, any, any kids walking out, you know, police running around, it comes very task oriented. So you don't really have time. If you think about the emotion of the moment, maybe a little later, but in that moment, yeah, you're sad, you're thinking about it, but you've got a job to do. And you've got a story to tell. And if you get too kind of wrapped up in the moment, sometimes like that, it can, it can affect it, especially when, I mean, you know, this when you get that call, how come station A, B, and C got the shot, and you didn't get the shot? You know? And sometimes the answer is, well, they went somewhere else, or sometimes I wasn't there on time, but sometimes like I've had it happen before I missed the shot. The granted was a sports game, like why didn't you get it? And I just said, I just missed it. I mean, I wasn't paying attention. That was me, like I my back was hurting a little bit. I was I was out of the loop. And that that was me, I took the blame on it. So just about about trying to be you know, mentally prepared for for that for that stuff to not miss anything.

Zak Dahlheimer 31:28

I guess detaching yourself and knowing that the task is at hand is that kind of a way you you assess and cope with situations I guess at breaking news?

31:38

It can especially if you feel sometimes it's a story that maybe the station's giving a little too much credence to, like, why are we spending like, I feel like sometimes we cover too much like the shootings too much, I think can be a bit much. And when we cover them all the same way, kind of wash, rinse, repeat. You know, I feel it can you know, it can be it can be a bit overwhelming. The one thing I do always remind myself and I had this conversation with a reporter is that you, you are dealing with people on what could be the worst day of their lives. You know, and for us, it's just another story. But for this person we're interviewing, you know, their daughter's dead, or their daughter's missing, or their son, you know, just had like a career, you know, horrible accident. And they're going to remember this day vividly for the rest of their lives. And meanwhile, us as journalists, next week, we'll be having a beer, the what was that story we were doing Thursday? What was that one? Oh, yeah, yeah, the kid hit by a car, you know. And so I always try to be mindful, you're dealing with people on the worst day of their lives, for the most part in some of these situations. And to be very mindful that you know, to be yes, I want to be competitive. And yes, I want to get the best shot. And yes, I want to do my job. But I'm also thinking, what if this is my sister? Or this is my cousin? Or what is this someone my best friend, because I know for sure if it was my best friend this happened to I'd cover it completely differently than if it was some random stranger at least I think that's just human nature people would. So I try and keep that mindset of, of just knowing what you're getting into, and being very courteous. And at that point, to me, the competition almost doesn't matter. That

whole Well, the family, the family talked to that station, so I gotta get the family. I'm like, Hey, I'm not pushing too hard. I think we've got to try and get the family. But if they say no, twice, we just got beat on this one. I'm not gonna push the envelope, because that's not right to them. And if that happened to me, and I asked you twice to leave, I'd expect you to leave. So I feel sometimes trying to be mindful that how human how these results yet we're covering these events, but we're not having to live these events. And I think I'd be very mindful of that.

Zak Dahlheimer 33:50

Is that how would you also say you assess constantly going to cover especially breaking news? Some severe weather you've already you've touched on but mostly breaking news? That can be traumatic?

34:03

Oh, yeah. And at some point, it becomes like I said, earlier, it comes a little wash, rinse, repeat. Like I don't want to sound mean or bad. But you know, how many shootings Can you cover where you show up and it's flashing lights with police officers and crime scene tape putting up and people crying? And it's like, I mean, I say I say that and you can just close your eyes and think of all the ones you've covered that are the same basically the same scene walking up looking. Yeah, exactly. So um, what but once again, that's where it just kind of becomes a job to do. You gotta you try and be mindful. I know for me personally, I don't shoot people crying in English. If they I was on scene one time where it was, it was a shooting. And all of a sudden you heard someone walking up like what's going on what's going on? And it was the the kid's mother that but a boy got shot. He was dead. And it was the kid's mother walking up and she was told I I was there, I was there when she got the news. And I was the only camera there. And she just started crying and wailing, and it was pretty dark. And my reporters, like, shoot that and I was like, No. And they're like, why? I'm like, Why did I have to turn my light on? And I'm not in the I'm not in the business of shooting grief. I'm just I'm not doing it. I'm the only camera here. So the answer's no, I'm not shooting that. Because I don't I don't like that. That's one part of our business, I think is I just, you know, like I said, we this is the worst day of their life. And, you know, to just to have a shoot that and televise that. I don't know, I've just never been a big fan of that out. Now. If I'm on scene and another, the other three stations are shooting that. I don't have a choice, I have to shoot it. But if I'm never just me, there have been many times I've told the reporter No, we can work around that. You know, I'm not I'm not shooting that.

Zak Dahlheimer 35:48

Speaking of emotional responses, do you exhibit any? Or have you've exhibited any across, you know, breaking news? Is that something that I mean, I know that, you know, we have to be on like, you know, when we're covering assignments, you know, especially when we're live on TV and such and, but Do you regularly exhibit any emotionals responses when covering this?

36:10

I think after the fact I think once it kind of settles, and once it kind of dawns on you, you know, once you kind of learn more tidbits, you know, as as the story goes on, like I would say, for example Surfside when Surfside happened that happened on a Thursday morning. And I was out there 13 of the first 16 days. And then by the second day, we pretty much knew that they weren't going to find anybody, because they were completely pulverized for lack of I mean, literally

crushed to death, like ripped bodies ripped apart. And you kind of you get that in the moment and you're kind of doing your story. And then later on at night, when you've done your, you know, 12 hour shift out there in, you know, 90 degree humidity, you know, drench you call home, take a shower, and you sit down and then you kind of think about it, you know, because you know, you're alone with your thoughts at that point. So I mean, I've never gotten like highly emotional about that stuff. But obviously, I mean, it does affect you, when you just being around that close to that much grief and that much tragedy. And I'm not a big fan also of I've never liked it when there's a tragedy and people say, Wow, well, it's just so much different when it gets closer to home. And like I I guess I understand why people say that. But I don't think it has to happen across the street to know that something is terrible you no matter where it happens on this planet, you know, I think you need to be very Be thankful and fortunate that it hasn't happened to you or anyone you know.

Zak Dahlheimer 37:41

Sure. Well, and thank you so much for going through all of that, too. I mean, I know this is a very touchy subject to. Now I want to get to, and this is I'm very interested in talking with the journalist and the study on moving forward looking ahead, and how has would you say in almost 24 years of being a photo journalist, how has consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather? I know you alluded to this a little bit earlier, but how would you say that breaking news severe weather has shaped your career is impacted your you as a journalist and shape has shaped you as a journalist?

38:21

Yeah, well, I mean, you can't experience experience experience. I mean, that is really, really what it gives you you're gonna you do something for a long time. You just kind of you almost go into auto automatic pilot, almost sometimes you go into automatic pilot when you've covered some events so often so So, so many times. And, and it's just kind of part of the job, you know, it's a front seat to history sometimes. So it's a little bit part of that I feel like you're documenting history. And so I think it's just luckily I've said before, you know, you get paid to be nosy I'm inquisitive by nature. And I think it's just kind of I'm thinking it also helps you to maybe just be a little more open minded and critical you know, and questioning and say hold on what's going on how is this different? Not all these are the same what's going on? You know, yeah, you can cover X amount of shootings, but they're not all the same, you know, and saying, you know, I need the information here or what you know, you know, this one seems odd compared to the ones I've covered in the past so just kind of being a little more critical and and knowing that so many things I look to be the same but they really are the mind at the end of it tend to be you know, a little bit different. And, you know, you gotta be careful not to paint with a broad brush, you got to be specific.

Zak Dahlheimer 39:38

What about trauma training? Did you receive any before or during your career and what what are resources, if any, you could speak to that have been available to help your mental health from covering these types of events, or one

39:53

I don't think I've been I know when Surfside happened and others more recent I'd even say in the last four or five years, they are more mindful of, of offering that. But prior to that it was pretty much non existence. I don't remember them ever offering anything,

Zak Dahlheimer 40:10

a lot of mental health resources, and none I mean,

40:13

but I also there was never an event I covered where I felt like devastated and needed it. Like I've had ones that and obviously, you cover stuff that affects you and you think about it, but I've never had one that was so close or close to me that I felt like you know, I need a day off work, or I don't want to be on this story today. I did return a breaking news, a breaking weather story aside, I did refuse a weather assignment one time, but that was because they wanted to go a like into the hurricane, like down to the Florida Keys. And I was like, I ain't doing that. And my luckily my boss was was mindful of that. But I think that's been relatively new. I mean, I like to see it. I'm glad this stations and people are more proactive. But I would say that's relatively new to the last four or five years. But prior to that, it was kind of I think it was available if you wanted it, but it wasn't like available as like, as far as stations and organizations saying we have this for you here. Come talk to this person here is like you would have to go be more proactive in doing that.

Zak Dahlheimer 41:16

Are there any areas of opportunity you'd like to see station companies explore when it comes to helping mental health for field journalists who have covered breaking news and severe weather?

41:27

Yeah, I think just being mindful of what they asked him to do on a daily basis, you know, because you when you look at, you know, like, kind of like what I looked at earlier, we do a good job, you know, of like, what was that story last week and, you know, forget and kind of lumping stuff together. But just especially just being I think it's also such a personal individual thing. Like, it's hard to look how people react to all that stuff is really depending on the person, that individual you know, I worked with one reporter during surf side, who was a very emotional reporter, and like it came through and, I mean, she was like crying on camera, and I'm even like, what I'm like, What's going on here? And that's just the type of reporter she was. Now a lot of that people kind of gravitated to that and she did a good job in the moment. But, you know, I knew after the fact I was like, okay, she, like you need to talk someone. You know, I basically said to her, and so yeah, I think he just I think there's got to really be mindful of taking on a person by person basis, because, you know, obviously, everyone's different. Everyone's got a different mindset. And just just have the options there. You know, and sure, and if you know, one person is like, okay, the options are there, but, you know, this one particular person out of the five, I'm just gonna give them an email. Hey, you sure you okay? So maybe you know, don't, don't treat all the reporters as a lump. Just kind of be mindful of the different strengths and different what you see and being more targeted in that when you when you offer it.

PARTICIPANT 5 ZOOM RECORDING RAW

Participant 5 00:25

As my, in my current position, I have worked. It's kind of a, I would say, I've been a field reporter for a year and a half. Now, I've been at my station for going on, I think five years at this point. But field reporting about a year and a half,

Zak Dahlheimer 00:44

which answers my next question. So a year and a half. Pretty much as a TV news field journalist so far, would you say?

Participant 5 00:52

I would say yeah, I started off in a little bit of a hybrid situation. So I was producing half the week behind the scenes, and then I would be in the field half the week. And then this October, this last October, almost a year. Now I switch to full time reporting in the field every day, five days a week.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:13

Gotcha. So would you say overall, even with your hybrid position? How long? How many years of field experience in general, would you say you have?

Participant 5 01:23

That would be that was a little bit over a year and a half with hybrid combined with full time reporting.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:30

Gotcha. And as far as like field journalist reporter, has been the main time that you've had in that role, as well as but you've also been a producer.

Participant 5 01:40

Yes, sir. I have. That's how I kind of got started at Channel Six.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:44

Gotcha. Well, as far as reporting is, we're talking about field journalists here. What types of responsibilities would you say come with your job as being a reporter at Channel Six in Richmond?

Participant 5 01:56

Well, a lot of responsibilities come with being a field journalist, as you know, every single day got to have a story got to wake up with a pitch. So scouring for stories, working your contacts, scrolling on social media, reaching out to people investigating news tips, for you know what you're going to be covering for the day. It's first of all, also, do conducting interviews, of course, writing lots of writing, lots of researching, lots of transcribing, being on air having to, you know, put your face on and be camera ready. Every day when five o'clock hits, sometimes four o'clock. And, you know, just networking, keeping up with your sources. Writing web scripts, helping out the producers. I mean, it the list goes on right?

Zak Dahlheimer 02:55

Many hats pretty much you're wearing

Participant 5 02:58

so many hats, tons of hats.

Zak Dahlheimer 03:01

Well, you've had, you know, you've been reporting you've been producing, you've been at CBS six for quite some time. Now, I want to ask you, finally, what kind of made you why journalism, why, why what made you want to get into journalism as a career.

Participant 5 03:19

So I started off in media, actually in radio, when I was working down in the Hampton Roads. And so that was kind of my introduction to the broadcast field. And I was doing kind of like entertainment reporting at the time. So a lot of like celebrity gossip, and like, you know, who What celebrity is crushing on what celebrity and doing artists interviews. And then, you know, when I went to school, at VCU, I decided that I want to do something a little bit with more substance, right? Because entertainment is fun. But I feel like my passion is in real life, everyday stories that impact real people with issues that they care about, right. And so ever since I started studying Broadcast Journalism at VCU, and meeting people being able to even just tell their stories as a student, of figuring out how government impacts their lives about how issues in their community impacts their lives, whether in a positive or negative way. Really, I think, built up my love for journalism, because it's just all about like the human impact, like that's really at the center of what journalism is. It's important because it affects people. And so I think me just kind of like really carrying that with me throughout my career is what got me into journalism and has kept me with journalism throughout the years.

Zak Dahlheimer 04:57

It sounds like I mean, it's been pretty rewarding for you, especially in the last year and a half when you've gone to reporting full time.

Participant 5 05:05

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I knew that I always wanted to be an on air reporter, I kind of took a different route than most field journalists do. Because you know, most people will start off kind of in a small market, reporting right out of the gate kind of work their way up in markets. I've started out in Richmond behind the scenes and worked my way up to reporting that way. But it's always been my goal, and it's it obviously paid out. And I'm still I feel very lucky to be able to do what I do. Yeah.

Zak Dahlheimer 05:36

Well, thank you for that. I want to move now to more questions, because we're talking about experience covering consistent breaking news and severe weather as part of this academic study that we're working on. I first want to ask you throughout your career, how often would you say, you've had to cover breaking news and severe weather in the field?

Participant 5 05:58

Um, you know, breaking news and severe weather is pretty spotty, right? Because those are both things that you never expect to happen. They just kind of are like, you know, it's happening now we've got to, like, adjust to everything and do them. So it's kind of hard to say, but I mean, I would say I mean, dozens of times, if not. I mean, you know, it's at least like once, at least once a week, right? There's something that pops up that kind of switches around your schedule, because you have to go to breaking news, or severe weather, I would say, between the two I've done more breaking news. And I have done severe weather just kind of given the geography of Richmond and what we cover. But yeah, you really never know when it's going to happen.

Zak Dahlheimer 06:44

You got to be ready at any moment. Any time. Yeah,

Participant 5 06:48

that's the thing about it just always have to be ready.

Zak Dahlheimer 06:52

Well, is, in your time as a field journalists, say, for instance, with breaking news, because as you mentioned, you know, you've covered more breaking news and severe weather, just geographically. That's where you are. Is there a particular news event that stands out to you, in terms of breaking news that you've covered?

Participant 5 07:14

Yeah, I would say, going up to Bridgewater College, when there was a mass shooting at that campus, sticks out to me the most, because it was just heartbreaking. To officers died there at that college, and it impacted the whole college campus. I mean, every student, every staff member that we spoke to was extremely shaken up by what happened, my god to eventually build relationships with the family of one of the officers and get to know them and hear their stories. But like, the immediate aftermath of that breaking news, I think is something that I will never forget. And like the images of just being on that campus and seeing the crime tape still up and and talking to students who are impacted by what happened. You know, it's something that you'll really never forget

Zak Dahlheimer 08:13

what I was gonna say, I mean, that leads me to my next question, I think you answered it there. It sounds like the emotional aspect of it. And the aftermath really to in terms of would you say that's why that stands out to you mostly, it's just the the emotional standpoint, you know, from you're out there, you're it, you're seeing all this, but then you're also the continuous coverage after such an event like that, would you say that's why that stands out to you?

Participant 5 08:43

Yeah, definitely. It's hard not to feel what the people around you are also feeling when you're immersed right in the middle of it. I mean, I remember being on campus and just having to kind of take some time to myself for like, five minutes, just like, go sit down and kind of like, catch my breath, just because it was the emotional aspect of it was so overwhelming, and just really heartbreaking.

Zak Dahlheimer 09:15

Well, and thank you for sharing that, too. I mean, we, as you mentioned to you, I mean, you're covering stuff like this, similar to this. It's fair to accurate to say, you know, what, at least once a week with your job. Has this consistent coverage of breaking news on the job impacted you personally. Would you say?

Participant 5 09:39

Yeah, I mean, I think so. It's just so stressful. Like, breaking news is just very, it's so it's moving so quickly. You're already on a tight deadline as it is, and you're trying to confirm information. Sometimes it doesn't exist and you still have to be on air and say something And sometimes you're like, What am I even gonna say? But it's like, it's the producers want it, you have to give it to them. And it's very demanding. And so when those days do happen, like, yeah, it's a lot of stress, you come home and it's still kind of weighing you down. It's kind of hard to escape the craziness of your workday. You know, it's not like you just log out, you close your laptop screen, and then you just like, go out with your friends or go to dinner and like, forget about the day, it's like, you carry that with you like throughout the rest of the evening. Sometimes, like even your sleep, like I dream sometimes about crazy work days, and then wake up thinking about the next day. It's like, it's hard to like, Just shake it off. You know what I mean?

Zak Dahlheimer 10:43

Sure, sure. I mean, so it's not only just obviously impacting you professionally, just be while you're on the clock, but I mean, like, and I know, I know, it's happened to me, but just you're saying like that mean, even coming home, after you leave the studio after the lights go out, and the cameras go off. You know, there's, there's still an impact really on you, personally, after I've with all this consistently.

Participant 5 11:09

Yeah, exactly. And it's, you know, a lot of times you're covered, you know, we work in a field where it's like a conversation starter, right. So after you cover some breaking news, people want to talk about it with you like even after you're done working. And so it's, it's something that is like really hard to escape, like you said, it's like you don't just leave it out the door it carries with you. And then when you get into a situation where breaking news becomes like continuing with coverage like it did in Bridgewater, it's like day after day after day, like something that started off as breaking news turns into a huge significant story that you just really never escape.

Zak Dahlheimer 11:52

Anything you do like to cope with all this, I mean, to help you kind of like after you get off the clock, like so that way, is there any coping mechanisms, or I guess, anything you do to help you with your mental health, would you say?

Participant 5 12:08

Absolutely, I think music is a really big therapeutic escape for me. So if I'm having a rough day, coming home, and just like strumming some chords on my guitar, my piano, just singing some songs, I've found is a really good way of, of release, you know, because it's like, you're bottling up all of these emotions. Because when you're actively working on the job, it's not like you can

just like release outwardly, what you're feeling about what you're covering. And so when I'm here home in my apartment, and I'm done with this stressful work day, like that's a good way to kind of like kind of get a little bit of the load off your chest.

Zak Dahlheimer 12:47

Gotcha. Yeah, I know, music helps me a lot to when I come home as well.

Participant 5 12:51

Yeah, sometimes John came to like, I don't, I don't like sweating. But if it's like a, like a fairly mild day, right recording helps to and like blaring music as in your ear as you're running.

Zak Dahlheimer 13:06

Gotcha. Well, would you say because I know that you've been in a full time field reporter now for a year and a half this is a job obviously that you know people move around or they have certain aspirations. But when it comes to consistent coverage of breaking news, would you say that it's guided your career path in any way?

Participant 5 13:32

Um, as the coverage of breaking news guided my career path?

Zak Dahlheimer 13:38

Yeah, like has it has covering consistent events like this guided your path in any way I guess as far as like, what you want to do or is it because it a certain beach that you that you eventually have picked up or you want to keep continuing on I guess,

Participant 5 13:59

um, I I personally, personally, breaking news is not my favorite. So if anything breaking news has would probably steer me in the opposite direction because I want to avoid breaking news. I like doing investigative in depth stories, stories that you really get to build from scratch and kind of like really cultivate yourself. Breaking news is a situation where like, it's happening right now you go and you report what everybody else is reporting, but investigative and in depth reporting kind of gives a little bit more freedom with you know, your story pitches and you know, who you want to talk to and like building those sources. And so I would say if anything breaking news, if I if my next market was like you're going to be the breaking news reporter I would probably say no, I would not want to do that and I probably would not want to be like a dedicated severe weather coverage reporter either because it It's just too intense. And I don't want to have to deal with it honestly.

Zak Dahlheimer 15:04

Sure, sure. I mean, I know I've heard a lot of other people say the exact same thing to.

Participant 5 15:10

Well, but there are reporters though, who like love breaking news, right? And they like live, eat and breathe it because it's like, some people like it's kind of an adrenaline rush. You know, it's like, you're, you're in the moment, and you're like, you know, you're working so hard to get

something on air. And like, I've talked to a lot of people who really do love it. And my reaction to them, it's like, Well, I think you're nuts.

Zak Dahlheimer 15:33

I was gonna say, I mean, I know. And you don't need to name out any names for the sake of confidentiality, but like, enrich men, like when you go in the field. I mean, you come across, like, you know, breaking news reporters that that's like, their, their, their bread and butter. They, they they want to cover it. And have you come across reporters like that often?

Participant 5 15:53

Absolutely. Yeah. Even reporters at our own station, like sometimes are just like waiting for breaking news to happen. So they can go to it. And kind of, I guess I don't want to say like, get their fix, but like they, they that's what they like to do. So they get it. You know, I talked to one reporter who moved to Richmond from a smaller market, and came here with the hopes of covering more breaking news because they didn't get as much of it in a smaller market. And I was like, well, more power to you. It's not me, but I support it, if that's your thing.

Zak Dahlheimer 16:31

Sure. Sure. thing. Well, I want to move now to this is more kind of like when you're in the field question. So kind of like scenario based questions, per se. So let's say you're sent to breaking news at your current job, you're in the field. When you get to a scene, what immediately goes through your mind typically.

Participant 5 16:54

I would say the first thing that goes through my mind when I get to a scene is okay, scope everything out, figure out what the heck is happening. Because normally when you're sent to breaking news, it's like, you've got like one very vague tip, or you heard something over the scanners or like it's not a lot of information, but it's something that is deemed to be of urgency. And so you just go and you have to figure it out. So my first thought is like, Okay, what's happening here? Second thought is like, Alright, who do I need to talk to? Is there a public information officer nearby? Do I need to call someone? Do I go up to, you know, whether it's police or fire or whatever government agency might be there? Are there any people, neighbors, witnesses that are nearby that can tell me something? And then also, eventually get to a point where you're working up against a deadline? And you have to figure out, what am I going to say when I have to say this on air, because sometimes, I can remember one time I was like, by the time I got to a scene, like I literally had to just get out of the car with like, not even 30 seconds of look around me and be live on TV. And it's like, I didn't even get a chance to like try to talk to someone or figuring out what's happening to me, because the five o'clock news started at 458. I got there at 455. I have like this much information. And now I just have to start talking. So it's like, look over my shoulder. What do you see, oh, police cars, talk about the heavy police seem, you know, I just got it here. I'm working to figure out more information. And we'll bring you updates type of thing. I don't like to do that. I like to have at least a little bit of substance because you don't want to like scare viewers with like, oh my god, there's a scene here. But I have nothing to tell you. So I think the most important thing, when you get to breaking news is figuring out like what the information is that you need to tell people.

Zak Dahlheimer 18:49

And that's a lot that you've laid out there. And I mean, and I know because I've been in situations where it's like, you're hooking the IFBB and you're putting the earpiece on and you've got everything you're dialed in, and then as soon as you get out of the car, you're you're you're walking in front of the camera, and it's like 543 So like, I get what you're saying there. But for those who like who may not be in the know, like us, I mean, mentally like how would you since we're talking on the basis of mental health, mentally, how do you how do you what do you make of all that when you're trying to do how would you describe that to people?

Participant 5 19:28

It's just chaos. It doesn't make much sense. It's kind of hard to explain. Your your mind is racing like a million miles a minute. I would say like for someone who's never covered breaking news, like just imagine like the most anxiety inducing situation to you, and whatever that is, but to make it like 1000 times harder. You have to then get on camera and tell 1000s of people who rely on you for information about that very like anxiety and losing thing. It's something that's like hard for, I guess, just the general public to understand unless you work in this business. But really, it just boils down to utter chaos.

Zak Dahlheimer 20:12

And this kind of follows up to that next question, because we're talking about stressors, you know, that come to mind when you experience on a consistent basis? So when you arrive at, say, a scene of a breaking news situation, are there any particular stressors that come to mind, that you experience on a consistent basis? Like when you're out there trying to get the information? And you know, doing all that any, any ones that come to mind? Would you say?

Participant 5 20:41

What do you mean by stressors?

Zak Dahlheimer 20:43

Well, like, like anything that, maybe that that adds to the stress, maybe to your situation, or like any, like you were talking about, like, you know, like, all those information, I would say, like, like anything from from that standpoint?

Participant 5 21:00

Yeah, I mean, I can say this, because I was a producer, but producers can be a little bit of an added stressor, right. And I totally understand that because I was in this position, but it's like your show starts at the show that it starts at, like the time that it starts out, right. So you need to have a reporter on the screen, telling people what's happening. And sometimes I feel like I'm not ready to do that. And so when you have, like demands of the deadline, and demands of the producer, kind of like always looming over top of you, while you're already in a stressful situation, that's definitely an added layer, you know, it would be much easier, right? If we went out to breaking news, and there was no deadline, or like no one like demanding immediate information from you right away. Because I've made that's really like where the stress comes from, like, we could all go to scenes. And if we had unlimited time to figure out what's happening, it would make our jobs let way much less stressful, right. So I think that would probably be like the biggest one. Another stressful, like I said, is figuring out where your source

of information is going to come from, as you know, you know, depending on what jurisdiction you're in, it's easier to get information and some parts of town. And it's harder to get information in other parts of town. Because sometimes the people in charge of giving you the information, like to communicate with you. And other times they don't like to communicate with you. Either way, no matter where you are, you will have to have a duty to tell the public what's happening in their community. Whether or not the person who holds the information is willing to give it to you or not.

Zak Dahlheimer 22:49

Sure, sure. And going more off of that, like say, we talked about stressors and now and we kind of touched on this like a little bit before but when you come across something, say a breaking news at a scene, like how do you assess and cope with the situation at hand?

Participant 5 23:09

How do I deal with it? Like in the moment? Yeah, kind of like,

Zak Dahlheimer 23:13

you're there? How do you cope with it? How do you kind of like, respond, you you recognize, respond to cope, kind of from a coping standpoint, how would you say,

Participant 5 23:23

I would say, you know, over over time, it gets easier to cope with. So my experience has helped me cope. Like today, for example, it was like 1130, I got a call that I needed to go to a school for a potential active shooter, and that I would maybe need to be live in the noon. So that gives you I mean, less than 30 minutes to get to where you need to go and get information out there. If I had to do that, like a year ago, I probably would be like really panicking. But I think just the experience and knowing that, okay, you're going to be fine after this. And, you know, this is not like, this is not like a life altering surgery that you're performing right now. Like you're just talking on TV. You know, like there's, there's grace for what you're doing. If you go on TV and you stumble all over the place and you say something that doesn't really make a whole lot of sense. It's okay, because there's gonna be another newscast that comes on later, where you can correct it and make it better. We also have social media at the palm of our hands. If you see something on live TV that you don't love. You can always correct yourself on social media and get it out there on the web, right? So I think just reminding myself that you know, you're gonna be fine like you may be stressed heading to this breaking news set. uation but at the end of the day, like, you're not in a situation where, where there's not going to be grace for you, if you, if you mess up, you're allowed to mess up. And you will every now and then, especially in a high stress situation, like breaking news, and that'll be

Zak Dahlheimer 25:21

okay. So kind of yeah, having that peace and you know, given yourself that mental fortitude of everything's gonna be okay. But you know, like you said to I, it's, it's kind of like your experience of continuing to go there constantly. And, you know, like you mentioned before, more experience of doing this, it kind of builds up. Maybe for lack of a better term and armor to kind of like help protect yourself like in those search certain situations.

Participant 5 25:51

Yeah. Yeah, totally. Like You. You. You understand your yourself better and how you operate in those tense situations. And that, that prepares you to handle the next one, right? Like, you don't need to get yourself like, so worked up about this. Because remember, last time you did that, like you nearly had a panic attack. And so yeah, it's just like, it sounds very cliché, but like everything that you do, like even outside of breaking news, even like writing and doing interviews, like you just get better and better and better with time, the more that you do it.

Zak Dahlheimer 26:32

What about emotional responses? do you often show that when covering breaking news? Or on a regular basis? Would you say?

Participant 5 26:41

Well, you know, I try not to, of course, if I'm in the car with my photographer, and it's just us, too, when they're like, of course, like I'll vent some frustrations, or tell them how I'm really feeling. But you know, when you're on the scene, and you're talking to officials, or witnesses, or people who are, you know, probably in a pretty bad situation, because breaking news is normally not good news. There's not room to express, to express yourself. So it's kind of like boxing that in and like when you know you're in a safe space, like the car, then you'll you'll have time to vent, whatever it is you need to vent. And I feel like I've done a pretty good job at that is keeping my emotions controlled in the heat of the moment, especially when you're preparing to be on air, you know, because the viewer has to trust you. At the end of the day, you know, the person on the other side of the TV wants to look at you and not see someone who's frazzled and doesn't know what they're talking about. They want to rely on the information that you're giving them.

Zak Dahlheimer 27:50

So you really take it upon yourself to kind of like you said, box everything in when you're in the moment. But you're still good at giving yourself that safe space, like you said to where if you need to vent or you need to, you know, exhibit emotions in any way you have that option like eventually.

Participant 5 28:11

Oh, yeah, exactly. There will always be a time that comes later, and which and what you can handle whatever emotion is that you need to handle, I will say there was maybe like one or two times, conversations got maybe a little bit heated with the producer like over our earpiece. And I'm not proud of those moments. But sometimes when when people are in your ear and you're also like, you know you don't have a script to go off of and you're like all this information is jumbled in your mind and you're at kind of a chaotic scene. It's not always easy to control the way that you want to react, you know, heat of the moment

Zak Dahlheimer 28:53

type of thing. Yeah, well, have you. I mean, have you like, not just yourself, but in general, like when you've spent with your colleagues out in the field? I mean, have you seen like others like break down or exhibit emotions or any be show emotions in any type of way? Or like you said, Is it pretty much from you and others in the field, like collectively, you all keep those in when

you're on on camera? But then you have that, that capability to go and find that safe space to exhibit emotions and to help you all personally mental from a mental health standpoint?

Participant 5 29:37

Absolutely. Yeah, I think for for the most part, journalists do a very good job of keeping it controlled when when they're on the scene of breaking news. I haven't really ever seen field journalists break down in the moment. I know that it has happened before because you see things on social media and I have seen videos of reporters who Who will break down like immediately after a live shot that was really hard, whatever it was that they were reporting on. But I feel like generally, we all understand what our what our job is and what we're expected to do, which is keep our composure in those types of situations. Mentally, some things may be going on on the inside that we don't express outwardly. But from, from what I have seen, everyone keeps themselves pretty much composed.

Zak Dahlheimer 30:31

Which leads me into my next question. I mean, I guess is that how would you assess constantly going to cover breaking news that especially breaking news that can be traumatic? I mean, how do you assess constantly going to cover those types of events, especially those that can be of a traumatic sorts?

Participant 5 30:52

How do I assess going to the breaking news? Or?

Zak Dahlheimer 30:57

Yeah, how would you? How would you assess constantly covering breaking news, especially incidents or events that can be traumatic?

Participant 5 31:12

It's kind of one of those things that it just kind of comes with the job rain, like, we understand and expect that sometimes there are going to be things that are traumatic and are hard to deal with. So I think just preparing yourself for kind of like worst case scenario, sometimes is a good like defense mechanism to understand that like, Okay, what I'm about to see potentially, could be really bad. But, you know, like I said, at the beginning, it's like, I'm in this job, because I care about people. And so when you see people that are suffering, it's yeah, it's, it's really hard to deal with.

Zak Dahlheimer 31:57

And kind of, like you said, I mean, how would you say like, we're an example of preparing yourself for Worst case scenario, as far as like, trying to assess covering traumatic events.

Participant 5 32:09

Um, it's, it's hard, because you don't have really like a lot of time to prepare yourself. Because really, it's like, you get a call, you're in the, you're in the car, and then you're on the way in, so really, it's just kind of like that, that pep talk in the car, right, that's what you're about to see, like, could be really triggering, it could potentially be really traumatic. And I think as long as you keep yourself grounded, and you keep a seriousness about it, because you know, when you're

when you when you work in this job, it can be easy to feel numb to certain situations. And therefore, and I think we've all done this before, but like, make light of the situation that is actually really dark, because it's like a coping mechanism, right. You know, you'll hear journalist oftentimes like to help kind of like dark jokes, because we see so much so many bad things in our in our daily work lives, right, that sometimes the only way to cope with that is to like, make a joke out of it, you know, and it's like, you have always got to remember that, like, there are people on the other side, there are human beings on the other side, sometimes when you're going through breaking news seems like families are being devastated and ripped apart and changed forever because of what you're covering. So when you keep yourself grounded, and, and, and you keep a seriousness about the job at all times, I think, is extremely helpful.

Zak Dahlheimer 33:59

Thank you so much for that. And really, I do appreciate. I mean, this has been a great conversation we've had so far. I only have four more questions for you. And this is more kind of like, looking ahead, you know, moving forward. You know, as far as from that standpoint, when we talk about breaking news, and you've talked about covering it consistently, in the field, how would you say and you've kind of answered this in earlier questions, but I want to make sure I understand this clearly. But when it comes to consistent coverage of breaking news in the field, how would you say that shaped you as a journalist and has impacted your career

Participant 5 34:39

you know, I would say breaking news is kind of like you know, when you when you start off reporting, you're not the reporter that gets sent to breaking news, right, because usually they will send the more experience reporters to significant breaking news, but then there always becomes that that First time, where you're the only option or like you're the closest, and you've got to go, and then you do it. And so I think getting over those, those first couple of hurdles of doing breaking news kind of like, really sets you up in journalism, because when you can do that, you really can do anything, when you can get up in front of a camera and just start ad libbing, from almost no type of really confirmed information, you don't have a script in front of you, you're kind of just like talking as things are literally happening, like right behind you, or right in front of you. That kind of like builds up a little bit of like, you know, like, oh, wow, I just did that, you know, like, you, you believe in yourself, like a little bit even more as a journalist, because you're like, oh, I don't need a script, you need a script, whatever time you can have a script, right? Because you don't want to put inaccurate information out there. But it kind of it kind of reveals like skills to you that like you didn't know existed, you're like, Why was I so afraid of this, like, I can do this. And I did do it, you know, and I can do it again if I have to. So in

Zak Dahlheimer 36:14

a way it kind of like inspires you and it builds you up mentally from a positive standpoint of the the type of skills that you're able to do and then continue to exhibit on a regular basis with your job.

Participant 5 36:27

Yeah, and absolutely can't now I will maintain that I will never like once to choose breaking news to cover. But I know that if I have to do it and when I have to do it, because it will continue

to happen that I can't and I can do it well, even though it is a little bit exhausting, mentally and emotionally. You want

Zak Dahlheimer 36:45

to stick with your what your bread and butter of investigative in depth storytelling.

Participant 5 36:49

Of course, of course, always.

Zak Dahlheimer 36:53

I want to go back now because I mean, you talked about your time in college and then you know, of course getting the WT VR trauma training. Did you receive any before or before your career or in your time, like during your career to help you when it comes to covering breaking breaking news? Do you ever receive any type of trauma training?

Participant 5 37:17

No, never received an ounce of any thing near trauma training?

Zak Dahlheimer 37:24

What do you make of that just not having that before going into the field.

Participant 5 37:29

I mean, you're, you're not set up properly, the way that you shouldn't be they handle those situations. I would love to know, like how you should be, I would love to hear from a mental health expert about, okay, this is how you should be preparing yourself when you're on the way to a breaking news situation and mental health experts who understands like our jobs as journalists and what we go through, and kind of giving us different Mac mechanisms to prepare and to cope and to handle yourself when you're in a very stressful situation. You kind of are just left to figure it out all on your own. And now want to

Zak Dahlheimer 38:13

get back to that too. Because that sounds like an area of an area of opportunity. Would you say?

Participant 5 38:19

Oh, yeah, absolutely. I think so. I mean, I I can't imagine any, any journalist who would be against wanting this type of training, or at least some conversations and discussions, even if it's like peer discussion just about like how we can all kind of cope through the coverage of breaking news.

Zak Dahlheimer 38:47

Well, and I want to talk to you I mean, where you are WT VR what Reese, can you speak to any resources, if applicable, that are available to help you maybe even help your colleagues mental health when it from covering consistent breaking news.

Participant 5 39:08

It's sad, but I really can't tell you of any I mean, I know that our corporate companies scripts does offer I think virtual counseling. It's not really like highly promoted or highly encouraged consistently from our newsroom managers. So I, I don't even know like how I would access it. Or are like where do you even begin getting involved with something like that? And I think that's probably the only thing I can really name. Now I will say that our bosses are fantastic at giving us mental health days if we need them and checking in on us and asking us how we're doing. But that's not enough. I don't think just asking someone how they're doing after You're you already been through a traumatic situation is is good enough it should be, before you get to it while you're in it and not just always the reactive, how are you doing, especially after journalist went through the coverage of COVID-19. And especially after journalists went through the coverage of the civil unrest, of 2020. A lot of those stories were really hard to tell. And a lot of those stories, we were constantly surrounded by reporting, like death rates, illness rates, you know, just injustice all the time. And even being out in the field sometimes and, and people kind of, you know, shouting things at you that are negative, you know, people who are not so friendly towards the media, acting towards you in a in a certain way that makes you feel really bad. I think especially after we went through the trauma of literally everything that was 2020, right. Because everyone went through trauma in 2020, like no matter what job you were right, but journalists were like literally also on the frontlines of it. You know, we've done a lot of reporting, I've done a lot of reporting on mental health support of those who are on the frontlines of the pandemic, nurses, health care workers, essential workers, I mean, people who really did put their lives on the line for us, and I'm very grateful to be able to tell their stories. But we were there too. And it was really hard. And I don't think there has been enough enough mental health support since we did go through that.

Zak Dahlheimer 41:47

So the way I understand it is I mean, there are the parent company, our parent company offers resources, but you believe it's not being communicated enough, or it's not being communicated? Well, from your experience to where you know, how to access it easily. And yours, bosses are taking it upon themselves to try to give some resources to you, but you believe that there's some growth, probably in that area to do more to help people like yourself.

Participant 5 42:20

Yeah, absolutely. And I think there's also an opportunity to for like in house support, as well. As I understand it, the corporate resources are virtual, and I believe the person who would be helping you is kind of like a national type of person. It would be nice if we had someone in house in person who understands the unique challenges and obstacles that our newsroom in Richmond faces, and knows the unique stories that journalists in Richmond cover, and could help us sort through that and walk us through that.

Zak Dahlheimer 43:03

Maybe so like a licensed clinical social worker, or therapists that's in Richmond proper, that can speak to exactly what's going on there. And that can be an immediate resource to you.

Participant 5 43:16

Absolutely. Yeah, I think that would be fantastic.

Zak Dahlheimer 43:20

Well, I know that's one but and this is my last question here. Are there any areas of opportunities you would like to see companies like Scripps, any companies in our field? Explore when it comes to helping the mental health field journalists with covered consistent breaking news and severe weather?

Participant 5 43:41

Yeah, so I would say definitely the in house support, of course, I think the creation of kind of like, peer support groups, like getting together groups of journalist to talk about what it is that is upsetting us at the moment, like whether it's we had a really hard week of coverage, or we're just doing kind of like a weekly, bi weekly, maybe monthly check in with everybody to kind of get a grasp of like, okay, what challenges are we all facing right now? What can we do about it together? How can we cope through it together? And is are we at a point where we need to collectively kind of bring these concerns to management or corporate and say, Hey, we're all feeling really affected by ABC. Here's how we think you could kind of step in and offer some support. I think, you know, would be kind of like a good a good way for us to connect with one another on a human level. We all are facing these challenges. We're all affected mentally and emotionally by our job. I don't think you'll find one journalist who isn't. But we don't have the space He's always to talk about him. You know, there's also the whole thing of like, astigmatism, right, like, we're, it's, you know, we we have to be journalists, we have to be on our a game all the time, we have to be trusted and respected by the community. So you know, it's kind of built up a little bit of a, of a feeling of, you know, don't ever let your guard down type of thing. Sure which thing that I could be, I feel like could be broken down a little bit. And then I haven't tried seeking out outside mental health support through my health care plan provided by Scripps, but I know people who have, and has said that it's just not enough. And it doesn't cover really enough mental health support. And all of it is basically out of pocket, you know, and you're given like a limited amount of funds for the year through HSA, or whatever plan it is that you choose. But then you have to prioritize how you're going to spend that limited amount of funds, because you also are going to get sick, probably at some point in the year, you'll have some checkups for whatever physical health concerns that you're facing. And then leftover, maybe I have enough money for like one therapy session, and then after that you're dipping into your own personal funds. So if there's not going to be a lot of in house support, how can we also make sure that they have the avenues available to them to seek outside mental health support through the healthcare system?

Zak Dahlheimer 46:54

So it's kind of like, whether it be in house or from a corporate standpoint, making sure that there's more aside from what's already there more specific benefits, geared towards mental health, instead of looping everything mental health, physical health, everything into like, kind of like one big tree?

Participant 5 47:17

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I've know of other companies that operate like that, and that do offer those types of resources. And I know people who go to those jobs, because they know that that's available to them. And I think, you know, especially in an era where let's face it, there are shortages of journalist and newsrooms. This is already a hard job. That's going to be challenging

to you mentally. And so if you're trying to recruit new people to you, why not go ahead and offer that robust support, because you're going to recruit new people, and then also keep the talented journalists that you have now, because this job is really hard. It is really mentally challenging. So you want to make sure that they don't get burned out and that they stay with you because they're supported.

Zak Dahlheimer 48:14

Would that be incentive mean I appreciate your time. I know we we've had a very long, great discussion, and really do appreciate all the things you've said and for taking the time out of all of this. Is there anything else you'd like to add or say or any other message you'd like to get out there regarding this topic?

Participant 5 48:32

Um, I mean, I think we hit just about all of it. Right. Yeah, I mean, I would say just, you know, like, the mental health crisis facing journalists right now is very real. It's a thing that we're all facing. And I'm glad that we're having this conversation right now. And I hope that it leads to even more conversations in newsrooms across the country.

PARTICIPANT 6 ZOOM RECORDING RAW

Zak Dahlheimer 00:02

Okay, so we just started recording and for the record, you have agreed to participate in this anonymously. It's that Correct? Correct. All right. Well, thank you for your time in doing this, since you're taking part anonymously, I will just ask you, if you could share your job title as far as what you do. What position in terms of being a field journalist, you say you are

00:33

a TV, news photo journalist for five years?

Zak Dahlheimer 00:38

Okay. And that's the only job title that you've had as a field journalist in your career.

00:49

Other than freelance? Yes.

Zak Dahlheimer 00:50

Gotcha. For those who may not be in the know, like us, what would you say the types of responsibilities come with being a TV news photo journalist

01:07

an expectation on a daily expectation would be going out to either breaking news stories or stories that have been set up prior gathering sound interviews from either stakeholders or those affected by breaking news such as fires or shootings or, or the like, and compiling that information that we have, with the interviews and the sound into a package, condensed package of about two minutes or less. Trying to give the viewer at home, the TV news, local TV news viewer at home the best kind of summary of everything that's happened.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:58

Gotcha. And would you say that those are the same responsibilities, you had your freelance role?

02:06

Freelance was a little bit different. Freelance for me was just contributing content of video pictures

Zak Dahlheimer 02:14

such okay. Or structured? Gotcha, gotcha. What made you want to get into journalism as a career.

02:25

Just being able to being able to pass along information that is both pertinent for people and, and in the way that it may affect their daily activities, such as breaking news, or things that may benefit them as a viewer, or as a consumer of news or a resonant of area in which we're serving, such as a community connection type story, versus a traffic, light, crash type story, being able to

provide that provide that news and have that creative influence to tell them in the best, and in the best way? What's happening.

Zak Dahlheimer 03:20

Gotcha. So really being able to make people aware of what's going on around them. Right. Gotcha. Well, thank you so much for all that it's sort of like a basic information, you know, to get us to know who you are, in a sense. And now I want to go and talk to about questions pertaining to your experience covering breaking news and severe weather on a consistent basis. Throughout your career as a TV news photo journalists, you mentioned, you've been doing it for five years, full time. Throughout your career, how often how, in those five years, how often had you had to cover breaking news and severe weather in the field?

04:02

In terms of the severe weather question, that would be maybe I would say monthly. It's certainly not every week, but it's certainly monthly. Whether it be from Thunder severe thunderstorms, to flooding, to Blizzard, to hurricanes to the aftermath of tornadoes. Certainly, I would say monthly, especially with flooding. In terms of breaking news, that is a weekly occurrence. And some weeks it can be every day, from shootings, to fires to crashes, and everything in between. That can be that can be up to the entire work week.

Zak Dahlheimer 04:53

Is there a particular news event or albeit breaking news or severe weather that stands out to you in the five years You've been doing this

05:02

with, say, hurricanes. Hurricane coverage is, is different from the normal severe weather coverage and that you, you can fairly well predict severe weather coming through forecasts days out. But the intricacies of hurricane forecasts and hurricane coverage, if a hurricane turns at the coast, your crew may either be your field crew may either be lined up in the perfect spot to go right through an eye of a hurricane or get brushed by the eyewall. And and get the worst of the whole storm or completely miss it entirely. Hurricanes are, I think, a different beast, and that you see it coming days and days out. But you never know what the exact effects will be. When it comes when it comes to your market.

Zak Dahlheimer 06:07

Is there a particular hurricane that you've covered that stands out to you?

06:12

Hurricane Dorian certainly stands out. Hurricane Dorian was I mean, it affects it affected Grand Bahama, those areas down there, but when it came into our market, it was it was still a category two storm and it caused some damage. And including flooding, tidal flooding surge, but but I was.

07:24

I was injured in a hurricane. My photojournalist career.

Zak Dahlheimer 07:45

so it's accurate and safe to say you were injured while covering a hurricane at some point during your career?

Correct.

Well, I want to go back to Dorian, because you mentioned that specifically. If you can maybe talk more about why that stands out to you. You know, what, maybe what were your other responsibilities? What was it like you know, and why it does stand out to you without getting you know, into the details that you don't want to get into. Or regarding the the part that we discussed about you don't want to get too much further into force

08:21

doors. So the planning going into a hurricane is you know, it can be very logistics minded, which is good. Pre positioning crews, getting them where they need to be before the storm hits. I certainly believe that helps to alleviate some of the front loaded stress of dealing with what can be a damaging storm. Having the tools and in place to have those logistics, field crew plans, equipment plans in place and get people where they need to be early enough to not cause issues when roads have to close or evacuations are ordered. I think I think planning for that even before severe weather season tornadoes. Tornado times like a spring and fall I think planning before that is important just to alleviate a lot of that. Maybe confusion and stress like have a generic game plan in terms of Dorian it was it was an issue where we knew this storm had caused just a massive amount of damage in the Caribbean. And it even though models it showed that it was going to going to weaken when it got to us a category one or category two storm is still cool I had a serious storm. And that ended up almost nearly 100 mile per hour winds when it hit us in our market. So being able to see the storm coming for days, and see what it did, and other places, it makes you kind of concerned for your area that you're serving, and you're trying to get the information out of what a storm can actually do. But I think the planning part was, is important because we were able to pre plan very well for that storm. And get people in plays and equipment in place so that we didn't have to worry when the storm got closer, where we needed to be.

Zak Dahlheimer 10:44

And for the record to I want to make sure I heard you. I think you may have mentioned this earlier, but you were in North Carolina for this hurricane, or was this Kenya?

10:54

It was North Carolina. Gotcha.

Zak Dahlheimer 10:57

Um, how would you say has consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather on the job impacted? You personally?

11:07

I would say sometimes, yes. It's, it can be certainly difficult to see the aftermath of tornadoes after after Hurricane but then Tropical Storm ESA is coming through. Coming through various states. There were tornadoes spawned that caused damage. And White Houses, mobile homes

just completely way wiped, wiped, they're wiped clean, and debris scattered everywhere. I think, you know, when you see those, when you see the images that come out of the areas that are damaged. If I mean, if you're a human, you feel for those people, like you see their houses blown away, you've seen that people have been injured or killed. In news, we cover a lot of difficult things cover a lot of difficult stories. And a lot of them are are unexpected. But when you know, a storm is coming, and you know, it can be difficult, and then you see the damage afterward. It can, it can certainly affect you, especially seeing people's lives strewn about a road or their family members gone.

Zak Dahlheimer 12:35

And we'll get more to that in just a little bit further. But I wanted to ask you to has on that same vein, as consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather guided your career path in any way.

12:49

With an interest in weather already, I think, I think I think I enjoy covering the storms. I think it's it's obviously important that we cover both the storms and the aftermath, including any damage to show the totality of what happens with each storm. But But I think it's guided me in that. It just continues my interest and and weather processes.

Zak Dahlheimer 13:18

Gotcha. Well, thank you for all that I want to move on now to kind of like what you just were talking about how it impacts journalists like us, you know, some of the things that we see when covering severe weather breaking news. So I first want to ask you say you're sent to a breaking news or severe weather assignment in the field, what immediately would you say goes through your mind

13:42

I would say that when we get a call from our assignment desk, or content desk, or real time desk, whatever your station calls it, when we get that call, we don't have all the information. We have bits of information from a source from a scanner, police scanner, we don't have all the information of the scene. So as best we can prepare for what we see getting there to a scene of breaking news and not everything. We're not going to know everything until we get there. And even then it may take quite some time to learn. Learn more than 50% of the story, just because it takes a long time for information to come out not just from official sources like police or fire or EMS but because situation may be so chaotic and that it's difficult to get accurate information such as such as a mass shooting, you respond to the scene. It's just it's incredibly chaotic and trying to sort through those details. Trying to sort through The chaos and figure out exactly what top line elements you need, I think can take a little bit of time. And viewers at home may not see that. And because we're, we're constantly in a society now where we want to be served immediately. We love that immediacy of news and, and information. But, but sometimes, you know, you just can't get that when you arrive on the scene, you're just gonna have to work what you can talk to who you can, and gather the info on it. Use slowly build on what you know.

Zak Dahlheimer 15:40

Yeah, and you mentioned, you know, I mean, information is coming out in real time, we're trying to disseminate information and while responding to the needs of the people back at the station for live coverage. And that leads into my next question, you know, when, when, when you arrive at the scene of a breaking news or severe weather assignment, are there any particular stressors that come to mind that you experienced on a consistent basis

16:13

the unknown of what a scene can bring, you can be called to a shooting. And the first thing you see when you pull up is somebody who had been killed a body laying in a parking lot, or driveway or in a car, and not surrounded by about a shield that the police have put up. You may not be prepared for that, that may be the very first thing you see when you pull up. And for some, it can be quite jarring to see somebody who was just alive a few minutes prior. And know that, that whatever story you're serving is both serious, but for the general may be serious for the general public. But it's serious for that family, for that person in that car, that they had a full life that they were living that, you know, the stress of thinking, I may be pulling up on two bodies, you know, at a mass shooting can be difficult to kind of digest.

Zak Dahlheimer 17:20

I know. Yeah. I mean, I know that I've experienced that, of course, you know, with colleagues, you know, throughout my career too. So I mean, I definitely hear what you're saying there. And this kind of again, flows into my other question, too, when you come across something at a breaking news or severe weather scene, how do you personally assess and cope with the situation at hand?

17:44

Let me add one more thing to the previous question there. The stress that can be caused from from a breaking news scene doesn't only come from what you're seeing in front of you can also come from the station can also come from people fighting for your attention, fighting to competing for your attention rather, to if you're on the scene as a photojournalist or reporter, you're attempting to gather the information on scene, but then your assignment desk, your manager, your producers, they also want to be relayed the information. They also want to see a live shot through through your live source. They don't want to see they want to hear all these things at the same time you're getting them and it can kind of pull you in different directions because you're trying to work the overall scene, which you know, TV, if you work in TV, it's a visual medium, and you have to get those elements visually. But you're also competing for the information that they're pulling. In terms of your other question. Can you Amanda?

Zak Dahlheimer 19:01

Yeah. So when you come across something, when you come across something at a breaking news, the severe weather scene in terms of assessing the situation and coping with the situation? What say you

19:18

assessing the situation is there's certain things we just cannot put on television, live television, local news, live television, and coming upon a scene assessing that's one of the first things I assess if I know there's, if I see a body I certainly have to be. I don't want to say creative but use

discretion and how I video the same. Especially if we're live figuring out how to gather video or Round the body, even though the person is the central point point of the story, if we're called out to a homicide, and it's outside that, obviously the homicide is the story. But you assessing how you gather video the scene is, is is a big deal, because otherwise you can both subject viewers at home to unnecessary trauma. And also maybe cause legal issues for the station now would imagine. So I think assessing that coping with what you see, some scenes can be difficult, have worked mass shootings, and it can be a difficult time to parse what you're saying. But I have a background personally, I have a background in law enforcement. And being able to focus in a highly chaotic environment is important, especially when you're sent out there to do do a job of a photo journalist gather the visual elements that you need to tell people what's going on whether it affects their own families, whether it affects their traffic patterns, their commute to work, or whether it affects their maybe like a their beliefs, maybe there's a large protests happening, that turns violent. from either the law enforcement side, or the protests or side, that can affect people both. Physically they're at the protest, and affect them mentally as well. And, and the same is true for those covering it. If you're covering a highly volatile, maybe highly politically charged, or racially charged type, type story, those kinds of stories which, which speak to your own personal experience, or speak to who you are, that can both add stress. But you have to assess how you how you gather video and gather information at those settings, because it can be both chaotic slash volatile, but it can also be it can also affect your personal psyche. Sure.

Zak Dahlheimer 22:53

And do you happen to have like any specific, you know, following up to what you were talking about to with coping with situation, any coping mechanisms that you tip like, typically use or you go to?

23:10

I mean, I have used therapy. Therapy is an after the fact. Maybe not, I mean, there's not. Other than, you know, if you're at a scene, you got to focus on what you're doing. Unfortunately, it can become overwhelming in certain instances. For people that may know the victims on scene, for people that may or may run in the same type circles of those affected, for those who have a heart for that category of breaking news. It, it can cause it can cause you to sometimes internalize what you're saying, but, but after the fact, therapy is incredibly important. While while everything's happening, it's hard to really cope because you got to be focused on what you're doing. But is that okay? Like talking about after the fact like therapy?

Zak Dahlheimer 24:18

Yeah, actually, I want to, I'm gonna get to that further when we talk about resources that you've used and all that. So we have all that coming up later, but I get what you're saying about being in the zone, because you're not the only participant that has actually mentioned that, as far as you know, and I can speak to it too, from my personal experience, you know, and when you're out there, you're in the zone and, you know, you have to, you know, deliver on what you've been called upon to do.

24:45

When I will say that having if you're a crew, though, if you have a photojournalist to rely on, or reporter to rely on. It's a field crew needs to have that relation. Ship needs to be able to say, Hey,

this is tough for me, either from personal circumstance otherwise, or just in general, because it's a tough scene, you need to be able to have that relationship with your, with your field crews amongst each other. And then, and then if, if you need to also with your management, they need to be receptive to what you're saying, at these breaking news areas, so that if you're having a hard time with what you're saying that they they need to be receptive. One, at the same time as you're being transparent.

Zak Dahlheimer 25:41

So would you say like, I mean, is that maybe some of the coping mechanisms that you have is throughout your career these last five years is you've to help cope with certain situations like you've leaned on your or not? Well, you've looked into your your colleague or without in the field or your management, you know, to try and help you cope with the situation? I would

26:03

say, yes, I think it's important to utilize them, not, not like, not just hey, I'm going to tell you all this, and just you just listen, and not just a sounding board, but to have that conversation, because they also they're there, they're right beside you, or the manager knows what they're sending you to. And if they don't, they'll soon be apprised of it through your email updates, or what they see on video. So they may also be dealing with the same issues and being able to talk about it. To someone who knows, or someone who's there with you, or has been through the paces of difficult breaking news scenes before I think that's important.

Zak Dahlheimer 26:48

What about exhibiting or showing emotional responses? Is that something that you regularly do when covering breaking news and severe weather? Would you say or have done one not

27:01

being on air? I think it's I think I think some people may see, it may think there should be a difference. I don't I, I believe if you need to show emotion, if you feel emotion, then show it whether you're on air behind the camera, because we have one life to live and we need to show people who we are. And it makes us vulnerable. But it also makes us human just like every other person that will be reading this study. Just like every other person who will be working in a newsroom or working in the field or doing any other job. We're all human. We have emotions to a point. It's not a bad thing to show them, especially when a reporter may get choked up during a difficult time. That's that's not bad that that means you were human. I'll tell you. I'll give you an example. Last night, just last night, in Memphis, there was a reporter Memphis has had a teacher that was kidnapped and murdered. And last night, they had a series the mass shootings, they had a series of shootings across the city leading to a city wide lockdown. serious, very serious situation. Multiple people killed and shot and a reporter was going live at a scene. And they didn't they hadn't yet caught the suspect. And it was just another shooting they had been to. They had already been to so many shootings, and they've already covered the teacher being abducted and murdered. They covered it from the family angles that her friends, they covered these other scenes where there are bodies. It's really difficult out there sometimes and I think and the reporter showed her emotion and she held held it together. But it's it's okay to get choked up. There's another end from from a tornado. More Oklahoma 2013. There was a recorder there near Plaza Towers Elementary that completely got choked up on air. Because kids children were in

the building. And it was the first report you got to first report that children were among the victims from that EF five tornado and he broke down on air and you know what? That's human. That's okay, because we need it. People need to see us like we're not robots. At the end of the day. We are just as human as the viewer watching,

Zak Dahlheimer 29:49

right? Can you speak to your own personal experience means showing emotion or if you have been with a reporter that showed emotion at something that you all covered personally? In your five years,

30:02

I've had experience unfortunately with suicide in my immediate family, and soon after that. Soon after that, I had a story that I had to cover about suicide, a lot of suicides. And, and it was, and I made myself vulnerable to my reporter at the time. And I was not afraid to do so. Because, again, I'm human. And it affected me. And I told my reporter that this, I may have a very difficult time getting through the story, either gathering the video, reading the scripts, about the suicides, just talking about it, or hearing it, it's, it was a lot. And it was a, it was a very difficult time getting through that story, and the subsequent stories about the same. But I allowed myself to be truthful and transparent about what else is failing to my reporter. And and I think that's important. There's no reason to hide who you are. Are you feeling especially if stories going to affect you? Sure. I'm

Zak Dahlheimer 31:29

finally kind of just in we've touched on this a lot. But if you can say for certain how do you assess constantly going to cover breaking news or severe weather events? That can be traumatic? How do you what do you make of all that? How do you assess that

31:43

it's part of the job. Whether we're affected to it by it or not, we have to show people the power of Mother Nature, we have to show people. Unfortunately, the worst of the world, because somebody told me information is power. And it can be a lot, especially with the pandemic. People have same too, forget how to interact with others, whether it be through because, you know, they had a difficult time in quarantine, or they just were that way before and the pandemic isolation amplified. That part of it. There's, it's hard, because we still have to cover these stories. There's still important stories to tell. If there's a shooting homicide, stabbing a mass shooting, Tornado rips through and destroys the neighborhood and kills some people or injures people or even not people aren't injured or killed, but their houses are taken. I mean, that's a difficult story to tell that their belongings are on a multi apartment, fire, that they've lost everything, it's important to tell their stories. It does. It does weigh on, at least on me. I don't want to speak for others in the in the in the industry and the TV news industry. But it does weigh on me it can be more difficult. When you're trying to do your best when you're trying to get the most accurate information and set aside your feelings set aside your emotions. But when you come home, or have a day off, and you think back to the stories you've covered in the past week, the past month, in the past quarter or a year they all start to add up the the bodies the the damage the loss, it can it can really add up but at the end of the day, we still have to tell the stories. Well thank you

Zak Dahlheimer 34:30

for all that and really appreciate all that you told so far. You know, we really appreciate all your input with this. I know this is not the easiest subject to talk about. We just have one more section I want to get to with questions about four more questions left in our interview. And this is all based around moving forward like discussion for looking ahead areas of opportunity. First, I want to ask how has consistent coverage Breaking news and severe weather in the field, shaped you as a journalist, but also impacted your career.

35:09

What shaped me as a journalist by showing me how much losses in the world how much difficulty there are in people's lives. How much injustice and struggle, there is not just what you see on the news, but it's out there that a lot that we don't report, a lot of human suffering and injustice is out there. And the news reports some of it, but there's a lot. I think it's also shaped me as a journalist, in that the processes of how to tell the story, how to gather video for these stories, is different from when I first started to throughout five years. Because you learn, you learn exactly what you can and can't video at scenes, but also, you also learn how to better interact with people at these scenes, how to empathize with them, you know, they just launched literally everything in a house fire, you have to be, you may not be a preacher, or a minister or a member of the Red Cross, a chaplain, but the empathy you can show may be what they need an NF, it's important that they tell their story to viewers on the news. That empathy would go a long way. So I think that that part is also shaped my career as a journalist.

Zak Dahlheimer 37:05

I want to ask you to about trauma training. Did you receive any before or during your career to help you with this type of coverage?

37:17

There are preparatory training modules about how to cover tornadoes and hurricanes and floods. And but their safety modules. So lightning, hazmat scenes, and there, there are hostile situation training. But it's still a training module. It's a computer based, self paced module, that you watch videos, there's no real life. There's no interactive portion other than watching a video and doing some tests. There's no in the five years, I've been a journalist. I know we haven't had any active shooter training in person. There is active shooter training is available through computer modules. But there's I've never seen any in person, hostile situation, active shooter training. I've been through it in my previous career, with my training in law enforcement, but other than that, I don't have I've never seen companies management take the the interest or the initiative rather, in pursuing those trainings, do I think it's important? Absolutely. But I haven't seen

Zak Dahlheimer 38:58

these computer modules. I mean, you're referring to this are the ones that that we get at Scripps. Right?

39:04

Yeah, I think they're, I think they're offered through Skillsoft. Gotcha.

Zak Dahlheimer 39:11

workday. Right. Right. So but you're speaking to the modules that have been generated by third party companies but scripts offers to their employees. That's accurate to say. Correct. Gotcha. You mentioned therapy. Those module will the module is more so about the trauma training, I'm talking about resources to help available to help your mental health recovering these events. You mentioned therapy, you mentioned going and talking with your colleagues that you're way out in the field or management. But can you speak to more of what resources if any has been available to help your mental health from covering events like this, especially maybe provided through scripts

39:59

and Well, I want to be identified with scripts, potentially.

Zak Dahlheimer 40:05

What? Just so you're sure you're aware this is a scripts. All in all, these are all scripts employees that are being interviewed. So everyone will be identified as the scripts field journalist, but if you're an in anonymity will will basically, that's, that's as much revealing as it will be a photojournalist within scripts. But you'll still be anonymous. Moving forward, nothing more further than that.

40:32

Okay. Scripts does offer some resources, I think it's called Magellan, they offer resources through better help for you either in person or, or computer base, or mobile therapy sessions. They offer five sessions, it's it's not enough. therapy should be included free, no limit there. That's one thing that I've noticed that companies do not place a priority on, is offering mental health resources. They may say they do. But but when you get five sessions, and then you're done, I mean, we have continuing trauma, from the scenes. You don't just see one body at a homicide, and you're done with your career. I mean, you see, probably, I've seen a lot. And I've seen a lot of damage, a lot of people losing homes and lives. And when it interacts with our personal lives, such as my experience with suicide in my immediate family, the five sessions the sessions can be wonderful. But it's not enough, we should be able to have mental health resources, therapy sessions available all the time, no extra cost, anytime we need. And, and, honestly, an in person, in house therapist, at a TV station has ready for anybody to come in for a session and come in and sit down because, of course, there's it's 2022. But there's still a stigma surrounding going to a therapist or speaking to someone about mental health issues or trauma. And there shouldn't be every single person is human. Every person deals with trauma. And every person deals with it differently. And when we're at these scenes, when we're at these very difficult visual scenes, or we hear very difficult stories, we need to be able to talk to somebody about that. So, so yes, Scripps offers mental health resources. Is that enough? Not by a longshot. They should be free, it should be no cost. It should be anytime. And as many times as we need it throughout the year, and and there should be someone in house and each station to provide for that. If you did

Zak Dahlheimer 43:40

you believe and this is this is perfect as this was going to go into my next question. areas of opportunity. So these are all areas of opportunities you think companies like Scripps but other

companies industry wide, should explore when it comes to helping the mental health appeal journalists who have covered consistent breaking news and severe weather.

44:02

Absolutely, there's a there's a complete lack of mental health resources available. And it's not just those resources. It's also wellness Day, which do not currently exist. Wellness days exists for police officers, for firefighters, for social workers, but we're not first responders as journalists, but we are second responders. We come right after they do. We arrived to the scenes soon after they do. And what people see on the news is is edited later on. They're not seeing they're not necessarily seeing the raw emotion and trauma and difficult scenes that we II see at these areas, so the trauma may not translate well on air to the viewer, even though it may be a powerful or moving or difficult story, but it's still there for us. Because we're at the same we're hearing these stories. Um, I'll give a quick example I was at a, I was at a shooting scene. And a city I was covering they sent me was breaking news, the Osama just sent me to the scene. And I arrived at the same time the mother of the victim did. And as I was pulling up, she was told her son died as I was pulling up. And you're not gonna see that on the news, we're not going to broadcast a Mother's Day Raw, guttural sounds wailing of losing her son. And those kinds of things, can sit with somebody sit with somebody covering that, because it's not the first and it wasn't the last time. And it's not going to be the last time that I hear or witness those elements. Those moments, nobody wants to have that moment personally. But witnessing it is terrible because you just there's absolutely nothing you can do for them. And being present for that can affect someone's psyche can affect their own emotion. And I called my manager in and told my manager about how incredibly difficult that scene was, I had to call out the next day, I had to use my regular vacation time. Because we're not afforded wellness days, or mental health days. I don't know why there, there should be built in if there should be an understanding, especially with a global pandemic that's killed more than a million people in the United States alone, including people that I know, there should be an understanding that times everybody has mental health issues. And everybody needs to be able to address them, and speak to someone about them, or take a day off without taking away from their other days.

Zak Dahlheimer 47:37

So and this is an interesting point you brought up too because I've had this is another instance to where you're not the first participant journalists that I've spoken to in this study that has brought up this area of opportunity, having extra PTO days, not the general PTO bank, but having for field journalists, separate days that coincide with wellness or or mental health days to be used specifically for to help with that without having an impact on the general vacation sick PTO back. Is that what I'm understanding correctly? Yes,

48:24

yes, absolutely. That should be that should be given to us. No problem. There should not be a problem with giving employees wellness and mental health days. Just like I believe there should be no problem offering mental health resources, unlimited therapy visits, at no cost.

Zak Dahlheimer 48:44

And an in house therapist to you mentioned

48:47

and an in house therapist, there should be no problem with that. The companies have the money. People are leaving, people are leaving the industry at unprecedented rates. And it's not just the pay times. I mean, I'm sure times have always been hard. But with the barrage of information that we get from multiple sources. It can be difficult for even the most hardened person to through the information, the breaking news, the difficult situations we have made difficult to get through that if we don't have those resources available to us at any time then you know we're gonna go find something else we're going to leave the industry and then we're going to find something that we don't have to see dead bodies and not talk not talk to a therapist about it. We're gonna go find something that makes us happy but also does not make us incredibly sad or incredibly distraught. Weekend week out.

Zak Dahlheimer 49:55

You bring up another point too and I want to you know, ask follow up About that, you know, the mental health impacts from breaking news and severe weather on field journalists having an impact on the industry with people leaving, you know, on the job pool. Can you without Of course, naming names for the sake of protecting others who have not consented for the study? In general, can you speak to what you specifically seen in your personal professional experience scuze me of people, you know, leaving, or a lot of people leaving because of the mental health aspect of covering breaking news and severe weather in the field.

50:41

I've noticed certain instances on social media, or people have noted that the industry is changing, where mental health needs to be prioritized. I've noticed some, at my own station, take leaves of absence to to prioritize their mental health. And, and it's, that's all fine. Because, again, companies need to realize that if you don't support, if you don't give people the resources to have mental health support, they're they're going to either leave or they're just gonna completely break from burnout from mental breakdown. It's just if there's no support there, then people are going to find something else.

Zak Dahlheimer 51:48

Yeah, gotcha. Well, I definitely want to be respectful of your time, and because you, but thank you so much for this has been a very fruitful conversation. I really appreciate you taking the time, and especially going into really tender subjects. You've helped this project greatly, and we really appreciate your time. Before we ended record, I just want to make sure that this is on the recording too. So as I mentioned 10 journalists from the EW Scripps company are being interviewed, of course, you know, you're one of them being one of the 10. But we understand that you chose to participate anonymously. So basically, within within the research project, the methodology will state that 10 journalists within scripts were interviewed, but if anything specific, like say quotes or anything like that will refer to you. It'll be a photo journalists who spoke to us anonymously, and you may be given either a pseudonym or a project participant number, so like participant number x or something like that, to help protect you and your anonymity for this.

53:03

thought that would be that would be just fine.

Zak Dahlheimer 53:06

You're okay with those stipulations? Yes. Okay. Good. Just want to make sure that you're okay with that. Okay, well, let me go ahead and hit stop.

PARTICIPANT 7 ZOOM RECORDING RAW

01:12

I started in the radio side of things. And I started freelancing with the local television or not the local television station, but the cable news station back in Canada where I had my first job, did a few stories there and did some more freelance work, I think starting in 2014, up in DC, where I was previously and you know, picked up a handful of shifts, so and then full time started in 2016 with DC CW. Up in DC, which was that whole script, the WTVR hybrid news station, so full time since 2016. But you know, fill in shifts since like, when t 11.

Zak Dahlheimer 02:05

So safe to say overall TV news field journalists years 2011 So we're talking 11 years. Is that a bit?

02:14

I would comfortably say at least six I guess since that's when I started full time. And, you know, with some smatterings before them. Got it? Okay, so

Zak Dahlheimer 02:24

So definitely, accurately six years full time. You mentioned you know, reporter and MJ fill an anchor Have you had any other roles as a TV news field journalists?

02:40

Sometimes I'm for some events, I've been simply the photographer. If we're short staffed on photographers, I'll pitch in there if another reporter needs help on something, but I don't think there are any roles, at least that I know of for a field reporter other than reporter MMJ type thing and just you know, assisting the others back at the station was putting the newscast together.

Zak Dahlheimer 03:03

Gotcha. So, you know, reporter MMJ being the main role you've had throughout your career. For the folks you know, that may not be in the know, like us. Tell us? What types of responsibilities would you say come with your job being a reporter MMJ?

03:22

First and foremost, I guess, is finding the stories. Obviously, we're putting together a daily newscast, so you need stories to put that newscast together. So the first thing is, is figuring out what story you're going to pitch in the morning meetings and then you know, if that gets signed off on by the producers going ahead with that, or if they said, you know, there's no there's something else we want you to cover or this event that you that needs coverage, then going to do that. You know what once you know what your story is, then obviously trying to line up figuring out what are the elements you need to put together to in order to tell that story. So figuring out who the stakeholders are in said story, you know, if there's a, if it's a pro con type story, getting both sides of that, potentially getting an expert to help explain complex topics, you know, legal or criminal or legislative issues. So those are always helpful. You know, sometimes you're doing you know, the man on the street stuff. So finding people asking how they feel about a certain subject that's coming up. You know, as you're learning, you know, keeping people abreast of

what you're getting, what you're not getting, reaching out for help if you need it. Because, you know, I found you know, you can't do everything by yourself. That's why we're a team here to try and help help each other out. Keeping you know, if you've got too much stuff sometimes then figuring out you know, how are you going to break this up into smaller chunks for the newscast, maybe save things for future and then obviously, you know, once you have all the elements, you know, from the from, as I learned going from radio to television, you know, it's more than just that Having the the sound bites you also have the pictures that go along with that. And on the days I MMJ, that is still one of my main struggles, as I'm still thinking with the radio brain is like, Oh, I don't need to picture think about what picture I'm going to cover these words with. But the photographer's will kindly remind me I do need to do that. And so yeah, getting the images to go along with the story, creating any graphics for something where you may not have an apologies, I'm just, I'm getting a text here from a colleague on something I'm trying to get cover. kinda late. Apologies for this.

Zak Dahlheimer 05:35

Oh, yeah. I mean, this is a instance in real time, you know, your duties, right? The kind of like what you were talking about? Yeah. So

05:43

there's just an event with down in Petersburg with the governor and some congressional Democrats are sort of like a bipartisan thing going down on their efforts to build up the state us is pharmaceutical drug production, something that was hampered by the pandemic. So we apparently didn't send a morning crew. So just trying to scramble our missed Mr. Wayne Kohler, senior reporter see if he get there, because he's Mr. Tri city. So just I think it'd be a good thing to get. So yeah, something like that. And that's the thing, if you're busy with something, reaching out to others, saying, Hey, I just heard of this. And you know, it's great at that station, like everyone does that if they hear something else that they can't do, they'll pass along, I've gotten great stories from other reporters before passed stuff along to them, then back to the daily grind. You know, once you have all those elements, then obviously trying to build the story in a concise, compelling, understandable format. You know, sometimes you're just doing both sites, sometimes you're doing packages, you have longer time.

06:50

Okay. Yes, and, and then obviously, if you're by yourself, knowing your workflow of how quickly you can turn something, but you know, if you're with a photographer, you know, learning what their work speed workflow is, I know, photographers at our station, if we're really slamming on something, I know, there's some ways I can work with that photographer, have a different workflow setup than I could with other photographers. So because you are a team working together to put together the best package yesterday. So I know yesterday, I was working on a story. And just before I started writing, the talking with my photographer, okay, what were you imagining? What were the good sound bites for you? What were your, what was your opening NAT POP that you were thinking of? And I had started with something that he said no, hey, how about this, and I liked it. So we, I changed it because it was felt like it was a stronger open to the package. Yeah. Yeah. And then, you know, once you have that written, then, you know, getting ready for in most cases, you're on air presentation of introducing and tagging it with the package in helping the anchors with the anchor intro making sure it's factually correct,

because I know, you know, sometimes people aren't as well versed on a story as you are. So you want to make sure that they're not saying something incorrect in their toss to you. So you might not have to correct them on air. And then it showed up, I guess, and then rinse and repeat for the next day type thing, or you're doing a preview story, passing an information off, you might have to the nighttime reporter to help them make their job easier. Like if you're previewing an event, helping them get ready to cover the event itself type thing of like, who to talk to, here's what you need to know what you don't need to worry about things like that.

Zak Dahlheimer 08:43

Well, thank you for that, you know, detailed explanation there. what made you want to get into journalism as a career. Um,

08:52

so my grandfather who died when my dad was in his young 20s was a radio announcer up in Canada. And so my dad always sort of raised me on the magic of radio. And, you know, it's something that, you know, we'd always listen to the Sunday Night Baseball games that we could pick up from the US when it was at night and off the am radio, it would get far enough that we could listen to that and always remember hearing about Walter Cronkite, the most trusted man in America. You know, we had some big names like Lloyd Peterson, up and or Lloyd Robertson story up in Canada, and just seeing that and so I started out, you know, not not really knowing how to really get started, so to speak. So I, you know, started campus radio, was doing music shows and then started to get into public address announcing. So you name the sport. I was a public address announcer for more than likely did a lot of a horse show circuit stuff. And then I realized like, you know, this is something definitely I want to do full time and look for a radio program. And so there was a radio program at the community college. And so originally, it was like a technical institute. And so did the two year program there, started in the radio side of things, got my first job at a station, Radio, nl And Kamloops did that for two years, and then made the transition down to the US. And that eventually went from radio to TV.

Zak Dahlheimer 10:29

Yeah, and you've been, you've been doing it full time now for six years and have been, you know, a staple. Of course a WT. br Would you say that, it's been been a rewarding career for you

10:43

100% Most days don't feel like a job just because it's, you know, it's not a nine to five office grind that I don't, I've never done that particular case, don't really know what that's like. But I imagine people don't get to do what we get to do in this business. Every single day is potentially different. You don't really know what you're going to encounter, the different people that you meet the stories that you get to tell and in some cases, holding people to account and helping people figure out their problems is immensely rewarding. Well,

Zak Dahlheimer 11:19

thank you so much again, for that I want to get into now your experience covering consistent breaking news and severe weather since this is what the story is this study is pertaining to throughout your career, how often would you say you've had to cover breaking news and or severe weather in the field? I really

11:42

should have gone through all of my scripts for because I saved them all. But because that's that's a tough question. Because you know, because because I know certain like, breaking news events, I've covered pop to mind and severe weather events, but like I've had to put a number on it. That's a that just feels like a tall order. 20% I guess I've never really lived in a, you know, worked in a market where there's a consistent amount of severe weather. And, you know, there's no rhyme or reason to breaking news. So it's tough to put a gauge on that. So I would say I've done my fair share.

Zak Dahlheimer 12:26

So clearly, between the two breaking news outweighs severe weather as far as your experience covering it.

12:32

Yes. I would like I said, I've only worked in the biggest, severe weather we had in Canada, where I worked was forest fires in the summertime, nothing really in the winter. And then since then, I've just been in either DC or Richmond. And so I think I think there's been one bad tornado events since I've been here. We had the dirait show in 2012. I think we've had Superstorm Sandy. And then just some other like heavy rain events. But yeah, it's not like being in a tornado alley in Oklahoma. Sure.

Zak Dahlheimer 13:09

Yeah, absolutely. A little bit different than that. Well, being that breaking news outweighs severe weather in your experience. And I know you were just kind of thinking about likes, and it's probably you mentioned you there's a lot kind of going through your mind. I mean, so one, like if someone comes up to you says, you know, is there a particular news event breaking news wise, that you've covered in the field that stands out to you? Is there one that that you can name right off the top?

13:43

I think like there's like several items have kind of like popped into my head. None, I guess really, you know, jumping out more than others. I honest. Like I would say, you know, sort of the combination one, if you're listening to combo one would be the direct show that I mentioned, just because that was very early on in their radio stations. Like I came to an all new station that had just started launching and so that was in 2012. And the duration was in 2012. So we were only a few months new and obviously, you know, you know, weather events coming but you don't know how hard it's going to hit. And I remember being the nightside reporter that night. Basically, I drove out to go meet the Deray CIO because it was moving from west to east and eyebrow from DC to basically Loudoun County in Virginia is pretty close to the West Virginia line. Just waiting to see what you know, to like explain to the people what it's like to sit through the Draco because it was coming towards you. And I just remember hunkering down in a 711 gas station that I remember seeing like the top over top of it. What's overtop of the gas pumps was just I remember seeing on air they were it was bending, like, like, wrenching like a bendy straw that you have in your drink. And then just like all these people, like rushing in to the 711 to hunker down, I remember like, what, like, one shirtless guy coming out of a minivan, his wife

yelling at him to get the baby. And just the chaos of like people trying to get out of the storm, because I, I think to this day, I've never been in a storm as powerful as that one.

Zak Dahlheimer 15:32

Well, thank you for sharing that. And and would you say because of what you saw, and like you mentioned, you've never been in a storm like that.

15:39

Is that why that particular event stands out to you? Just because yeah, I've never been in a severe storm. When I was in Canada, that was the biggest one I ever sort of encountered in the US because I don't remember. I because I remember sitting in a parking lot, and the winds start to pick up and I just said, I don't feel safe out in the open like this, because I wasn't a near trees, but it's like I just needed to be in a structure. So I remember driving to there to find someplace that I could hunker down. And so I know, it's that's the severe weather event that really pops into my mind. And I know from like any breaking news, you know, covering the protests of 2020 and other things, other protests that I remember back during the Trayvon Martin stuff covering those marches. The Occupy Wall Street stuff, like I never, never fear for my safety the way I did, during the dirt show. And just, you know, the, the sense of I could get injured in this as is I've always felt much higher in the, in the severe weather events. Gotcha. And what year was it the ratio? That was 2012? Gotcha, gotcha.

Zak Dahlheimer 16:50

Well, would you say consistent coverage throughout your career or breaking news and, and severe weather while on the job has impacted you personally?

17:04

In any way? Well, I know like, obviously, like, you know, in the moment itself, it can be it can be stressful is especially with the severe weather stressful, just with the whole I don't feel safe right now type thing. And so that that's definitely your something. Always thinking about, okay, is what I'm, because I definitely noticed, like with breaking news as well, I tend to have I don't know what the right word is. But basically, I am more eager to go into danger than potentially my photographer might be or my wife would like me to be. Or I like to go headlong first because I like to be right in there. But like I said, you know, break with so like I'm you know, they always say with gunfire, it's people run away police run towards and reporters as well. But with like the weather stuff, definitely there's times where it's I get to the point is like, Okay, I'm not doing that I've never drawn through driven through standing water because I've done enough of those stories to know, that ends poorly. But just yet, like, I'm always, always cognizant of falling tree branches, things like that to see I don't want to become the story becoming a casualty. And, you know, obviously with breaking news, it's a huge rush getting to cover breaking news, trying to figure out what's going on. And when you feel like you've gotten something you've gotten it right. Again, that's exhilarating feeling. Like I know, I remember covering the the shooting at the Annapolis news room, when that guy went in and killed the five people there. I remember covering that day very vividly. Because I was working on something else and got a call from this the DC w 50. Day. So we're getting a call, there's like, hey, there's something going on out there. And rushing out there. That's like an hour long drive from where it was to get out there. I remember getting on the scene, having to figure out what was going on getting different people.

And, you know, that's definitely one that stands out. And I distinctly remember, like a lot of the back of my Radio Days covering the, you know, the marches up in DC with the whole Trayvon Martin stuff, because obviously, you know, the nation's capital, there's lots of stuff that is always going on there. I feel like I've kind of gone on a tangent here in terms of what the original question was, because I'm just like reliving all these different memories here. So yeah, no, no. Or did I answer it? Yeah, no,

Zak Dahlheimer 19:39

you answered my question. Well with that, but I want to also follow up to how about when it comes to consistent breaking news and severe weather coverage in your career? What about when it comes to guiding your career path? Has it guided your career path in any way would you say?

19:54

Um, I would say no, because as, again, breaking news is something that I like. It's not something that is daunting to me or something that I don't like to cover. And I've just, I've never really applied to places where I said, Hey, if I go here, I'm going to have to worry about, you know, severe weather type thing because it before I landed the job in DC with the TV station, I had applied to, I think I was interviewed in Biloxi, Mississippi, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and I don't think at any point didn't, you know, I don't think there's any severe extreme weather events that normally hit in Wisconsin, and obviously, I think being in Biloxi being in the Gulf, you'd probably have hurricanes to worry about. But that was never something that my wife or I ever, ever want, like, hey, you know, we don't want to go here, because there's hurricanes type thing. So yeah, I wouldn't say that. The possibility of trying to avoid or going somewhere specifically to get to cover either of those things has ever been a factor and in how I've chosen where I've ended up.

Zak Dahlheimer 21:19

Well, it's interesting cameras. I know, like, in my interviews, so far, in this project, there's been two camps that have come out that said, there's reporters that, you know, step up to the plate, they say, Yeah, you know, I, I always answered the call, we cover breaking news. I like covering breaking news. Some may even say good, the breaking news reporter. And there's others. There's the other camp that says, Well, you know, I'll go cover it. But, you know, I just don't really like covering breaking news. I would prefer not to cover it. But it sounds like you're in the camp of you don't mind covering breaking news, like you step up to the play.

21:55

Yeah, if you give me the call saying there's breaking news. More often than not like, if I'm able to go, I'll probably go.

Zak Dahlheimer 22:01

Gotcha. Very cool. All right. Well, I want to go now to so this is kind of like, you know, situational bass. So let's say your sense of breaking news or severe weather assignment in the field, what immediately would you say goes through your mind when you're given the call, say, Hey, we got something going on? Breaking news, or severe weather?

22:25

What's the address? My first quit, just I guess, chronologically here, basically, you know, you know, in this day and age, you know, if I'm being called to get there, you know, be punching it in and more than likely, I'll just be on my, you know, what's going through my head is like, Alright, how much information can I figure out? Before I get there, and who's going to help me get that and, you know, being here, TPR, that's probably going to be Robert, our assignment manager. So I'll probably be on the phone with him throughout the drive there. And, potentially, because, you know, I don't know what the situation would be like, I get a chance to get in the car with my camera guy. We're riding up together. I guess the most recent example of this would have been, where there's a huge fire and Tappahannock were burned down like a whole city block. And so that was like an hour drive. And so I got to be with my photographer he drove. So I got to basically, while I was driving out there, you know, checking Twitter to see is anyone posting about this? Does anyone have video, because I know by the time you're gonna get there, the flames will probably be knocked down. So you're not going to have as good video. And that's something you want from the storytelling elements. So like tracking, you know, tracking down video of the event that has kicked off the breaking news that you're going to cover? Is that something that you can find somewhere, getting in contact with those people trying to line up ahead of time? And basically figuring out the best way to get there, were there road closures, is there a media staging area, trying to figure that out? And I know, you know, basically when, when, for this most recent example with a fire. We had unfortunately, we didn't have a backpack, we had our SAT van. So we are a lot more tethered than we normally would be, which is not ideal for something like this. So basically, as soon as we got close to the event, I told like Dwight to just drop me off. And I hopped out with my phones and started doing interviews. Like, as soon as I walked up to people, I started saying, Hey, you do something and I you know, one one phone is my camera, the other phones, my microphone, and I just do it that way and then we ingest that way and I've actually found it's easier to send video back that way then sometimes through a hotspot just doing through iMessage and so yeah, so recapping. What's the address best way to get there? What information can I find out ahead of time? And potentially line stuff up? What visuals can I you know, scour from social media? And who can help me find that type thing?

Zak Dahlheimer 25:10

So obviously, and you and I know this, you know, a lots going on, you know, when when we go to the scenes and you named it off right there. Are there any particular stressors, you know, emotional drains or strains, mental strains that come to mind when you experience covering breaking news and severe weather, especially on a consistent basis?

25:33

Um, I wouldn't say, again, I'm just trying to think back, but I wouldn't think of any emotional strains just because I know when you're in the moment, I, you know, if you remember the movie soul where they talked about people being in the zone, and you just, I don't know, I feel like when I get to break new scenes, you're just autopilot is not the right word. But you're just like it. There's no, at least for me, I don't feel like there's time to stress out I know, the biggest stressor, I guess would be okay, I have this great sound, but we're not in a great area. How am I gonna get this back so that we can get this on air title thing? And how many minutes do I have until I have to go live? And how much time? Am I going to have to actually write something? Or am I just

getting on air and riffing but ya know, I get a huge rush out of covering breaking news where it's not. I don't think I ever feel stressed. In breaking news. I

Zak Dahlheimer 26:40

feel focused. And that's interesting, too. I mean, yeah, you're in the zone. And what about say, like coping and assessing with situations like if your center is seen? So is would you say just staying in the zone? Is that sort of like? Is it accurate to say that's kind of like a coping mechanism or like helping you like, assess or cope with situations?

27:04

I wouldn't call it a coping mechanism because I, again, I can't think of any. Again, the only time where a for lack of a better term, I guess I need to cope with something has been when I'm in the weather events, and I was like, Okay, I don't feel safe here. I need to move. And thankfully, my I guess my caveman brain kicks in, at that point says Danger, danger, danger, get out of there. And I'll remove myself from the situation. But so in terms of like, the mental stress, something like that, I don't think I've for breaking news, that's something that I need to. I'm trying to think like, yeah, like definitely the weather is the one where it's like, I'm feeling the emotion of fear of this isn't safe, you need to get somewhere different type thing. And I know it was gonna say more recently, like with the protests, things like that, where I know you know, some events where the media is not exactly welcome. Sometimes in these these things. I feel like I've well aware enough of those situations to not put yourself in any sort of situation where you are at risk of being surrounded or open, you know, put in a dangerous situation sustained to the periphery, things like that. I know our station really stresses like, trust your gut, if you don't feel safe, don't go any further and then you have to type thing.

Zak Dahlheimer 28:39

And those are the protests at the George Floyd. situation back in 2020. You were talking about? Yeah, and

28:49

I'm trying to think if there was a situation back when we had like the big gun rally I don't ever remember feeling anything. Oh, yeah, that was a big dinner. But you because I remember like getting sort of and I remember like during the Occupy Wall Street ones up in DC. I was like, literally in in the front of the line between police and protesters pushing on this metal gate. And looking back now is like that's probably wasn't the safest thing to do. Because I remember like, one of those gates was like, dropped on my foot. So I think it probably learned as a older more experienced reporter to stay on the outside so you're not injured doing this. I remember like we we got a little bit of tear gas during the the George Floyd protests. So and yeah, just so you know, staying away where stuff where you could get caught up and stuff like that. Sure. So

Zak Dahlheimer 29:47

you mentioned for the severe weather events too. I mean, that, you know, emotions that you exhibit, you know, safe covering severe weather. So would you say that If you have had experience, obviously, you know, feared certain, like, if you're in a tradeshow or in a severe weather event, you regularly experience exhibited emotional responses like, say covering severe weather events.

30:14

Oh, I guess it depends on what your definition of an emotional responses. So if if the definition is, you know, I've felt unsafe and that I need to remove myself from the situation that absolutely yeah, but like, I haven't had a situation where, you know, I'm frozen with fear and unable to move or something like that. That's not something I've ever really experienced.

Zak Dahlheimer 30:39

Well, camera, how do you assess? You know, if you're constantly or consistently, maybe rather, being sent to cover breaking news or severe weather events? How do you assess constantly covering those two types of events? Especially those events that that can be traumatic to a degree? What do

30:59

you mean by assess them?

Zak Dahlheimer 31:01

How do you what do you make of that? I mean, what do you I guess, what do you make of you, us, you know, but in your instance, you know, going to cover breaking news to severe weather events, what do you make of covering those events that can be to a degree traumatic,

31:18

um, it's, you know, it's part of the job, it's, if it's something that I felt was so detrimental, that I couldn't do it, I would probably look for a different job. And I've never been at a station, thankfully, where management has ever pushed myself or anyone at any other report of the station to do something you don't feel comfortable with. So if there's a situation I said, I, I don't feel comfortable doing this, I can't do this. It's just not safe. They say no, your safety comes first and foremost. And you know, we don't want you to get hurt type thing. So do the best you can from as close as you can, that you feel comfortable. And just sort of go from there type thing. So it's it's never been a it's never been a thing that I guess has threatened to push me out of the business, if that's the what you were kind of asking like, it's not something that I think or dread about or think that is like, if I'm going to quit, this is one of the reasons I'm going to quit.

Zak Dahlheimer 32:20

Gotcha. Yes. Because you you understand the duties at hand. But it's it's interesting to hear to UBR, the stations you've been at have been very supportive, where they don't In other words, that there was some of that that that went above the, your personal threshold. You could you could say, Hey, I don't feel comfortable or or what have you. And they respect that. And they and they address that according 100%. Yeah. Yeah, I don't

32:52

I don't know if that's the norm. Hopefully, that is the case for most reporters at most stations, but I would assume, so maybe get pressured to do things they don't feel safe doing.

Zak Dahlheimer 33:01

Well, I got just a couple more questions here. Just last few questions. And I really appreciate all your time as we've got we covered a lot of ground in it. Definitely really appreciate it your your input on the subject.

33:16

When it comes to

Zak Dahlheimer 33:17

trauma training, Did you receive any trauma training before or during your career when it comes to relate it to this type of coverage? You know, consistently covering breaking news and severe weather? And you mentioned it a little bit too, but what resources have any have been available to help your mental health from covering these types of events? Would you say?

33:37

I know I've under scripts, at least we end previously with Tribune and I can't remember back when I read it is, you know, we had to do that the online training of here's how you cover breaking news and severe weather. Here's the things to look for. Here's the things you don't want to do. Here's what to do. If you don't feel safe. Here are some real life examples of I distinctly remember one example of damage, I can't remember if you've probably done the same train where it was like this, they go to this deadly shooting, there's grieving family members there and the reporting the photographer literally getting right up in those people's faces with the camera and aggravating the situation, as like, why would you do that it is not worth that potential soundbite for like angering a grieving family type thing. So done that. I know. Like, I know, they have resources available of like mental health experts that you can talk to. It's not something I've ever been to the level where it's like, I need this type thing. Like if I have a stressful day, you know, talk to my wife or talk to my colleagues and typically that's enough that I need so but yeah, I've gone through the training and I know the resource resources are there if I need to.

Zak Dahlheimer 34:58

Gotcha. Well, it's good to hear personally?

35:02

Finally,

Zak Dahlheimer 35:02

Are there any areas of opportunities that you'd like to see companies like scripts or just industry wide explore when it comes to helping the mental health of field journalists who have covered consistent breaking news and severe weather?

35:20

You know, just just from my experience, because I don't think I've had any extremely negative experiences or suffered any long term trauma and in a sort of sense of the way that is needed. Anything extensive, I don't, there's nothing that pops to mind just because I've not been on that, that other sides so that, you know, I wish I could give a more eloquent answer, but just not having the life experience to know that, hey, I feel like this was missing type thing. Every

situation I've been in, there's nothing more I can say like, Hey, thanks, XYZ to fix the problems type thing?

Zak Dahlheimer 36:00

Sure. You it's it, I think it's accurate to say, from what I've heard, you know, it's, you're satisfied with the resources that are currently available, and you know, they're available?

36:11

Well, I couldn't, you know, I couldn't say that I'm satisfied with the resources that are available, because I've never had to use the resources that are available. Because I've never been in a situation where I need to use them. So I, I don't know if if things are adequate, because I've not never had to use them type of thing. So you know, I'd have to get to that point to be able to use them to know whether or not hey, this help, this didn't help type thing.

Zak Dahlheimer 36:36

Right. Your main, your main resources to impart had been like talking about with your loved ones, family colleagues.

36:46

That's really, yeah. And, you know, that's, that's, uh, I feel like that's just general human nature as opposed to like, you know, the company has, you know, this mental health professional, we're gonna get you a two hour seminar next Tuesday to sit down, talk, talk through, maybe they'll prescribe you medication, things like that. That's not something I've ever needed or required. So I, you know, I think every hopefully everyone's got friends and family that they're able to talk to, if they have a tough situation. And I've never gotten to the point where I've did more than that. Gotcha. All right. Let me go ahead and stop recording.

PARTICIPANT 8 ZOOM RECORDING RAW

Zak Dahlheimer 00:35

Okay, so and that's gonna be pretty much your experience within the EW Scripps company has been three months safe to say. Yeah, exactly. How many years? Would you say you've been a field journalists?

00:48

Well, let's see. I have this year in San Diego since January that I had three and a half years in Palm Springs. So that's for on air than I had a year in New York City, just producing for ABC News National like Nightline Good Morning America type stuff. And then before that, grad school for a year, which Annenberg was still you're pretty much doing, you know, TV journalist stuff in the field. So, you know, I'd say you could say safely five to seven years,

Zak Dahlheimer 01:17

five to seven years, okay? Well, what what made you want to get into journalism as a career?

01:25

You know, I always tell people, my favorite thing about this job. And the reason why this is my passion is because every single day, it enables you to meet someone new, learn something new, see something new, it's not a desk job, I knew I didn't want to be at a desk every day. And I really feel like this is the most fulfilling way that I could spend my life. You know, to me, this is not just a job, it really is a lifestyle. It's a very fulfilling way to spend your time learning about the community around you being involved in the community around you going to what's happening, when they say you have a front seat to history, and you're really is true and whatever community you're in. And I just think that's incredible. And I did an internship at CBS here in San Diego back in 2015. And I remember witnessing that for the first time and just thinking, you know, oh my god, this is the coolest thing ever. I have to I have to do this one day. So kind of became a goal back then. And slowly worked our way up. And yeah, here we are.

Zak Dahlheimer 02:23

Awesome. Well, I'll go ahead and get get to it, because I want to make sure I'm cognizant of your time. obviously this studies about interviewing field journalists, reporters, photo journalists, people out in the field, they're experienced covering breaking news and severe weather on a consistent basis, and how does that relate to their mental health? We're getting to all of that. First, I want to ask you, though, throughout your career, you know, you've done obviously, I know, You've done a lot, you know, in San Diego, and then before that is just in Palm Springs. But how would you say throughout your career, how often you've had to cover breaking news and severe weather in the field?

02:59

Constantly. I mean, breaking news, every day, every few days, whenever it happens. You know, in California, we don't have the same severe weather as the East Coast, but in a way, you know, it's its own severe weather, the extreme heat in Palm Springs, life threatening temperatures, 120 degrees, seeing the impact on communities there, and how that intersects, you know, with poverty and the different types of neighborhoods that you see out in the desert. On top of young

California, we have the fires the wildfire, there's nothing crazier than wildfire stories, I'm sure you know, and remember from que es que. But here just and it's such a cycle, right. It's the fires. And then you have rain seasons. So you have the mudslides and so just seeing all those emergency systems in place, whether it be rain, mudslides, heat fires, it's all the SoCal weather. Yeah, we cover that constantly. It's always super intense, but also very rewarding.

Zak Dahlheimer 04:03

Yeah, boy, do I remember those wildfires back in 2016 distance yet? It feels like yesterday.

04:08

Totally. Don't forget it. You're not you'll never forget it right? No,

Zak Dahlheimer 04:12

no, not at all. Is so it's, it sounds like between weighing the two breaking news, severe weather, you've done more breaking news, it's accurate to say versus severe weather coverage.

04:24

Probably just because by nature of how often the events happen, you know, to get severe weather in California, that's more spread out and breaking news. And I've covered a ton of horrible crime story shootings. You know, most recently last Tuesday, the SDSU rape allegations story, so, you know, just really intense, heavy kind of story of the day type stuff depending on what we need.

Zak Dahlheimer 04:50

Absolutely. Well, you mentioned some examples, you know, in the last couple of minutes, is there a particular breaking news event throughout your whole career that stands out to you? And if so why does that stand out to you?

05:06

Well, I can tell you the craziest story that I in my head, like when people say, what's the craziest story I've ever covered. And I think it has to be a story one day out in Joshua Tree, where there was a man, and it's one of those things he just never forget. His name was Roger Tyndale. And he was like a trailer park situation, he shot a guy in the face before taking a pregnant woman hostage in his car, leading police on a chase while he was high on crystal meth. While he's Facebook live during the whole thing, before he crashed into a ditch where his grandmother lived. So I remember you know, we're hearing about this crazy stuff on the scanner is and I got out there I arrived on scene like right after he crashed into the ditch and police were there to arrest him. But like, you know, you never know what you're gonna get in this job. And that's just, you know, one wild breaking news story that I you know, that stands out, but too many to count. Really?

Zak Dahlheimer 06:07

Why do you think that that one in particular kind of sticks out to you so much?

06:11

It has so many variables were just so many layers to is good. It was when I was a brand new journalist who I was like, You got to be kidding me like it was I think it was still kind of a shock

factor. And, you know, to your point about mental health and journalists, and how insane you have to be to do this job. Like I think we do kind of the kind of the shock factor of everything wears off right after the first couple years. It's like, Oh, it's another shooting. It's another, you know, homicide investigation, another horrible situation that we're being called to another SWAT standoff. And it's like, but in your first couple of years, it's everything is so new and novel, and you're just like, Oh, my God, I can't believe what I'm seeing. And hearing right.

Zak Dahlheimer 06:48

Yeah, yeah. No, and then after kind of like, wears off, like you said, a couple of years after that. Yeah.

06:54

Yeah, I still, but I try always to make sure that just because I see and hear the stuff. So often, it never changes the amount of empathy I try to have in telling a story or how I'm able to, you know, handle it on scene because as many times as I've seen a shooting, for the families involved in that shooting, it's most likely the first and one and most devastating, potentially whenever that they're going to experience right or moment that you're going to experience. So try to be very aware. You know, it's not let that become not to make sure it doesn't change the way that we tackle this story. Right?

Zak Dahlheimer 07:33

Sure. Absolutely. When we're talking about consistent coverage of breaking news, and and severe weather, but would you say has all of that, while doing that on the job has impacted you personally, you kind of alluded to it a little bit there. But if you could maybe expand more on that if it has,

07:51

or Yeah, I don't know how it couldn't I, you know, I think there are different kinds of people who get into into this job, and everybody has different strengths. But I think for me truly, like my strength is empathy, like I have always been, it's a blessing and a curse. I've always been an empathetic person, my mom is super empathetic, I love human beings. I love people, I always want to help. But you know, in journalism, it is kind of a blessing and a curse. Because when I'm on the side of the road with a family who just you know, is getting on scene when a family member was in a car crash, like I genuinely feel like I, you know, I want to be able to put myself in their shoes and, and be really sensitive. And you know what, at the end of the day, for me, the story isn't really not my priority. Like, we're, I think we're human beings. And if there's a family grieving, I'm never going to push them to do an interview, I'm first going to have a compassionate, empathetic conversation with them. And if they're willing to open up or if there's a way that I can help them by being a journalist who can, you know, share a GoFundMe or something, I'm happy to do that. But I don't ever want to be a journalist first and a human being second, I want to be a human being first and then a journalist second, absolutely. You know, but on the flip side of things, being super empathetic, and really trying to put yourself in the shoes of people who are enduring horrible things can have consequences for you as a journalist, right? So I do days and nights where this stuff keeps me up late, and, you know, I can't really shut off my mind. And it's not damaging to the point where I would ever walk away from my job because, again, I think it's the very thing that makes me good at my job is also the

thing that makes me you know, kind of stay up too late thinking about this stuff. But like I said, I am able to have a balance. I don't ever let it get to a point or hasn't gotten to a point so far, where I'm like, I'm drowning in grief, and I'm overwhelmed. And I need to take a step away from work and never got to that point, and if it ever did, I think I would be comfortable, you know? Sitting down with my bosses and saying, like, I need a breather or break. But you know, so far, I've been able to, I think, juggle everything, manage it. And I credit a lot of that too, you know, just healthy habits, making sure I exercise, I have to exercise I have to I go for long runs, and I'm always posting that on Instagram, IBC that, but I have to go for my like, every couple of days, just a nice, long walk, I feel like that's really good for your mental health. Yoga, you know, I also I'm a spiritual person, a lot of prayer, a lot of prayers involved in life these days. And you know, making sure that I sleep I was the worst time I ever had for my mental health was the working the morning show because I wasn't sleeping, getting up in the middle of the night, there's something so unnatural about that, in the middle of the night to go straight to a homicide investigation. On top of getting like three hours of sleep, that was probably the lowest point that was like when I was the most unhappy as a journalist. Wow. If we talk about you know, so the importance of sleep, and all these other things to recharge your battery, so you can do this very difficult job.

Zak Dahlheimer 11:06

These are all kind of like, which is I'm glad you touched on that. Because I mean, you know, these are pretty much resources in a way that but also ways to you helps you cope with situations with having to go to breaking news constantly coping with those situations, you take time for yourself, you exercise you make sure you get plenty of sleep. Because yeah, I mean, like you said, I mean, if it keeps you up sometimes mean that can be pretty heavy.

11:32

Yeah, definitely. So the sleep is critical. There's, I would say that that's the number one for me. I second that if I am sleep deprived, if I go into work on three to five hours asleep, I am on edge. I'm groggy, I'm anxious, I maybe take things a little more personally, I'm just more heightened emotionally, you know, there's all kinds of negative things, my day starts off just on the wrong flights. And I don't feel like myself. So yeah, I think the worst thing for your mental health as a journalist would be working the morning show unless you're super devoted and dedicated and can actually go to bed and get eight hours of sleep. But that was very, very hard for me. So I'm very grateful to not be on that shift so that I can kind of do those things that I need to do to be ready for this

Zak Dahlheimer 12:19

this. Well, I'm happy that you know, you're on the different swing too, as far as like in a different ship that's happier for you. Yeah. When you're out of the scene, are there any particular stressors, like mental emotional drains or strains that you consistently experience? Like, say if you're sent to a breaking news or severe weather scene?

12:43

Yeah, you know what? That's a good question. And the first thing comes to mind is, I am always because I work in news, I am always on edge and very self aware of my surroundings. I'm always very untrusting of people around me, have you never know who like you think about just

being a woman and who could be targeting you and who could be stalking you or who could be or who you know who has a gun or who has a weapon or who's out to harm you who's out to get you. So when I go to a breaking news situation, and we're going live, I do always have this sense of like heightened anxiety, where you never know who's around you or what's going to happen. Like I was covering, you know, a SWAT standoff the other day, there was a guy in House took him for nine hours to come out. He got out he finally did come out, he got arrested. And then we're going live about 30 minutes later, later. And as we're going live, this car is slowly creeping up towards me. And I'm doing lightshot I'm very focused, this is a big story. I'm trying to process answer a q&a with the anchor. But one part of my brain one of my eyes is looking at this car that's slowly inching towards me and in my mind is simultaneously answering a q&a with the anchor about all these very specific details about a standoff and also thinking to myself, who's in this car, and what do they want? And are they going to harm me? You know, is this a buddy of the guy who just got arrested and he's pissed that I'm airing the footage, you just don't in my mind goes to these automatic, anxious places, sure, under scenarios, and ended up just being a neighbor who just wanted to get through the driveway and I'm like, can you not give us five minutes? Can you really not like see that we're doing a live shot. But there's just so many times when I'm, you know, doing digging on a breaking news scene or kind of looking into some of this stuff that you don't know who's watching and you don't know who's paced or you're pissing off and you don't know what, you know, I was doing a live shot in Palm Springs and I remember was five in the morning a guy in a skull mask jumped out of the bush next to me and into my live shot, you know, and so that puts me on edge. Little stuff like that. I just, you know, Bid live television comes with its set of risks, you never know what's gonna happen. So I do think that adds an element of anxiety to what we do on a daily basis.

Zak Dahlheimer 15:09

Well, I appreciate you sharing all that because I mean, that's that's a new perspective, I haven't heard as far as like, you know, being out there and like, you know, you're, you're out there, you're doing your job, but you're also in the presence to where everyone can see you. So you have that in the back of your mind, kind of like what you said, kind of from an anxiety standpoint, what can happen and so forth. So I mean, I, that's a new thing I didn't even hear from others talking about. So that's a good new point to cover there.

15:36

Yeah. And you know, because they know where you are your online television with a locator, if you're doing a morning show, they know where you're going to be for two hours, or three hours, depending on where you work, right. So you really had some wacko who's stalking you. And again, I think there's an element of gender here just being you know, by nature of being a female, you always have to think, on the defense. Not that everyone doesn't. But there's just this added element of like, you never know who's out to get you or harm you or who has some ill intent. And we're kind of a sitting duck at times, right?

Zak Dahlheimer 16:12

Yeah, no, I mean, I can understand that. Yeah. Or I hear you with that. And I appreciate you sharing all of this, you know, I know that this is not the easiest subject to talk about probably open book. Well, I know. Just looking at the time, I just want to get to last couple of questions

here. Try trauma training. Did you receive any when you were in school, or before you got to que es que? Or a time throughout your career to help you deal with this type of coverage?

16:43

I don't even remember potentially? I don't think so. And nothing that stands out, in my mind. Seems like it would be helpful. I do. You know, they tell me when you join a new station, you know, there's mental health resources and EAP whatever. And I've never looked into any of that. But I think there are resources if you need it, but as far as pre-emptive training at school and or like going into the job, I don't think so much it was one of those modules that I kind of like, you know, rushed quickly. But it Yeah, I don't think anything's super intensive, you know?

Zak Dahlheimer 17:21

Yeah, nothing like certified like, Hey, this is Trump is writing to prepare you before anything like that?

17:27

I don't think so. Um, well, I'm

Zak Dahlheimer 17:29

interested to hear because this is the one where I've been getting like a lot of interesting answers and thoughtful answers. And I'm curious if there's anything you want to add to the conversation, but are there any areas of opportunities you'd like to see companies like Scripps or just industry wide explore when it comes to helping the mental health appeal journalists who have consistently covered breaking news and severe weather?

17:56

Um, you know, I think it's tough because I think it's one of those things that

18:03

it's, if you if you sent out some like module, again, not to not to hate on the modules, I just don't think the modules like anyone really takes them that seriously. You know, I would, I would hate to see the end result be like, here's a 30 minute module to put on your laptop screen and like you have to click through it once a month then just becomes like a chore. No one really takes it seriously, or it's not really beneficial. Or maybe it is for some people. I don't know, I that's I don't think that really is the answer. But I do think you know, making sure that your employees know about the mental health resources available if the company and again, I don't want to hate on scripts, I don't even know maybe maybe they already do this you know, if the company if scripts covers for X X number of free therapy sessions? We do actually, yes. Yeah. So I wish they would cover just free therapy for good. You know, why? Why would you only need five sessions if you're a journalist with a contract for three years, they I think they should offer you know, maybe, or some kind of long term therapy solution, because you might, you might need it your whole time working as a journalist.

Zak Dahlheimer 19:11

Well, one, one idea that's popped up with a lot of participants has been a therapist or a counselor that's local, that can be tied to the station that knows the area knows the events that are going on,

and that can actually face the face. Help people at the station versus doing virtually for X number of sessions. What are your thoughts on that?

19:36

That'd be nice. Like it would be it would be nice to have somebody plugged in and specially trained with the news industry. I think that's a great idea actually, like kind of like an HR but someone with less of a HR field, someone who's actually just a therapist on site. You don't feel like it's gonna have a conversation with management, but now I got an actual confidential therapist. Yeah. the ins and outs So the news industry maybe knows your work, who's familiar with what's happening at the station or the local news stations in one market to have one therapist that their job was to be the therapist for anyone who works in news at a station or multiple stations in one plays? Yeah, knows the area. I mean, that'd be awesome.

Zak Dahlheimer 20:21

The other the other big answer that I've gotten from like almost everybody is wellness days, or PTO days specifically for mental health, that are standalone and that don't come out of the main bank of PTO. In other words, you get your regular PTO, but you'll have days set aside to help with mental health that way, you don't have to worry about hurting any of that what say you?

20:44

That'd be great. Yeah, I can, I can see why they like to have everything grouped into one thing. So people don't like, you know, abuse their sick days, and just having like, one bank of PTO is probably really convenient. But that would be nice. You know, even after like, last week, when I did that really intense SDSU rape allegation story, I actually worked an extra day on my day off to do that story. And I got an extra day off, you know, the following day to compensate for that, but like, you know, that was a really intense story. And, I mean, I honestly probably could have use an extra day after going through that and really thinking about that. So, you know, I think it's a great idea. And people would definitely benefit from that, you know, because there's just some days when it Yeah, it is so much to be in this industry. And I think a lot of people could benefit from just a breather every now and then.

PARTICIPANT 9 ZOOM RECORDING RAW

00:32

Okay. So I've been with Scripps, which is our company, right? So I've been with Scripps for maybe, what, seven years now. So I started with PTV right after college. So I was there for about five years. Then I moved to Waco, Texas, where I was anchoring and reporting for about two years. So I actually just wrapped up my first year with WPTV maybe a week or so ago. So it's crazy where this we're this far along already.

Zak Dahlheimer 00:56

Wow. Happy anniversary.

00:58

Thanks. Yeah.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:00

And we're now waco was your first on air roll or did you do on air stuff in your first step at PTV for a little bit

01:08

with PTV they had me shooting you know, like I was like the camera guy on the weekends where I shoot all the most shots and stuff like that and then out I was a paying too, so I was writing shooting. But yeah, then waco offered me the opportunity to do the on camera thing that I was looking for. And surely I think maybe like a couple months after that there was a weekend anchor spot open. So got that offer. So I was doing a little bit of a twofer, which is a lot of fun.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:32

Perfect. So So job titles, you've had your career as an anchor reporter.

01:37

I started I started way from the bottom, I started as a studio tech. Then I started doing graphics and then I started helping the producers write stories get you know, content, started AP and then obviously basically MMJ without actually being on camera on the weekends. So yeah,

Zak Dahlheimer 01:54

here we are. Perfect. So seven years was scripts. And so how many years was it as a field journalists like reporter photographer,

02:02

so it's been a you know, when I was out shooting without being on camera?

Zak Dahlheimer 02:06

Yeah, like anything, because the way we're defining a TV news field journalist is like anyone that's like in the fields like regarding

02:13

Okay, so it has to be, I want to say, four to five years. Wow. Okay, four

Zak Dahlheimer 02:21

to five years total. And then. Now you're on your little more than a year, technically now, but back to PTV full time on air. Well, for those who may not be in the know like us. What types of responsibilities come with your job being a field journalist, whether it's a reporter, anchor Reporter What responsibilities come with that?

02:48

Do you mean editorially or just?

Zak Dahlheimer 02:51

Like expectations, general expectations? Like what is it that you do like what like

02:56

so so you know, when you're a reporter, whether you're MMJ, or with a photographer, if you're, you know, if you're lucky, you know, you're always on deadlines. So the minute you get to work, you're already starting to think what your day is going to look like, who you're going to talk to what you're going to film, right, there's so many factors that change and fluctuate. So it's, it's kind of lining up what your day is going to look like, and who is going to have to contribute to that, as well. As you know, taking your care, you know, are we going to get lunch today, we're going to have to drive through if it's a if it's a breaking news, you know, we have to observe our surroundings. So there's always so many different factors, your brain is just going a mile a minute, you know, there's so many different things you got to balance while still staying on track to get that deadline by 1011 o'clock, or whatever your your Showtime is.

Zak Dahlheimer 03:41

And you know, all that, you know, coming into play also to I mean, I know that, you know, we go all the way back to our time at University of Florida. But for the record telling folks, for the basis of this project, what made you want to get into journalism as a career.

03:55

So it was high school time, I did a lot of TV production in high school. And when it came down to sitting down and thinking about what I want to do long term, I realized that journalism is kind of something I've always been doing, I was always the guy with the camera with my friends, documenting what we were doing, telling stories, you know, getting into whatever the people were doing. So it really just made sense that journalism was the right track for me. And it's a great way to share stories that I've never been exposed to myself. So I get to learn a lot about things I didn't know about. And I get to teach people about that. So telling those stories and sharing those stories, I think is the most rewarding thing, which is you know why I'm here.

Zak Dahlheimer 04:36

Absolutely. And that's and that's great to hear too. I mean, then we appreciate you sharing that you know, telling us a little bit about yourself, you know a little bit of background, but now I want to get into you know the the next section of the questions for this project. So as you know, this is an academic research project looking at the mental health impacts related to field

journalists covering breaking news and severe weather. You've been doing this Now for many years, obviously, especially within Scripps, which is we're going to be entered we're interviewing field journalists across E.W. Scripps all around the country. But, throughout your career, how often would you say you've had to cover breaking news and severe weather in the field?

05:18

Breaking news is, it's got to be weekly. There's I don't think there's been a week where we haven't covered breaking news, severe weather is not as often, but when it happens, you know, we're all hands on deck. But it you know, breaking news, it can be anything from there was a car crash fire, you know, fatalities are never great, but in that they happen. So just all the above.

Zak Dahlheimer 05:41

So would you say between the two, in your personal experience, breaking news outweighs severe weather in terms of what you cover personally in your career?

05:51

Yeah, and it definitely depends on the time of year. But even now that we're in hurricane season, we haven't seen a lot. If there's severe weather, it's mostly flooding related. So it's not it's not the worst. Right. But maybe we're talking about mental health as flooding is not too bad to talk about as opposed to a fire that killed a family, you know,

Zak Dahlheimer 06:10

right. Absolutely. Well, you spent some time in to mark a no and to great markets, you know, that a lot of news is obviously happening West Palm Beach, Florida and Waco, Texas. Between your time in both those markets, is there a particular news event, albeit breaking news or severe weather that stands out to you that you covered.

06:32

There was one story that stuck with me for multiple reasons. And I think it was Christmas day, there was a family that had bought their I believe two or three children ATVs they've been wanting it for a while, and they've been pushing back on it. And they finally bought it for them. And then Christmas morning, one of the kids went out for a ride, got too close to the road and was unfortunately hit by a car and passed away. And, you know, I was just I was there from the beginning, I was super polite. Obviously, it's bad time for the family. But eventually they called me back saying they would like to share their story. And I was the only news outlet they reached out to which was really great. As far as the trust factor goes with our station, and the family invited me and me only to be there for from from explaining what happened to vigils in the community to the funeral even and beyond that they've you know, they've kept in touch, which is great. So it's it's, it's interesting to see how, you know, just one day, which resulted in multiple days, but one day in your recording career can develop into that trust and that relationship in the community?

Zak Dahlheimer 07:42

What Yeah, absolutely. And in the relationships you develop with, you know, the people that were actually been impacted to and how you've kept up with them to this

07:50

day. Yeah. And it's even, you know, the extended family had seen the coverage. So when we were at the school, for example, where they were doing something for the students, you know, Grandma came up said, Hi, to me, the aunts, uncles, kids friends. So it was it was interesting to almost feel like I was a part of the family. But at the same time, you know, I'm there to just tell their story. I can't, you know, it's difficult not to get too involved. But

Zak Dahlheimer 08:15

yeah, absolutely. And this was in Waco.

08:20

Yeah, and we go, we can define a central Texas because we covered not just waco it, there was a variety. We've been down in College Station at that time.

Zak Dahlheimer 08:26

So Oh, gotcha. Okay, so this is Central Texas proper.

08:30

Yeah, yeah. So I can tell you the boundaries. But yeah, we were stationed in Waco. But then, you know, we were four hours out an hour and a half, huge geographical area.

Zak Dahlheimer 08:41

Absolutely. why would you say that? That I mean, because that was a very, it sounds like a very heavy event. And I know that, you know, you and I, we covered events like that. But that one sticks out to you. Why would you say if you can elaborate more on why that why that event sticks out to you from covering that.

09:01

I think it's you get to see the human and people and oftentimes as a reporter, you get so many stories of, you know, it's it's almost repetitive, you know, there was a crash, somebody died, there was a shooting, somebody died. But you know, talking to this family and seeing that emotion, you remember that these are humans. And we're telling their story. And we have to be very sensitive about that. And luckily, the way that the product that I produced, they were very happy with it. And I think it all comes down to like I said, Being polite and treating them as humans as opposed to just another person that died. I think that that goes a long way. And viewers are very receptive

Zak Dahlheimer 09:37

of that. Well, and that's it's interesting, you bring that up too, because I feel like that's been a commonality in at least one or two other participants in this research study I'm doing is recognizing the fact that yes, we are journalists and and I agree with this too. But first and foremost, we're humans, and we have to recognize that you know, right off the bat when we're in these types of situations. Yeah, great. Yeah. Um, would you say, consistent coverage of breaking news and or severe weather on the job? has that impacted you personally?

10:11

Mentally, and we're talking about mentally, yeah, like,

Zak Dahlheimer 10:13

impacted you personally, from like a mental health standpoint or personally in any other aspect.

10:20

It's funny because I have such a broad spectrum of friends. And there's definitely it takes a certain kind of person to be in television news, right? Not a lot of people could go to a homicide scene and potentially see a body laying on the ground and go home and sleep perfectly fine. You know, I've talked about my workday to some people, and then they're just shocked by what I experienced. So for me, you know, it's, I think, after breaking news, breaking news, breaking news, we're desensitized a lot. But I think it takes those days where you just unplug, and just take care of your own mind that balance is all that. And on

Zak Dahlheimer 10:59

that same vein to have, would you say has this consistent type of coverage from these two realms, guided your career path in any way? What do you mean? So like, have you done a lot of like, say, for instance, you know, breaking news, you know, was that really your big beat, and that, that lead to your career path going in a certain directions, like,

11:22

I mean, I, I personally love breaking news, just because I love the rush of it, of getting there, when the scene is happening and figuring out the pieces, right? It's almost like a puzzle, every time you turn a story. So days where things are lined up, and you have a press release, and business was going to talk to you and this is what's happening is great, you know, you have it's almost handed to you. But breaking news is really when we put our journalistic hats on, and we are the ones that are in the community, you know, maybe getting some details from officials. But ultimately, it's you can tell the same story so many different ways. So for me, breaking news is finding those elements and getting the facts right. And of course, you know, getting it before the competition, but doing it correctly.

Zak Dahlheimer 12:03

Well, and it's interesting, to you that you bring that up, because, you know, and there's been similar responses from participants, and there seems to be like, two camps that, you know, reporters are in, there's the camp that, like you, you've just mentioned that, you know, they don't mind covering breaking news. In fact, some have even said they enjoy covering breaking news, or they're the ones like, hey, if something's happening could be out there. I'll go cover it. And the other camp is, you know, I'll go to it if I have to, but I really don't like covering breaking news. I don't I kind of like stray away from that to cover that. So is it? Is it accurate to say that you're in the camp of it breaking news is happening? Put me out there on the front lines? I don't mind covering it.

12:48

From that standpoint, I Yeah. I mean, I definitely love covering breaking news. But I mean, if we're talking about the mental health factor, too, there's no, we can't do breaking news every

day, it obviously would, would take its toll. But I mean, I personally enjoy it. I like being there. And I like you know, pushing things out on my own pages and talking to the people that I encounter. But at the same time you we do balance those with maybe not as heavy new stories somewhere in the week, and just not balanced. You know, if it's a heavy news day, I know that somewhere along this week, maybe it'll be a little bit lighter. And maybe that's what gets me going or gets me by. But But yeah, definitely breaking news is what I enjoy. And it's not so much that I enjoyed what's happening this the scene particular. But I enjoy that, that that's when I really put my best skills to use. Sure, yeah, you you.

Zak Dahlheimer 13:42

You don't mind and you enjoy covering that. But you you say that, you know, there needs to be a healthy balance as far as like, hey, maybe covering some lighter fare maybe later on in the week, or different types of stories in the week to kind of balance everything else was not breaking news five days a week or so forth.

13:58

So and I think that also comes down to a strong leadership or a station with solid leadership that recognizes mental health is important. I know a few years back there was you know, we had that big presidential election. The same year was the Pulse shooting. I think Stoneman Douglas also happened in that same year. So, especially for us here in South Florida. We had such heavy heavy news stories, where children are dying, you know, young people are dying. The community is going out each other because of the election. It was so hard for so many people, whether they express it or realize it themselves or not, that the station brought in grief counselors to the station, even if and it was weird because I didn't think that I needed it. And I think I was just going to the bathroom casually during one of the breaks and one of the grief counselors stopped me and just said, Hey, you have a quick minute to chat. And we talked for like, an hour and a half and I had no idea that I had so much that I needed to unload. So it's it's a great example of you know, You got to take care of your mental health even if you think you don't need it.

Zak Dahlheimer 15:02

Right. Right. Absolutely. And so, and that was, and that was WP TV, offering it right off the bat after was that directly, you said after the Stoneman Douglas shooting,

15:14

or it was, I think it was I forget the order of things. But it was we had that election. We had the Stoneman Douglas shooting, we had the Pulse shooting in Orlando. So there was just a lot happening. Yeah, a lot in that two year timeframe window. And it's a lot of, you know, children that are dead right there, for lack of better words. And we're hearing from their parents that just lost their children, we're hearing from families that lost their friends at a nightclub now they're just trying to have a good night. So it's, it's, it's all things somewhere along the lines you can you feel connection to, and you realize that that could have been you or that could have been your family member. So having that that resource to unwind with a grief counselor was was important, right? We, we gotta take care of ourselves in order to do our jobs. Well.

Zak Dahlheimer 16:05

Well, and thank you for bringing that up. Because I think that's a good point to touch on. And we're going to be covering resources there. There's a question, you know, related to resources and section, you know, coming up in a little bit. But now I want to go to another part talking about this is more so when you're out in the field and how you act, your SOPs, and so forth. So, say for instance, you're sent to a breaking news or severe weather assignment in the field, what immediately would you say goes through your mind right off the bat,

16:36

when I get to the scene, when you get sent?

Zak Dahlheimer 16:40

So say, like, the desk, or managers or producers say, hey, we have this going on, you need to go to this immediately kind of watch the wheels in your head going are like,

16:50

well, when there's breaking news, you've probably already been working a few hours on one story. So the first thing that comes to mind like are we got to drop what we're doing save it for another day, maybe. But you know, just heading to a breaking news scene, you're just constantly checking, calling people if you know, officials have, you know, contacts in the area. Let's you know, let's paint a scenario. Let's say there was a shooter shooting we hear that people are are have been fatally shot, and neighborhood why? So if I know, people in that neighborhood, maybe I'll call them see what they've heard, obviously, called PIOs. They're going to be the ones with the confirmed information. But just heading to a scene, you know that the producers depending on the time of day, the first thing is what is expected of me, what am I going to be in what show and what do you need for this show? And then that can kind of help me gauge what it is I need? As far as content and what I'm going to be delivering?

Zak Dahlheimer 17:41

Sure, yeah, absolutely. Just kind of like going through your head, like, you know, the expectations, what you can deliver, you know, all that, so

17:48

to speak. Yeah, it's interesting, because it's so easy to get absorbed in what's happening. And you know, being more of a viewer when you're on the scene, and just kind of observing things, but you got to remember, we're here to do a job. So we got to figure out what that job is going to be, you know, what that story is going to be, who it's affecting, and how or why, you know, and then the big picture is always, you know, who Why did it happen? And how can we correct this? You know, what are what is it that the community says, caused the situation?

Zak Dahlheimer 18:18

Absolutely, and kind of going off of that, too. So when you arrive at these types of scenes, are there any particular stressors, mental joint mental strains, emotional strains, that come to mind that you experience, you know, on a consistent basis, like you're out there in the middle of it, your your, your got all that going through your mind, any particular stressors like that you typically experienced on a consistent basis. But

18:47

I think the biggest stress is really the fear of the unknown. You don't know, if you're going to pull up to a scene and people are going to be happy to see you. Or if you're gonna pull up to the scene, and they're going to be very hostile. You know, I've, I've experienced both. And again, it comes back goes back to what I said earlier, is, you know, you got to treat everybody like they're human. Maybe sometimes, I'll tell the cameraman, hey, like, don't bring any of the gear out. Let's just walk out there, maybe talk to people introduce ourselves, let them know who we are. I found that the least intrusive method if it's a bit the crime scene, for example, to kind of get them to trust us because once you get that trust is really when things you engage a little bit better of how these are going to go. And there's been breaking news scenes where people are absolutely not wanting to talk. And again, you gotta you gotta understand you got to respect that if somebody's family member just died, and they don't want to talk to you like I say, no problem. Maybe like, here's my car like if you're willing to talk later, like we're more than happy to share that story but I would never push them to talk especially when there's so many emotions happening in that moment.

Zak Dahlheimer 19:52

Yeah, you know, and that reminds me of, I don't know if you all get those data PTV. But up here at WTKR because we're Scripps to Um, those modules, those trainings that we get every now and then, and there's the one video, you may remember it. I think it was like

20:08

a, there's like a mob and the cameraman is like right up in it,

Zak Dahlheimer 20:12

right and the camera person, it's like, you know, taken down or something like that. But that's the other piece to what you're talking about, you know, getting up on someone who just found out maybe that someone died or someone you know.

20:24

And I've, I've noticed, especially from my experiences, people generally are more willing to talk or share some information when there isn't a camera pointed in their face. So So for me, if I'm a journalist, and I know I gotta make deadline, and I need people to help me tell the story, you know, I'm going to find the best way to do that. And if it means putting the camera down for a few minutes, while I gain that trust and get their permission, then let's do it. Everybody. Everybody's happy. And then nobody's uncomfortable. And you know, camera is, you know, it's not a little camera. It's not a cell phone. It's this big ol camera. Yeah. People see you and they're gonna recognize you. And automatically you, you have maybe a few couple minutes to gain their trust. So why not? Why not do it the smart way? Right?

Zak Dahlheimer 21:05

Yeah, exactly. Yes. Smart. And like you said, the human way, you know, hey, let's

21:09

Yeah, and like you were mentioning about the modules. And you know, you don't want to you don't want to approach a brand new scene, and then put yourself in danger. Because then it's just going to unravel from there, and it's not going to be constructive at all.

Zak Dahlheimer 21:23

Yeah, absolutely. Um, so when you're at the scene, whether it be breaking news or severe weather, and of course, you cover more breaking news, that severe weather in your career. How do you

21:39

if you need me to talk about a scenario when it came to weather? I can definitely talk about that as well. Oh, yeah. Yeah. I mean, if you feel comfortable, I'm sure a lot of people are feeding you like breaking news scenarios. But I mean, I can talk about like a breaking news weather scenario. That was kind of tough. Yeah, sure. Me, I

Zak Dahlheimer 21:54

know that we had a few weather instances. So but if you want to talk about from a severe weather standpoint, feel worried. I think the biggest issue with

22:03

my, the incident I can think of with severe weather was the lack of understanding when it came to safety. So it wasn't so much my coverage of what I was doing, it was more of what was the correct thing to do. So without naming names, or anything like that, there was a situation where there was just a crazy amount of rain, it was a thunderstorm there was flooding lightning everywhere. And then they were expecting me to go live immediately. And I was trying to explain the fact that there's no way I'm going live with a lightning storm around me. You know, I've I've and maybe that comes down to experience that are growing up in South Florida that lightning is no joke. And it was tough, because there was management that was kind of pushing me to do it. And it was me kind of clapping back at management kind of saying no, and you know, as as a reporter, it's tough to tell your leaders and people that you know, usually are the ones with the correct answer, telling them know that they're incorrect. So it was it was weird. It you know, that definitely sat on my mind for a long time. And I had to talk to HR just kind of to make sure things went, how things went. Because I wasn't sure at that point, like it was IRA. Like, was they right? It was it was not the end of the day. We're all trying to tell the story. But But So who, you know, how could we have worked around that? Right?

Zak Dahlheimer 23:21

Yeah, I mean, well, and that's, that's an interesting case to where so it was a lightning storm, and you had to stand up for yourself? Because yeah, I mean, we've, we have a thing here to where if it's lightning, our manager said are clearly said no live shots. We do not want you out in the field, like outside the truck whatsoever.

23:40

Yeah, so So different stations will have different rules or parameters when it comes to severe weather. But it was just, that was a moment where the leadership that I reached out to didn't have the answer. I was I was asking, you know, am I supposed to be standing in this situation when

there's lightning within these many miles? And nobody really had either the same answer or short answer, which, which only made me more uncomfortable, because I had a general idea of what I was supposed to do and not supposed to do. So the fact that they didn't know, definitely was just so much more stressful than it ever needed to be. And it just did not work out at the end for anybody it was, it was almost a lose, lose. Because while I was safe, you know, I felt I was I felt like I let the team down for my own safety. Right. And that goes back to my mental health, trying to meet the expectations while balancing my own safety.

Zak Dahlheimer 24:34

Sure. Well, and thank you for sharing that. I mean, that's an interesting point, you know, and and a new point that no one's really touched on. And so I appreciate you sharing that with us.

24:43

And it was interesting, because there was a lot of other reporters on the team that reached out to me while that was happening, because it turned into a little bit of a drama situation. So it was it was good to be the example Vega we could we could say that like it could. It's good. It is good to be an example for how to stand up for what you know is correct when it comes to your own safety, especially in severe weather, because you're going to be the one on the field and you're the one that can really gauge how the environment is looking, you know, management, and many manage maybe management from there and saw that it looked like a clear day. But from my end, if I'm seeing lightning all around me, I gotta communicate that because they can't see what I'm saying, you're actually the one

Zak Dahlheimer 25:21

out in the field and like in the elements, so you know, what's best for yourself.

25:25

And that also goes back to breaking news. If they send me out to there was a homicide. And I get out there and there's still no police officers, and it's dark road, you know, you need to take care of yourself. So don't go standing around, don't go walk around, there's, you know, somebody out there with a gun. Right? Right. So it's you just gotta gauge your environment and know what's safe and what's not. Well, I

Zak Dahlheimer 25:47

appreciate that, and thank you again, for sharing all that too. I do want to get back to, you know, so breaking news of severe weather, you've laid out two instances, at least, when you come across something in general, whether it's weather related to one of the two subject areas, how would you say you assess or gauge the situation when you are at the scene? Like what's, how do you read with it, but then on on the same side? How do you cope with the situation with being out there? And, you know, as you mentioned, I mean, we see raw emotions, we're on the front lines, you know, where we're seeing all this. So from an assessment, and then from a coping standpoint, what do you make of all that?

26:34

So when you get to the scene, you obviously immediately you're going to see, you're going to start analyzing what's happening around that, that that setting? Are people crying? Are people,

you know, do they look hostile? Or they're, you know, put they're pushing each other? Is it is the safety, right? It's what is what is the scene looking like, if it's a bunch of people hugging, maybe you, it might be a little bit easier to approach than if people are running around or pushing each other. That's obviously not the Jumbo. But again, you know, at the end of the day, we have, we have a job to do. And while I'm sympathetic about what is happening, it's I'm listening to it reading body language and seeing what people are telling me and building off of that. And again, remembering what my job is. And it's it's, like I said, it's easy to get stuck in the story and experience what people are experiencing with them. But you almost have a switch in your own mind where it's like, we got to turn this off real quick and just listen and write so we can get story, right? Yeah,

Zak Dahlheimer 27:36

absolutely. And then coping mechanisms, like if you come to a very rural scene, is there any coping mechanisms that you typically because I know like some people have talked about, you know, going into like a safe space, like into the car, maybe like talking with their photo journalist, or if it's a photo journalist talk with a reporter talking with management people back at the station? Is there any coping mechanisms you particularly have?

28:04

It's weird, because I, you know, especially with the breaking news day, my mind almost, except that it's going to be a tough day. So I'm not dwelling on it too much. And I think it goes back to other days where I take my own time, or my own space, where my days off where I unplugged that, those really tough days where it's hard to find that mental health balance those days off, or those mental health breaks are so important. And like you were mentioning it, we you know, our cars are our office, especially as reporters or nmjs. And, you know, that definitely is a time to decompress. If you have some thoughts about something, just, you know, I wait till I get back into the car, to maybe even express it to my camera person. Because the last thing you want to do is be on a scene where there's so many years, especially people, you know, you're not from there, people are watching what you're doing what you're saying so, and there's so many times where you don't want to have a side in a situation either. So you don't want to go to a scene and say, Oh, that's so sad, or, Oh, that's, that should happen. You know, because cuz then people are gonna know you have some some thoughts, some sort of way. So it's just being professional, being polite, being a human, and taking care of yourself back in your car, for example, for importers, and, and getting your job done.

Zak Dahlheimer 29:23

While also to like you mentioned, taking the time on your days off to have like for your own mental health to kind of decompress and your time and all that.

29:32

Oh, yeah, for sure. And you know, I work night side so my shift is 330 till about 1130 midnight, depends on the on the news day. But you know, my whole morning is really just, I go to the gym in the morning. That's that's, you know, I don't decompress afterward, but you know, it just gets me ready for the day. I don't know what I'm going to expect in the day, but just having your routines and those those solidified constants, makes the unknown of what a news day may look like BAM It's more bearable.

Zak Dahlheimer 30:00

They absolutely, yeah, no, I'm the same way because I'm nightside, three days during the week here and yeah, I see you definitely similarities kind of like how we cope and deal with certain things with that. What about exhibiting or showing any emotional responses when covering breaking news and severe weather? Do you regularly do that? Or what's your personal philosophy on that? expressing emotion? Yeah.

30:30

I mean, if somebody's family member just died again, you got to be a human. And I And for example, yesterday, there was I was reaching out to some some people who lost a loved one. And to start off as a human, I apologize for their loss. Right? That's, you know, you don't want to just get straight to business. You got to you got to you got to be human first. Absolutely. Yes. And I mean, and like I said, it's tough to turn off your feelings. When you're hearing, you're in the environment of what happened in that case, whether it's breaking news, or whether it's, you know, crazy, whether somebody's house flew away, right, it's, you're seeing the impact that it left. But it's really just being professional and letting people know that you're there to tell their story or get the answers and, and, you know, maybe showing a little bit of emotion isn't a bad thing, but at the same time, you got to you almost have to help them understand why you're there.

Zak Dahlheimer 31:22

Absolutely. Um, oh, finally, with this section, how would you how when it comes to constantly going to cover breaking news, or severe weather events that can be traumatic? I mean, especially for people like us that do it constantly? How do you assess that? Or how do you what do you make of all that?

31:45

And the fact that we're exposed to so many things,

Zak Dahlheimer 31:47

yeah, me constantly going and covering the stuff that can be traumatic. Have you assess? What do you make of that? Would you say,

31:53

it's, it's tough, you know, our job isn't, you know, to talk about the new park that's being built every day, you know, there's going to be a lot of heavy news that we have to cover. And unfortunately, that's kind of the job we signed up for. And I think that the journalists that are doing it are a different breed that do it constantly. Because there's so many people that they can sleep just fine when they go home. And they're journalists. And there's people that would not be able to sleep for weeks, and they're probably a different profession. And, and I mean, I'm not saying that every journalist can sleep fine at night, there's a lot of there's a big there's a lot of reasons why so many people leave the journalism industry, it's because it does get very heavy constantly. And, and I think people are only so strong, and they can only bear it for so long. But it's just, you know, the mental health game is so important, especially in journalism, because you're you're required to be the strongest person there to get it right. And, you know, if you

can't make it happen, then you have to self diagnose that right self analyze, and you got to ask yourself, Is this something that I can do every day, potentially? Right? And the answer might be yes, one day, and it might be no the next day, and it's recognizing your own mind, and making sure that you're taking care of your mind to be able to tackle those hard news days when they come?

Zak Dahlheimer 33:17

Absolutely. Well, and you said something I want to follow up on too because I had in fact, the person I just talked to you before you that's another participant in the study mentioned the same thing about people leaving the industry, especially as of late because of the mental health impacts female journalists just getting out. Have you personally without naming any names? Of course, you know, for the sake of protecting those who are not been consented for the study. Have you seen in your personal experience in your career? Have you seen some folks that have said yeah, I'm a field journalist, reporter photo journalists, what have you, and I'm getting out because, you know, the mental health toll is just too much.

34:01

Yeah, I I've seen so many people leave the industry, whether it's a reporter, a photographer, you know, anybody behind the scenes is, you know, we're all kind of exposed to the same kind of content, maybe a different degrees, but we're absorbing it constantly. And it's not just what we're covering, it's, you know, you're never gonna make anybody happy. You know, there's always people, the viewers, somebody's going to always be upset with you, no matter how hard you work that day, or how well or unwell you deliver the product. And then there's just so much behind the scenes of news and so many uncertainty of what the news future is going to look like. So it's, it's not so much with the content that you know, gets to people's mental health. It's kind of our own futures right. What is the future of journalism right now? You know, it's not the glam that it once was, you know, it's not the big paychecks that it once was. A lot of reporters don't get paid a lot and they have to put up with a lot. So a lot other people that I know from my personal experience, have really just sat down. And while this was their passion, and maybe at one point, they're looking long term for their own personal health, their own mental health. And while this is something that they do have a passion for, maybe that's not the best path for their mental health. So they chose to be happy, they chose a different outlet that that was more on board with making them healthier mentally along the way, right? Because if somebody is struggling with covering breaking news every day, could they see themselves doing that for the next 3040 years? That's maybe but but what are the consequences of that? Right? So and it's funny, because I don't know if I've ever talked to a reporter or a news person that left the industry that said, they've regretted it. So it's, it's kind of something that sits on my own mind is like, man, what, am I missing out on something out there? So it's, it's you just got to do what makes you happy. And, and it's, I think the tough battle is people see leaving news as failure, right? This was their, their choice of major their choice of career. And I think the healthiest mentality is to say that, you know, you did it, you accomplished it, you did it for however long you did it. And then it was time for the next chapter. And that's not a bad thing.

Zak Dahlheimer 36:18

Absolutely. And that that was that was, they're all really good points. And you know, I really appreciate you sharing, especially your personal, you know, instances of covering you, those

things have stuck with you and the way you cope and deal with you coming on breaking news to me, it is a heavy thing. And it's tough. And

36:39

you know, journalists, we have crazy work hours, you know, we work all the holidays, while we're seeing our friends and families having fun, you know, we miss wedding, sometimes we miss birthdays a lot. And it's just kind of kind of what we signed up for. And it's unfortunate that, you know, we don't have the the normal nine to five that most people have and holidays off. But you know, it's it's tough, because it's almost your choice to be be dealing with it, right?

Zak Dahlheimer 37:05

Sure. Yeah. Well, now I want to get to the final section, I just have four more questions, you know, to ask. And again, I really appreciate all of your inputs, these are all Numberland points. You kind of touched on it earlier, but I want to like dive in more just to make sure I covered it too. And some for you to speak on it. consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather in the field. How would you say that's either shaped you as a journalist or impacted your career in any way?

37:39

I think, you know, consistency is so important because you learned so much from every different scenario, and no day in journalism is ever going to be the same. But there are things you can learn from different scenarios. And I think that's what comes down to experience in the definition of it. Right? You're, you learn as you go, you see what worked and what didn't work, or what could have been better, or could or you can even understand what could have gone worse. And there's so many times you'll have, you'll be on the field with other stations. And they're doing things a little bit differently. And you can kind of gauge and see what's working. So constant breaking news is tough mentally, but at the same time you're growing, you're learning a lot, and it's so important to go back and see the product that you deliver. Because being in it and, you know, making deadline and slamming and editing, putting it together and sending it back is one thing, but you got to take time after your shift to see what did that look like. And again, that goes back to you know, your own growth. You gotta you got to look back in the plays, you know, you have to see what what what what, what did viewer see versus what were you feeling? And you just got to tweak things. Yeah, well,

Zak Dahlheimer 38:50

I want to move now because I know, you and I, of course, you know, go back to us. But either in your time at UF, or maybe, you know, in your time before you joined Scripps, or at any point during your time with Scripps, that you've been on air trauma training. Did you receive anything specific to that? I know, we talked about, you know, the modules, obviously, but anything specific related to trauma training, before or during your career to help you with this type of coverage? Breaking news, severe weather consistently? Did you receive anything like this?

39:28

I think that especially with our generation, it mental health wasn't as either accepted or as mainstream as it is now. So from my perspective, I don't think I did. I don't think there was ever if this is happening, or if you're feeling this way, like you got to take a pause. But I think it's so

great that the generations now or just everybody now is advocating mental health so much that people's minds are so important. So it's been we were all learning about this new mental health era which is great. Uh, and you know, it's, it's, it's weird because you're gonna see the older journalists who have this grind, grind grind mentality, where in their minds, you know, that's how you get successful. But in our minds, we're seeing the consequences of what that means, right?

Zak Dahlheimer 40:16

Absolutely, no. And we talked about, you know, obviously, the modules, we talked about the counselors that were made available to folks at PTB after that two year news cycle from 16 to 18. With those events you'd mentioned, but is there anything you want to touch on as far as what resources if any, had been available to help your mental health from covering events like this? Through your the company, you mean, through the company of any personal resources? But yeah, me especially, has the company had any resources

40:53

for you? Well, yeah, I mean, the company, you know, when when there was just a series of really heavy news stories, days, weeks, could leading up to months, they obviously they, like I mentioned earlier, they provided the mental health counselors and the make sure that we were okay, which is great. And I would recommend to any young journalist while they're interviewing, if they have that, if they get a chance to ask a question. Maybe that's, that's the one asks, you know, what do you do to help your staff with mental health because whether you admit it or not, I think everybody struggles with mental health to some degree. So you want to really find that team that values that and respects that and it's going to take care of you. Because if you're good, then the station is going to be good. And that's a win win, right? But I just know, anytime there's ever been a stressor you, you want to have leadership that you can approach. I know, sometimes it can be intimidating. But whether it's your boss or HR, you, you almost have to have that relationship where you're comfortable enough to confront something if it's not going well, especially if it's a mental health issue. I've been at stations where reporters will say, I really need a mental health day and I've seen management be totally okay with it, not even asking about like that night. And maybe I wasn't the person that that happened to, but seeing that a reporter has that resource, you know, it makes me feel better to if there is a heavy day for me, personally or mentally that, you know, the show will go on, right. It's it's, I know, you want to reporters want to be there want to, you know, be the one to tell the story, but it's okay. Not to some days, if it means your mind is going to be okay. In the long run,

Zak Dahlheimer 42:32

you need to make sure you're taking in other words, you need to make sure you need to make sure you're taking care of yourself, if you're not feeling up to it that day making sure that your needs are being met just as equally. Yeah, for sure. Um, I got a lot of interesting responses. This is the last question. I've done a lot of interesting responses from the participants. So far. I'm curious to see if there's anything you want to add relate to this. But are there areas of opportunity that you would like to see companies like Scripps or really any company industry wide explore when it comes to helping the mental health appeal journalists who have covered consistent breaking news and severe weather? I think there

43:12

is right now. It's almost voluntary. How you want to address your own mental health, maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to schedule, you know, managers do monthly meetings all the time maybe to talk about your progress when it comes to your journalism, your your story, your content, maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to maybe make monthly mental health days for staff where they do sit down with a counselor I know, like law enforcement, I believe has to go through through routine mental health checks, possibly, um, don't quote me on that. But joy, would it be a bad idea that to make sure that your staff has a consistent recharge, right, because that's what it is. It's a mental health recharge. And there's so many days where you get stuck in the motion of things you work, work, work, okay, days off, work, work, work days off, that even with your days off, sometimes there's so many other things happening behind the scenes that you just don't get that recharge. So if you ask me, what would be great is Yeah, making maybe even a mandatory monthly, sit down with a mental health counselor, you know, just on brief debrief, talk about what happened, get it off your chest. I know I have a lot of friends that, you know, I can reach out to and you know, they're not in journalism, so they don't really understand but even just chatting about what's going on, and just getting it off your mind sometimes just lessens the impact that it has, and it weighs on my own shoulders,

Zak Dahlheimer 44:29

your II that answer relates to actually it's one of the common answers that I've gotten from quite a bit of the participants and others have said, a local therapist or counselor partnering with the stations that way. One, they could be there to help people on the ground locally. It's not telehealth or from remote area but also they're in that area of the community so they understand hey, you You've been covering this locally. I know because I live here and I've been seeing it and I have a different understanding, then like someone maybe across the country would get on a zoom call, is that when there's something maybe you'd like to see or you'd like to weigh in on,

45:15

I think the mental health game is so much. Mental health is so personal to some people. And so many people see it as a weakness that you almost need to have a consistent person to go to work that you can trust, right? It's it's tough to open up to a stranger. So establishing a set mental health resource at a new station, where it's the same person constantly that understands what you're going through, what maybe other people are going through, would probably be the best way for you to kind of unload, honestly, right. I think a lot of people try to keep our big, big boy big girl pants on and and when in reality, to really unload, you have to be honest and vulnerable, which is, which is tough sometimes, right? And it's even just, you know, like, be human to your co workers, right? You know, what story they may cover. And you know, they may have had a tough day, check in on them. You know, I do mental health Monday checks ever on my own social media every Monday, just for anybody who's out there who may be following me. And because everybody wants to reach out to somebody, whether they do it or not, it's up to them. So having the resource where they feel comfortable to do that, I think is key.

Zak Dahlheimer 46:26

That's real. I like the mental health Monday check. So that's your you're interacting, not just with colleagues, but off but viewers really, you know, see you're checking in on everybody.

46:36

And what I've gathered from that is there's so many people that think that their issue is is not a big deal. No, maybe it's you know, this is happening to me, but don't worry about we're good. Because I'm I explain what I do. So on my Instagram, I'll say, hey, mental health check, you know, how are you feeling? How's your mind? And it used to be a neat event, I'm okay kind of deal. And now just more of a sidebar situation. But you know, when I reach out to people where it's not looking great, or maybe they said they needed to vent, a lot of people always like, Oh, don't worry about it. It's fine. This not. But even if it's something minimal, and it's on your mind, like why not talk about it, get it off your head? Sure. And

Zak Dahlheimer 47:11

one other thing I want to follow up with, too, and this is another big a big answer. And you've mentioned mental health days, but quite a few people. And granted, this is all Scripps employees that had been interviewed, they said, mental health days that are not in the general bank of our PTO, they are certified mental health days that we could take, you know, for it for exactly what it is for mental breaks to help our mental health. But that don't hit the general bank. There's days that are set aside for that. What do you make of that? No.

47:47

I think that's a great idea. Are there people that are going to abuse the privilege? I'm sure, right. There's there's really no way to avoid that. But, you know, risk reward, right? Would you rather have a few people that are going to, you know, take advantage of the system for the benefit of people that genuinely, genuinely need it? I think that I think that's a good option, right? A lot of people even if people are sick, they show up because they don't want to lose their PTO days. So how do they justify their mental health? Right. So yeah, I think it's a great idea. Great, well,

Zak Dahlheimer 48:22

let me go ahead and hit stop here.

PARTICIPANT 10 ZOOM RECORDING RAW

Zak Dahlheimer 07:04

So you see throughout your career, it's safe to say you've been a woman of many hats.

07:08

Yes, several?

Zak Dahlheimer 07:11

Well, I think we're on the types of responsibilities for your current job here at WT KR and the jobs that you've had in Mississippi. If you can go through the types of responsibilities that you know come with the jobs that you've had in Mississippi and in Virginia.

07:30

So it seems like a simple question, but it's quite an emotional one when you think about the role of a journalist. So I would just say overall, my responsibility, no matter what hat I've worn in the newsroom has been to shine a light in a mirror to reflect what's happening in the communities I serve. And also to shine a light on things that need to be fixed things that need to be addressed in a technical standpoint, to serve as news producer as I did in my first role. I am the one who is building the newscast I'm selecting which stories we will share in our newscast, I'm working with the assignment editors to determine what facts we need to make sure we include I'm determining the order in which those stories are presented, I'm working with the anchor who the anchor is essentially essentially an Editorial Manager or an executive producer of a newscast. So I've had that experience as well, as a reporter I am knee deep in the community, I am developing relationships with folks in different neighborhoods, I'm developing relationships with political leaders, so I can get a pulse on who needs to be held accountable when things go wrong, and when they go right. And pitching stories that I will then follow up on to get interviews to really show a full picture, a balanced picture of any story that I've been covering, as a news anchor. I am simply the face of the broadcast in in a in a very superficial sense. But in a journalistic sense. Your news anchor is an Editorial Manager and executive producer overseeing not only which stories are in the newscast how they're presented. That person is bringing their institutional knowledge to ensure that we are covering our communities fairly speaking up when we're not offering guidance to producers and reporters about what stories we need to cover angles we need to pursue using our contacts and our institutional knowledge. Also to help mentor and guide younger journalists in the newsroom,

Zak Dahlheimer 09:55

and you know, throughout your career I mean, I'm sure you've had you know, quite a bit of experience, you know, especially since this is about, you know, TV, News field journalists, these are folks like us that are out in the field, like you mentioned, forging those relationships, getting to know like the finger of the pulse on the community. But also, you know, being really on the front lines, especially when it comes to breaking news situations, or maybe if there's a severe weather event going on, we're right in the thick of it.

10:25

We are, and when you are a younger journalist, your ambition to do your job well, is almost a barrier to the severity of what you're covering. So what do I mean by that you are thinking about the job you're doing, which is to serve your community. And so you want to make sure you talk to the right people, you want to make sure you get the best information, you want to make sure that you then share that with the communities you serve in an accurate way. So when you're younger journalists, that's where your mind is. A few years into the business, I call it the business, but really, we are servants a few years into serving communities in this way. At this point, you've been in the community for a while, they are not strangers, they are your neighbors, they are your friends, they can become your family, I met and married my husband in Norfolk, my mom relocated here. So Norfolk is not a community I cover it is home. And things start to become, they start to penetrate your emotions in a more direct way. The longer you you serve as a journalist, not that you're cold and disheartened beforehand, you're just so preoccupied with getting it right. And then once you understand you that part of your craft is second nature. And you arrive at a at a murder scene, or you arrive at a scene where a tornado or hurricane has just leveled the community and people are weeping. Because everything they've worked for it is a pile of dust. That's difficult. And you start to over time realize and you hope it's not too late by the time you realize it that you are wearing the weight of the emotional scars that people have acquired, because of the horrible things that they've been through. Yeah, and I realized that it a couple of stories that I've covered here, and I can share those with you now or later.

Zak Dahlheimer 12:57

Yeah, I'd love to get into those because there's a part of the interview to where we're going to talk about, you know, especially when you're out in a breaking news situation, like how you react what's what's going on, like from an assessment and a coping standpoint, which I want to get to those and get to those examples. We're actually going to get to the examples in a few moments. But, you know, you and I have talked about, you know, why we want to be in this business. Why do we want to do this as a career, but, you know, I'd love for you to share, if you don't mind, what made you want to get into journalism as a career,

13:28

I have always enjoyed being a storyteller. Even in my second grade class, and my aunt was actually my teacher, she noticed that I like to read children's books that we were reading as a class to like perform them in front of the class. And so my family recognized early on that this was a passion I had and so that, you know, went to public speaking and just a passion to an interest in telling people's stories, and that naturally aligns with what we do as journalists. So I've always always wanted to be a journalist. And you know, if I can tell a second grade, I would tell her there's going to be ups and downs, but you know, your heart is is going in the right direction.

Zak Dahlheimer 14:17

I love that though with the second grade like reading this, and that's kind of like how I got into it too. Because I know for me it was when I was five and I started lecturing at the church and that was how it started for me so kind of like similar paths there.

14:30

Yes, yes. You feed off of people's energy. Oh, yeah. Yeah,

Zak Dahlheimer 14:34

the cool thing people are drawn in and they love story stories and they love hearing the you know the the crux of storytelling so I mean that's that's cool like the similarities with that. Well, and thank you for telling us first a little bit about yourself for this project. You know, I I want to now get into like we were talking about this is experience covering breaking news severe weather Um, you know, 14 years. That's a that's a big breath of career right there. And you've been in, you know, especially different geographical areas throughout your career. How would you How often would you say, throughout those 14 years how often you've had to cover breaking news and or severe weather both of those?

15:20

Oh, how many times? Oh, God, I mean, hundreds.

Zak Dahlheimer 15:25

So pretty often, like throughout your career?

15:28

Yes, yes, I mean, pet has to be hundreds. In total, it was more when I was, in general assignment, day to day. But even as a news anchor, an investigative reporter, I do more long form pieces, but they often center around those things, too. But if I had to guess in the course of my career, hundreds, maybe 200 I'm just guessing, but there could be weeks where I would cover a homicide of murder, some type of death, like every day for weeks on. And

Zak Dahlheimer 16:13

so sounds like especially when it comes to breaking news, severe weather between the two. Breaking news outweighs severe weather, obviously, from what I'm gathering just uses, but just by talking with you.

16:25

Um, you broke up a little bit there. But I think I think I caught the gist of oh my god, it's saying my internet connection is unstable. No, it's not. I'm at the station. Um, so I have reporting in Jackson and reporting here in Hampton Roads. These are both communities that are impacted by severe weather, hurricanes, tornadoes. So I've done my I've done my fair share of both. But if I had to say which one was more than the other, it would probably be. I probably covered homicidal violence, more than I've covered severe weather. Gotcha. Well, if I had to guess,

Zak Dahlheimer 17:13

and if you and if you you mentioned a couple of instances earlier, which leads into my next question. What so say with breaking news, is there a particular event throughout your career that stands out to you? And if so why does it stand out to you personally,

17:33

there are there are two or three that really stand out. I'm the one that stands out the most is several years ago, we heard over the scanners about someone being shot and killed in Newport News. And we load up in the news van, and we're on the way. And then we're gathering more

information. And we learned that it was a mother, who heard gunfire outside of her door, and ran outside because her kids were playing outside. She ran outside to try to protect her kids, and she wound up being shot and killed in the crossfire. I can't even say Crossfire, I think I she wasn't the target. And so when we got to the neighborhood, and to the scene where police were set up, there was police tape, and we look in the courtyard. And I literally can still see it. Her body was in the middle of the courtyard. And she must have been a very tall woman because the sheet they put over her didn't also cover her feet and her feet were expose. And I just like my heart sank. And I remember running into a reporter from a different station. And I looked at her and we looked at each other and we were both speechless. It is something that I will I will never forget. And I thought about how I thought about how she was just trying to protect her babies. And now here her body is in the middle of a courtyard and her feet are just exposed. I still get a little teary thinking about that. Um so that that was that was one where you ask yourself you start to think about everything not as a journalist, but just like as only as a human being And so that was a difficult thing to push through. Nowhere near as difficult obviously, as the kids losing their mother, but seeing that, and then it also made me think about our first responders. And, you know, I was broken over, seeing her exposed feet from her dead body in the courtyard, when they got there, they probably had to look at her lifeless face. And probably had to see her children crying over her body. So that stands out. And then one other time I'll share with you also in in the Hampton Roads area was in Norfolk, we learned that a person died in the water near Naval Station Norfolk, like in a community near the water. And there was nothing suspicious about their death, it could have been natural causes, it could have been, it could have been suicide. We, we never knew exactly which one but we knew someone else didn't kill them. And the consensus became that the person was homeless, and may have needed some medical care that was long existing and died. And I just remember thinking, like, there was no relatives, no family, and how sad. I'm like, Oh, my God, this person died alone. No one is coming to claim them, no one is mourning them, no one is crying over them. And it was like a few days before Christmas. I remember I remember that it was a few days before Christmas, it was cold when we were doing the live shot. And I just, I started crying a little bit during the live shot, tearing up, and trying to fight that back as to not cry in my report. But I just kept thinking, you know, who would have thought when this person was born, that this is how they would die alone with no one to claim them or mourn them. That was incredibly sad. And that was a moment where, again,

22:18

the humanity in what we do was trumping the professional part of just relaying the information. And I think at that, that was the point where I decided that they could coexist. Like I wasn't going to not be a human being, as I told stories, if something was sad, and if I felt sad, I wasn't gonna say it. If I started to tear up, I wasn't gonna pretend like I wasn't crying because something was sad. I was just going to tell the viewers give me a second. As you can imagine, this is this is really difficult to process. Even I'm tearing up like that was a pool. Yeah, that I said, I wasn't going to pretend like I was a robot, because we're not. We're human beings who tell stories.

Zak Dahlheimer 23:04

You recognize, I mean, and I really appreciate you sharing both of those. And I'm sorry, I know, it's not the easiest thing to talk about, obviously, and, but from what I get out of that is, you

know, you recognize the humanity and you recognize empathy, being empathetic, and not just as a journalist, but a human being. And, you know, this was actually gonna be one of my other questions, but it sounds like I mean, you regularly exhibit emotional responses when covering breaking news, depending on the situation, if that's accurate to say,

23:39

now, now I do. And again, that was a very pivotal moment. I would say that that was probably like, maybe nine years ago. I want to Norfolk the one in Norfolk. Where is it was the homeless person who passed away? So? Yeah, about nine years ago, so probably December of 2013.

Zak Dahlheimer 24:02

And it sounds like both that and the Newport News with the mother, they were they somewhat close and range and time to each other?

24:10

No, no, the one in Newport News happened. I had been here maybe a year. Oh, okay. Yeah, I'd only been in Norfolk maybe year. So maybe that happened in 2011 2011.

Zak Dahlheimer 24:22

Okay, so about a few years of separate apart from each other.

24:26

Yeah. About two, maybe two, two and a half years between those, those events. Okay.

Zak Dahlheimer 24:35

Well, and that kind of goes into my next question I wanted to ask you, I mean, and people have weighed I've actually had similar participants say, the importance of recognize that humanity and the empathy and seeing that yes, we're journalists. But first and foremost, we're humans. I mean, it's would you say that it can when you get when can inconsistent coverage of breaking news on the Job. has that impacted you. Personally, I know you shared with some of that. But if you can elaborate more, if you don't mind?

25:07

Well, it absolutely does. Because we consistently shine a light on things that are heartbreaking. Things that can be infuriating. It's our job to do that. And so yes, I have covered amazing, happy, joyful stories. And I'm grateful that I work at a place that puts a priority on mixing those stories in because one, we should, to our viewers, also, we, if we shot, we shine a light on everything. So we have to talk about all the good things happening. But then it's also for our own mental health, but the consistency of covering day death, destruction, and corruption can leave you with a warped perception of the world, that everything is bad, or that something bad is always going to be around the corner, right? I'm sure it can, it can leave you with that perception. And so for, for me, I have experienced anxiety throughout my life, I didn't know that's what it was until I finally went to therapy about 10 years ago. But it was exacerbated after many years in the news business. Absolutely. Because my I had more examples of terrible things happening than I had of good things happening. And so that, when that happens to a person who has experienced and dealt with anxiety, it's just like turning on the burner to Hi.

Zak Dahlheimer 26:56

Wow. And on that same same thought process to because you've held a lot of different hats like in Mississippi and in Virginia, consistent coverage of breaking news has it guided your career path in any way you could speak to.

27:14

I would say it's made me try to have a greater focus on like solutions based stories. That's why with investigative, you shine a light, but there's also the hope that someone in power will see it and make a decision that can help change things. So So I would say that it's also it's also helped me if I am I will seek even harder to find like a family member or someone impacted by someone's death. Even more so so I can serve them well in and you know, empathy can help you develop an A genuine relationship when you're having to conduct interviews like that. So it's it's made me it's made me be more of myself, and offer help, and, quite frankly, prayer to people when I am interacting with them in those situations. And, you know, I don't know how ethical This is. But if I'm talking to a family, and they've lost a loved one or several loved ones, and we're talking like, I pray for those families, you I, for me, the absence of a spiritual faith foundation for me, I would not be able to do this job. I could not carry the weight of that it is impossible, you have to have an you have to have some type of outlet or overarching belief system that while you don't see it, there is more good in the world than there is

Zak Dahlheimer 29:02

bad. Faith this easily. I mean, it's safe to say I mean, it's, it's something that you lean on and I'm the same way to. And it's kind of like it will it is a resource for you to help you with this job.

29:16

It is my my faith is a resource again, the overall belief that what's in front of me isn't all there is. And then therapy has been huge. I wasn't related to a A death that I covered. But what year is this? So 11 years ago, I had a panic attack on air. While here I hadn't worked here a year yet. And it was one of the scariest things I had run to a live shot that I was about to miss the live shot and couldn't catch my ref and like internally freaked out. And I spiraled after that. And so I kept a good face, on TV, for TV and in front of my colleagues, but I literally was torn up inside for a very long time. And so it took me a year to finally admit to myself that I needed to go to therapy. And I'm glad I did, because my therapist helped me understand that the weight of the stories that I cover, even though like it didn't happen, like I didn't have an anxiety attack the night that I saw the Newport News mother in the courtyard, but she would say the totality of those experiences, sometimes express themselves in, you know, unpredictable or unthinkable times. And so I look at that now, in the moment, it sucked, because you, you don't feel comfortable in your own body. And you start to fear everything. But in hindsight, I'm grateful that it happened, because it forced me to go to therapy, and so that, that having that tool, because I want to stay in this career, so having the tool of therapy is a huge credit to my, I'm still able to do what I do, because it helped shape my perspective differently.

Zak Dahlheimer 31:21

And thank you for sharing that. I mean, and that's, I mean, I know, I do therapy, too, and it's a big resource for me as well. And we're gonna get into more into resources in just a little bit. But

now I want to kind of go to when you're out and about, so this is kind of like situational base. So say, you're sent to a breaking news scene. What is going through your mind on the way over there? And then when you arrive? Are there any particular stressors that come to mind that you that that come to mind that you experienced on a consistent basis when that seems like that? So

32:05

the number one thing on my mind is finding the person impacted most. And hoping that they trust me to share the worst moment of their lives with me in which will then be broadcast on television? The, the everything, obviously, you just want to get the facts already. And the other thing you think about which you hate that you even have to think about it, but we we is that? Is someone from a competing station, going to get the interview or get information that even despite your best efforts you didn't get? And then how, how is your news manager going to react to that? Are they going to be understanding and know that sometimes things just happen? Or they are going to degrade you? And say you're not good enough? Why didn't you get that interview that the other station got? It would be great if that was something we didn't have to think about. But the reality is, is if you're on a story that several other people are on as well. Unfortunately, that's a part that you think about the key is though not to let that part make you inhuman, or inconsiderate? When you are interacting as a storyteller to open yourself up and hoping other people share their story with you. Because if you do then you're treating, you're treating the families of murder victims, like objects and not like people. And if that's if that's always it, then you should quit.

Zak Dahlheimer 33:56

And I mean, just and it's interesting, because, you know, they've had at least a couple of others like it said, you know, yeah, the competition factor is one of the things that is going through their mind on when they're on the way the scene but can also be, you know, a stressor when they're at the scene, you know, hey, I'm trying to get the same thing as the other persons getting while also trying to be empathetic to the people involved. How about I mean, because you you've been very open with L your experiences and I really appreciate that and and from an assessment standpoint, when you come across something at a breaking news scene anything coping mechanisms that you have, like when you're directly at the scene, I know you mentioned not being not being afraid to show emotions or having your faith as a resource, you know, and being empathetic, you know, of course, but any particular ways you cope with situations when you're at the scene.

34:55

So I always remind myself if I'm especially if I Am I overwhelmed? covering something is that I will go home, and I will be safe when this is over. And that thought gives me peace of mind that I will not be in a highly emotional, highly stressful scenario forever. I'm there in the moment, to serve my community and serve the people who are hurting in that moment. But at some point, I will get back in the news car, and I will go home. Knowing that I will be able to go home to my family is the part that keeps me sane and not frazzled.

Zak Dahlheimer 35:48

That reassurance of peace of mind

35:51

that that there is an endpoint that that it's not indefinite, right? Even sometimes when you're breaking news scenarios, you could be out there 1216 hours depending on what's going on. But at some point, there's an endpoint, where you take a break, where you go home, even if it's for a few hours to that some point, you will be able to step away from it. And so I just remind myself like, I am not in an infinite loop of this high stress, high emotional ordeal. At some point, I will be able to get in the news car, put on my seatbelt, go to the station, get in my car, and go home to recalibrate.

Zak Dahlheimer 36:35

Gotcha. Um, I do want to go back to because you mentioned you now exhibit emotional responses regularly at breaking news scenes. What was the point to where you said it's okay to regularly exhibit or was there a point before to where you had to keep kind of like a don't show anything focus on getting the story Tet? What was that point liked where you said, it's okay to show these regularly.

37:02

So the, the homeless person who died in in Norfolk, near Naval Station Norfolk, that I covered, that was my personal moment of, I'm not going to suppress that anymore. And if my news director doesn't like that, then they can. They can get somebody else to work here. That's how I felt about it. I'm like, I'm not going to Sure. But even before that, I would say Robin Roberts really opened the door for the acceptability for journalists to exhibit themselves as emotional and emotional situations. So she's told this story many times that she had just started on Good Morning America after her tenure at ESPN, and one of the first big stories that happened was Hurricane Katrina, and it hit her hometown of past Christianne Mississippi. And they sent her to pass, Christianne to, to report on the devastation there. And during her live shots, she started crying. And she talks about how in that moment, she thought, I blew it. I have the biggest job in my career, I cried on television. I wasn't professional, they're gonna fire me. And what happened was, is the world fell in love with Robin Roberts. Why? Because she cried on TV, because it was bad. And that is what humans do. So that was in the back of my mind. When the incident happened, the person passed away in in in Norfolk, that these incredible journalists that I look up to have made it okay and it should have been a long time ago to exhibit actual human emotion. There was nothing biased about her crying there was, you know, nothing unethical about her crying, I mean, a hurricane leveled her hometown. It said, and so I think she made it okay to not be a robot, because we're not we're human beings.

Zak Dahlheimer 39:13

Did you notice when you when that turning point of that to homeless man or Naval Station Norfolk, after you showed emotions, you know, with that, did you notice a difference? Did anyone like come up to you and say, you know, you know, that's, that adds to the authenticity or they, they they took notice that you were being human and because SKUs you mentioned that people love Robin Roberts, for showing her emotion. Was that the same case with you when you kind of made that turning point?

39:44

It didn't happen right away. I mean, my mom noticed it, and she, you know, Mom has noticed, so my mom noticed after a while she was like, I see you when you tell a story now And not that I

was was it me before the the any pretense was certainly gone. And I think that moment also unrelated to death and destruction. But I eventually at the station on air shared a lot about my own personal health journey. But I would not have felt comfortable doing that. If I had not also years before giving myself the permission to just be human on TV and not suppress emotions when something is sad, and you're not being biased by expressing sad emotions,

Zak Dahlheimer 40:52

allowing to be yourself fully from the standpoint of it's okay to react and be

40:58

human. Yes, yes.

Zak Dahlheimer 41:01

And I know that I mean, because I've had situations like that in my career, obviously, you've been very open on this call. And you've touched on this many times. But is there anything else you'd like to add from the standpoint of? How do you assess constantly going to cover breaking news events that can be traumatic, because people may not? In the know, like us, people outside of that window may not fully grasp of like what it means to consistently, you know, makeup going to these events constantly. That can't be traumatic for us.

41:34

I think what it is, it's something called secondhand trauma. It's like a psychological term that I first heard about when I started going to therapy. I wished that earlier on in my career, there were more discussions about mental health, and that it's okay to be like, affected by the stories you cover, I think we're much better now. I'm a member of the National Association of Black Journalists. And each year at our convention, we have several sessions that are geared toward mental health. I spoke at one recently at our convention in Las Vegas to talk about my experience, but it's just like, it's like chipping away. It's it's like chipping away at a dam until it busts loose. Right, you may not notice it's happening over time. But that one last flick, and the whole thing goes right. And so I think the goal for us if we really care about the journalists who are doing the work and not just about journalism, is to fortify the dam before it breaks.

Zak Dahlheimer 42:50

And I've had a lot to get into with that, in the when we were wrapping up the interview. And I'm curious to hear what you have to say about that. We're now in the last section only have a few more questions left. I really do appreciate your time. I mean, this has been very fruitful for me, and very helpful for this project. You've talked a lot and have been extremely open about how consistent coverage of breaking news Lichfield has shaped you as a journalist and impacted you in your career. Now I want to talk about moving forward. trauma training, when you were say at, you know, in college, or when you were in before you started in Mississippi, or at any point when you were in Mississippi or in Virginia at any time before during your career. Did you receive trauma training to help you with this type of coverage? No.

43:44

No, I don't even think you know, I graduated from Florida a&m University, where I received a stellar education in journalism. But I graduated in 2007. If you think about the era, we were not having conversations about mental health in journalism at all 15 years ago. What do you

Zak Dahlheimer 44:07

what do you make of not having that type of like, certified trauma training like actual like this is we're going to train you to help deal with trauma when going to breaking news. What do you think of the absence of that for you?

44:22

Well, the absence I think, explains why we have so many people leaving the field of journalism, especially younger journalists in their 20s and 30s. They're out. Because you think, Oh wow, I'll be fine. And if you're not prepared for the level of second hand trauma that you'll let your face or even aware that you're going to take home some the emotional weight of many of the stories you cover. This generation is is not for it. They're like, Oh, no, I'm out. And they will figure out another way to serve their community and try to be effective. So I think because we have not been candid about that, or forward thinking about that, that we are losing people, good people. So like you said, what does that look like? I think we have to have maybe a class on mental health in journalism schools early on, to talk about the signs of anxiety and depression, the signs of secondhand trauma. And most importantly, like, how do you get to therapy? What do you do in an emergency situation? What do you do in a slow leak situation, right, where you know, something's happening. But if you get into a good therapist at that moment, it can help set you up well, so you can be fortified right, and continue to serve your community. I have many thoughts on how we can address this. So I'll wait for you.

Zak Dahlheimer 45:55

Yeah, and that's the big last question at the end, which we'll get to in a couple bits. But you mentioned therapy, you've gone to therapy throughout your career, your faith that you rely on, you know, to help, you know, at certain, especially during breaking news situations and the aftermath from those any other resources, if any, that have been available to you to help your mental health and covering those events, say, any that scripts or has provided or anything that you could speak to from a company standpoint?

46:25

Well, I know Scripps provides a pathway to mental health professionals, I have not utilized that. Because I have had my own therapist for the last 11 years. You know, I will say at least at news three, which has been helpful is if someone needs a mental health day, they can communicate with their manager and just say, Hey, I'm not going to make it in today. It's been my experience that that is received. Well, I will say, a few years ago, I was was struggling. It was before the pandemic. And I just felt disassociated and asked my boss, this is before we will read scripts, though, ask my boss, if I could have some time. And I eventually got it. It wasn't right away as soon as I felt like I needed it, which is something that could have been improved. But I think the culture of more people speaking up about like, hey, I need a mental health day is more acceptable. And I think that means our news managers are not taken aback when they hear it and are more willing to make adjustments. So people can be well.

Zak Dahlheimer 47:53

Well, and with that being said, we've reached the you know, the last question, and I've gotten interesting, I've gotten a very deep thinking results from this question. I'm curious to see what you have to add to this. Are there areas of opportunity you'd like companies like Scripps, other companies industry wide to explore when it comes to help in the mental health field journalists who have consistently covered breaking news and severe weather?

48:24

Not in this order, but these are things that I think can help, we must move to a four day workweek. We have to move to a four day workweek. Here's the thing. Most journalists are not working eight hour days, we are working 10 and 11 hour days, easily. Ask our producers who are supposed to be taking lunch breaks how how. And they're not enjoying their lunch breaks when they take it because they don't have enough time to come back and finish everything before their shows. Our producers aren't just producing a half hour of news they're producing one hour, 90 minutes, two hours, several hours of news. are cruising in the field, our reporters and our photo journalists, especially if you're on an intense breaking news date, when when are you going to be like okay, I'm going to take my hour to go sit down and have lunch at this nice air conditioned restaurant. It's not happening. And so the only way to ensure that people are getting enough time to disconnect and replenish and protect their mental health is to go to a four day workweek. We are already working more above and beyond 40 hours in a workweek in three or four days. You know, I can tell you this I work a morning shift I get into work at three. I had a special report airing the following Day in from 215. When I got up that morning until close to seven o'clock at night, I was in some way involved in work.

Zak Dahlheimer 50:11

Yeah, I noticed that too, you know, you've gone above and beyond like not just tied to those specific hours because it might be a special report or there may be a developing breaking news situation to where you have to be involved in.

50:24

And that cuts into sleep, which is connected to our mental health. The only way to address that part to make sure people are getting adequate amount of time away from work, is to go to a four day workweek. In addition to that, I think we need way more PTO think about it, when someone starts with a company, they get 10 days of PT 10 days for the year, it's better with scripts, I'm just going off of a basic. But if you ask me, I think we should have 30 days of PTO in a year. Why do I say 30? That accounts for planned vacations, that accounts for time you can take because of all the holidays that you're working because you're not going to get them all off. And then that also account can account for mental health days, right? If you're looking at a bank of PTO, and you're struggling mentally, but you have a trip planned to see your family and Christmas. Like you have to decide, do I go see my family at Christmas? Or do I take this mental health day? Or will I toughed it out. And when people toughed it out, that's when the dam breaks. So companies need to assess, including my beloved scripts, additional PTO for its employees, and I guarantee because every journalism company is experiencing a mass exodus. Right now, just journalism companies, businesses all over the place, people are leaving, because people are choosing to be broke over being burnt out. And so the only way to address that is if you acknowledge that with a four day work week, increase PTO, even if you want to normalize

like a mental health day to add on top of the PTO, so people aren't worried about like, I'm stressed I was at a murder yesterday, it was really tough, had nightmares, what am I going to do, but you force yourself to go into work because you have to. So those are some things we can address the I'm just gonna say the final thing is, it would be great. Like I know, we have the virtual resources for therapists, which is great. I think it would also be good to identify an in person, like one or two therapists in each town, that can be available to serve journalists in the building to have in person appointments, and someone who is trained specifically, in second hand trauma. So when a journalist comes for, for instance, for example, we had a fairly young reporter who was recovering who was covering a rally or a vigil. And then there was a shooting while she was there. Right, like, Thank God, she took some days off in our management, approve that didn't give her grief about needing that time. But how great would it have been, if she were open to it to know there was a person she could call who was on call, and she could be in their therapy office the next day? That's something that can help too.

Zak Dahlheimer 53:37

Well, so and I want to discuss this a little bit further, because you're not the first one in this study that has recommended, I mean, you've definitely gone in depth, but the PTO, which I'm gonna get to in a little bit, but also, so you're thinking kind of because people have said this to so it'd be like, a therapist or a counselor that is tied directly to the station that is in house that knows the area knows the events that we're covering is familiar with the environment that we're in here. And that can that can be readily available. And like I said, you know, quite a few people. And I've also brought this up with other participants, because it's been brought up so much. Is that kind of what you're saying pretty much with that. And what do you make of just with other people bring it echoing the same sentiments?

54:29

So not necessarily someone in the building but at least a someone in this city that, you know, we're we're connected to right partnership? Yes. Right. Right. They can be itself they can be Norfolk, they can be, you know, somewhere within driving distance. Or if they can be mobile, to meet the person. You know, if we have a wellness Room here at the station, where therapy sessions happen or where meditation can happen. Well, that's a good one, a wellness room. Yeah,

Zak Dahlheimer 54:58

that'd be good. Um, This sounds good.

55:01

So and I'm not surprised that other people have thought about the same thing. Because that means at some point, we needed that. So in the moment where you need it, and you think about it, I mean, you're like, oh, man, I wish I had access to this right now. But no, I'm not surprised to hear that other people have that same thought.

Zak Dahlheimer 55:19

And the PTO days, I mean, many participants have brought this up. And I brought this up with others, just to get their thoughts on, but you brought it out right out the gate and went in depth on it, too. You know, everyone else is basically been saying wellness day. So in other words, like

PTO days that are not in the bank, but they're specifically set aside for mental health reasons. So they don't have to worry about, you know, hey, they have to sign up. And they're, you know, taking one day away from a vacation or sick day, you know, whatever it's labeled, but they have these days set asides where it doesn't hit the actual bank. What do you make of just with that? I mean, you brought that up, but also mean, what do you make of the consensus of it being brought up by quite a few other participants who, for the record, are scripts, journalists, but you know, it's not just a lot one location, but it's people across the country kind of saying the same thing?

56:18

Let's because we need it. I mean, I know, after I had that anxiety attack, if there were a wellness day, I could have taken the next day to kind of like, gather my wits about me, that would have been great. But I Oh, I was new here. I only had 10 days of PTO for the entire year. And if I had taken one of those days, what was my Christmas gonna look like? Was it going to be able to go see my family? If I took time?

Zak Dahlheimer 56:53

Your thoughts? You've had those thoughts of like, well, you know, Christmas versus, you know, taking care of my mental health, you know, so to speak.

57:01

And they're both mental health. I mean, I, I, Norfolk is a 17 hour drive from New Orleans, which is where my family was, you know, that's, do I sacrifice the later for the now? You know, or are you had instances where people felt like, they had to lie about being physically sick. So they, because they needed to be home because of a mental wellness day, and no one likes to lie. But I don't blame people if they had to be like, oh, yeah, I don't feel good. Because you don't feel good. Then there's the whole doctor's note thing is just like, you know, back in the day, and then trying to you know, fake the funk about being sick. But really, it's because your mind was a mess. But how do you tell your boss that without them thinking? Well, when her contract comes up, I'm not going to renew,

Zak Dahlheimer 57:53

right? Yeah, sure, man. Well, I like I personally like the 30 PTO days, that'd be pretty cool, huh?

58:01

Ah, I'm gonna show this to show this all our scripts folks and tell and tell them people are crying out for help. I mean, listen, if they if they want to keep good journalist employed, not just at scripts, but journalism countries all over the place, they're going to have to do this, they, they're gonna have to, or we're gonna have to keep having a revolving door. And at some point, we won't have enough journalists to put newscast on television and share on our digital platforms.

Zak Dahlheimer 58:30

And following up on that really quick, I mean, without Of course, naming any names for the sake of protection of other peoples who have not consented to this project. But have you personally seen anybody lately or throughout your career? They've said, you know, Hey, my mental health

breaking news. I gotta get out, you know, because I, can you speak to kind of like what you were talking about there? If you if you personally seen anything like that?

58:56

Yes, several good people. Several people were excellent journalist. The weight of it was too much, and there wasn't enough balance to make it make sense anymore. And when I say balance, I mean balance in terms of time off balance in terms of compensation. Listen, I I can imagine like if you're working on the network level, on a big morning show, right? I work mornings, that's a different stressor on the body and on your mental health. And I'm let me be very clear, I am not minimizing anything that our colleagues at the national level go through at all. I respect them, they do an amazing job. It's still a very heavy weight, right. They also make millions of dollars a year. They also have a driver that picks them up in the morning and gets them to the station. They also have makeup artists, they also have producers who can help them research. Now they're still doing a lot of deep work. Let me be very clear about that. But you compare that to someone who is living paycheck to paycheck, or making enough to maybe go on one trip a year Don't eat out once a month. There's, there's not the balance on the other end, to help soften the blow of the mental anguish you face while doing a job that you love. And so at some point, you don't love the job anymore. At some point, you choose yourself. And that's what I think we're seeing is, is people not feeling. People feel run into the ground. And so at some point, they have to decide, do I do this thing I feel like I was born to do because many of us as journalists, we feel like we were born to do this, or do I figure out a different pathway to do it, where I can have better balanced mental health. That's the decision people are making.

Zak Dahlheimer 1:00:42

Well, thank you so much. Before I stopped recordings, I know you've been very passionate about this particular question. Anything else you'd like to add? About areas of opportunities or anything in terms of that?

1:00:55

Um, no. And I'm glad we're wrapping up because I have to get to the studio because we're doing the rehearsal. Oh, yeah. Yeah, I'll just say I'll reiterate. Four Day workweeks. Increase PTO specific wellness days on site, mental health professionals, and better pay.

PARTICIPANT 11 MANAGER ZOOM RECORDING RAW

Zak Dahlheimer 00:01

Okay, so we just started recording. And just for the record, as of now, you are participating with us as an anonymous interviewee for this research project, is that accurate? Correct? Perfect. And just for the record to, since you are, at this point going to be an anonymous interviewer, we will give you a generic title as a former TV news Scripps TV news manager, and then we'll maybe give you a participant number. So like maybe participant numbers seven or 11, some fourths. So that's how we'll go for it from there. But moving forward with that, how many years would you say you have worked? From the basis of Scripps, TV news management, you read Scripps as a news manager? How many years was that total?

00:55

2018 to 2022. So four years?

Zak Dahlheimer 01:01

Four years total? Okay.

01:02

Nearly four years is what I would say. Right? Yeah. Yeah, I'll need to go back to my LinkedIn. But I want to say I moved to Scripps and September of 2018.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:18

Gotcha. Yes. So it pretty much I would say, Yeah, four years on the nose.

01:24

It went by fast.

Zak Dahlheimer 01:28

Well, and I know, we kind of talked about this offhand. But if you could say, talk about if you have any experience working as a field journalist in TV news, so field producer, reporter, photo journalist, basically a component of it being out in the field? And if so, what were they and for how long would you say in your career,

01:53

this would probably be only for a few months. And this was at the start of my career when I would go out with photographers to stories and to spot news. So I would say, you know, if you were to capture all of it, maybe six to 10 months,

Zak Dahlheimer 02:13

and in your entire career in TV news, how many years would you say?

02:18

Let's say 90? nearly 25 years?

Zak Dahlheimer 02:23

So 25, nearly 25 Overall, and then four as a TV news management scripts. Gotcha. Well, as you know, this, this academic research study pertains to experience covering consistent breaking news and severe weather. Since this is anonymous, and more so talking about your experience within Scripps, when you were a TV news manager within Scripps, how often would you say your news organizations when you were at the helm of had to cover breaking news and severe weather in the field? How often would you say that that took place?

03:06

It would vary Market to Market, probably in Denver when I was there for a year and a half. Maybe 20% of the time 25% of the time. There were big events that happen there, including a school shooting where a kid gave up his life to save an entire class. We had the horrific interstate fire where a man behind the wheel of an 18 Wheeler couldn't stop as a team couldn't stop the truck and crashed into innocent drivers killing some and we witnessed the cars exploding into flames. Keep in mind we're right in the middle of the broadcast and people are dying. What else can I recall from that time? I'm sure we had a mass shooting but because those happen all the time. It's it's hard to recall. But I know it happened. We had the blizzard, the bomb cyclone, where reporter nearly Well, crew almost got involved in a crash. Because the weather conditions. Wow. Those are the biggies that I can recall.

Zak Dahlheimer 04:39

Thank you for sharing those with me too. And would you say one of those that you mentioned or maybe this maybe there's another event? When is there a particular event that you would consider to be traumatic that stands out to you either professionally or personally would you say related to either those events or any news event in general that comes to top of mind for you.

05:03

Oh, yeah. You know, the hit and it's gonna be easy to figure out who this is.

05:12

We had the helicopter, the helicopter crash at KOMO, where, probably 8:15 or 8:20 in the morning and the helicopter crashed right outside the station. And we quickly went into breaking news mode. But that was a traumatic experience. And just hearing the son of the chopper photographer calling who was also on staff, as a photographer, like como, calling to ask about his dad. His dad died in the crash. And so I was the one who picked up the phone and could hear him shouting and screaming on the other side, please, not my dad, not my dad. And I asked him to come to the station. That's all I could say. So when everyone was at the funeral, that that weekend, because I want to say it happened on a Monday morning. The funeral was that Saturday, I was in and that was the same day, we had the landslide that killed 41 people, and it wiped an entire community off this earth. But the traumatic experience was just hearing the calls for help the screaming from residents, because you can hear them over the scanners screaming and yelling, and all of the first responders were yelling for all helicopters within the the region of Oregon, Idaho, all Arif equipment in Washington, and then in British Columbia, since we were so close. But I think the thing that really affected me as it did a lot of others was just the two to three weeks of just constant stories about the families and the survivors that lost everything and how the community was coming together. But when you hear of the loss of life of this magnitude, it really hurts. And then, you know, I think one thing that stood out to me and I, I

wasn't processing it at the time, was just the just the constant, depressed state, if you want to call it that, but as a journalist, you're just pushing through and so towards, you know, day seven, mind you, we just went through the helicopter crash. Now it's the landslide. I was the on call manager when it happened. And I didn't stop until probably a week and a half to two weeks later. And the traumatizing part, I guess that kept playing into my head was just hearing these people's stories, talking to family members, my news director at the time put me in charge of the coverage for all the funerals. And so I was deeply invested in deeply feeling everything. And so I remember going to my news director and going, I don't know why, but I just have this feeling of crying all the time. And that's when she said, Oh, you're probably deep, deep into it. And I'm like, I know and I I don't know what to do. But I ended up getting a minutes and math helped. I'm not sure if I've shared with you. And this isn't necessarily news related, but it's helped me become who I am today. And that's just witnessing my nephew who accidentally shot himself in front of me and having to call first responders and really turning into news Toronto, and getting everyone in the truck and calling for help. Yeah, I was also the one to call my sister in law. My nephew's mom and my mom to tell them, hey, there's been a shooting and accidental shooting you need to get to the hospital. I didn't realize at the time it was affecting me but when I tried to go back to work that Monday because it's happened on a Saturday, I wasn't able to work, I would just shut down and just start crying.

10:07

And I remember again, going, what is going on. And so I ended up seeking help. You know, and out of all of that came this great conversation I had with my news director at the time, who said, I've been given a great gift. And that's the gift of compassion and empathy. And using that, to help others, right, especially from the position in the title that I hold. And so ever since then, I've been able to switch things that have happened to me in a negative way, and turn them into positives that have helped me, right. And so all of that to go, that's what that's why I am the way I am today, it's through those experiences in the newsroom and outside of the newsroom who have shaped me into a leader that that leads with empathy that leads with compassion, that leads with inspiration versus the flip side.

Zak Dahlheimer 11:19

Gotcha. And, and thank you again, for I mean, I know that you and I had had personal conversations about what happened with your family member that accidentally shot himself and and thank you for sharing that because I know that it's a lot, you know, how this could be impacting us, you know, how we could take this these events and impact us personally or, and professionally as well. And really kind of guide our career paths as at the same time.

11:49

Yeah, no. And what I always say is, you know, I don't ever want to give up on news. And it's just been my passion since I was young. And so what I try to do is share, you know, the positives and the opportunities that that exists in newsrooms, right, or challenges. Because that's what they are. They're their challenges that we endure every day, how we choose to get through it, or how we choose to view it and our takeaways is based on us. And that's what I tell folks here, right? I, you know, this is going to happen, it's you choose how you want, how you want it to impact you. This is where I go back to ownership and leadership. Are you going to let it own you? Or are you

going to own it? Are you going to lead the way or you're going to follow? I like to lead. I like to, you know, own it. For lack of a better word.

Zak Dahlheimer 12:54

Absolutely. Well, and, you know, I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you this, you know, because you brought it up a little bit earlier. But what made you want to get into journalism as a career and as a passion, you know, for you.

13:06

It was that curiosity. It was the impact you can have. It's how you can change things, right for the betterment of everyone. You because that's that's the power we have as journalists as, as ones who not only seek the truth, but report the truth. And you know, the others, everyone has a story. And that's what I always ask is, what's your story? How do you want to be remembered? When you were here, because that's ultimately how your legacy lives on is through the impact that you have and the story that you leave for others to tell? Absolutely.

Zak Dahlheimer 13:54

Well, and I, again, thank you for being so open about like, what you went through, not just on a professional level with, especially those two stories that happened back to back, but what happened even to your own family. And I know personally, just you know, how you have a passion of wanting you know, your team to own the big story and to really be out in front of it while also showing the compassion. You mentioned, you know, wanting to own the story is that what made you decide you want to eventually get into news management, or was there other factors that made you want to get into the management role?

14:33

I think early on, I wanted to be in front of the camera, but there was something about knowing a little about a lot, right. But then there was also something that I was witnessing that I was seeing coming up the ranks and that was how employees were being treated. Right. I had my own little core from the assignment desk. I could You know, helps shape your day with an assignment. But if you keep moving up, you have greater impact, you have a bigger role to play, you have a more, it's a bigger, larger responsibility, not only to the team, but then to the viewers. And so it was looking at all the negatives that were happening in the room and thinking to myself, well, if I can sit in the corner, one day, I can change all this. Right? And I and I told myself, you know, maybe one day, and for whatever reason, you know, I kept making moves throughout my career until I did move to Cam, GH, and scripts. And that's where I was able to see this, this other level of impact. And I enjoyed it. And so I kept working towards that, and just looking at challenges as opportunities to succeed, or to take risks for the betterment of myself.

Zak Dahlheimer 16:16

Speaking of, you know, Scripps to I mean, in your experience in those four years as a TV news manager within Scripps, when you were with the company, how would you gauge the company's standpoints and your personal experience, being a news manager, when it comes to mental health for employees feel journalists covering breaking news and severe weather consistent and consistently, and also the resources that were available to help you and your stations, employees mental health related to this.

16:51

So you know, I will say scripts is great about putting employees first. And I think it starts at the very top right, and then it trickles its way down to stations. But no scripts is great about putting its employees first having resources available. But I think it also goes back to the leadership, right at the television stations, you have leaders who believe in the mission and the scripts mission, they can also help put their, their finger on it. My, my general manager and my news director in Denver, are some of the best. When you talk about empathy, when you talk about compassion, and leadership. They they were strong for the simple fact that and I still carry this, you know, same belief as well, no story is worth your safety. I can't expect you to be the best if I'm not giving you the best. We have to take care of each other. It's us against the world right now, especially in this 24/7 world. But always knowing that there are resources available no matter what. In reminding employees through difficult situations, that help is available. I still remember having my first and second day at station there in Norfolk letting the team know, counseling is available for you. We've just gone through the school shooting. You've been talking to families, you've been talking to parents, you've been talking to folks who are dealing with a traumatic event. And whether you realize it or not your body is affected your mental toll your mental well being as affected, as strong as you want to be. You're not. You should always take advantage of the resources that are available whether you think you need it or not. It's always a good gut check as to how things may be impacting you. You may not realize it at the time, but there are events that happen in your life that will impact you that will change you how it changes you is up for you to decide.

Zak Dahlheimer 19:37

And you know, I'll tell you I personally remember you saying that because I know that that was right at the very beginning of your tenure there. I mean talk about it first day on the job, you know in Norfolk for you.

19:49

And it's sadly that wasn't the first time I was having a conversation. There have been other school shootings but with the Each tragedy you learn, you learn how to be more empathetic, you learn to be the leader, you wanted to have you learn that sometimes, all you need to do is just be there. Just shut up and be there. Just listen. You're just that calming force.

Zak Dahlheimer 20:25

Being there in the room just to, to have someone to go to but also like, and correct me, correct me if I'm wrong, but you've been so open, you know, and your leadership style includes letting people know being open about mental health and saying, hey, there are resources available. Even if you think you may not need it, like you said, you should look into it, you know, if that's what you want to do,

20:50

there is no stigma around mental wellness with me. It's there, if you choose, choose it right? up more, so it's sometimes you don't know what you don't know. And for whatever reason, you know, some journalists may be, you know, but have a different mindset, where it's like, oh, I don't need help. That's for others. Oh, I'm not weak. That's not, that's mental wellness or mental

and ease is not a sign of weakness. It's a sign of courage. It's a sign of, I'm raising my hand because I need help. There's nothing wrong with asking for help. Well, and

Zak Dahlheimer 21:38

and I just have one more question, because I know that I really am been appreciative of your time. And I've gotten a lot of interesting answers from the field journalists that I've talked to in this study of for this. I'm curious, from a news manager standpoint, what your thoughts are, and this is not just for scripts. It's more so from an industry wide standpoint, are there areas of opportunity you'd like companies to explore when it comes to helping the mental health of field journalists who have covered breaking news and severe weather consistently?

22:12

So that again, so

Zak Dahlheimer 22:14

areas of opportunities, do you believe are there any that you would like to personally see companies explore industry? Why when it comes to helping the mental health of field journalists who have to go out and consistently cover breaking news and severe weather?

22:32

This? Yes, so the short answer is yes. I think there are always opportunities to better serve our employees with mental wellness. Sometimes, maybe it's just a mental wellness gut check. Hey, how are things going? Especially after a big event, or just consistent coverage of a tragedy, let's say hurricane coverage, let's say the flooding coverage in Kentucky. What's been the response for those journalists who have witnessed the worst of the worst, and but yet the best of the best with humanity and compassion when communities come together? I think it's a balance. But I think if anything, COVID has pushed all has hit us fast forward button. And it's brought 20 years. And today, and because we're still dealing with some of that, some of that some of the civil unrest. Yes, right, because everything is unpredictable. And what we can do, though, is be better about opening up the lines of communication, to check on your mental well being. Because a lot of times, you're just gonna get surface level answers, but I think if you can make resources available, or just remind folks, especially after big events, bad events, that there's something there. I know a lot of times, you know, you'll hear from corporate or what you'll hear from leaders after a school shooting, right counselors will be available. a therapy dog will come in. Sometimes maybe it's just good to have a counselor come in to just to share with the room. You know, what's going on in their community and just to maybe open it up but not so much in a public way, but maybe, hey, here's some things that you know, are taking place in this community. I'm going to be upstairs, you know, tomorrow, or I'm making myself available, if anyone would like to come and chat, or it can be something as simple as we're bringing therapy dogs in just to have them or puppies. Something? Yeah, there's always opportunities for companies to provide gut checks.

Zak Dahlheimer 25:35

Well, I wanted to get your reaction or your thoughts on this, too, from a news banter standpoint, but the common answer I've been getting from a majority of the other participants, you know, they've mentioned two things in particular, one may be stations or owner, particular stations,

partnering with a local counselor or therapist that's lives in the market area, that's familiar with all the events going on at sec, and that can speak to, you know, have more of an understanding, you know, that what the journalists on the ground are going through. But also many have said about creating more specifically, mental health wellness days that are not associated say if because if some companies maybe have a general PTO bank, if they have maybe some, I don't know, how many would be, but like maybe seven to 10 days set aside to where it could be specifically for mental health. what's your what's your thoughts on that?

26:43

I think PTO is part of mental health, right? I think to say it's a delicate balance. Here's why. For some, you have folks who are okay. Well, what happens if I decide not to take that mental wellness? Do I still get to add it to my PTO bank? Or is it just not there for years?

27:13

And you may have someone else who says, oh, yeah, no, I need it all the time. You know, I it is what it is. And so from that standpoint, I would be hesitant, because I would think some would abuse it. That's what you know, I think leaves her for, you know, when you're asking for a leave of absence, you know, all these different things, I think are different. I don't think we're there yet that with with adding, you know, more PTO, because from a business standpoint, you have to look at how it's affecting the business and the bottom line. From an HR standpoint, I could see that as a great resource to offer employees. This is me telling you, I can see multiple perspectives, right? Sure. I can see the perspective from the business. I can see the perspective from HR, I could see it from a recruiter standpoint, hey, this is a great recruitment opportunity for us to use to get people I see the employee perspective, hey, I need help. I should be able to take time off when I want to. You can it's called PTO. But this is where I go and I would have to investigate it here. But I'm looking at my PTO balance. And I have one for holidays. I have one for personal. I have one for vacation. And then I have my full year vacation. And then I have one that's called Safe and sick. So I'm guessing that's mental wellness right there. Um, so yeah, I have a lot there. But no, like, if if you were to ask me if I'm running a company, is this something that I would look into? Sure. I would look into what I enacted, probably not yet. I would want to do my my my work on how it affects the business. You know, is it a great recruitment tool to have? Are people taking it for the right Reasons in abusing et Cie, my fear is that someone would abuse it. Just because I know I would.

Zak Dahlheimer 30:10

Well, and there and that actually has been talked about, you know, there is that a couple have said, yes, there is the caveat that they're probably more more likely to not will be someone that you know, abusive for whatever reason.

30:23

And the reason why I say that, I had reporters abuse it, in Oklahoma. And I'm like, going on, on leave, because they couldn't handle handle the job.

30:41

When they sucked, I'm sorry, they needed improvement. But just to throw your hands up and give up.

30:53

More power to you ended up quitting. But this is where I go, Hey, if you needed help, there's help for you. You just didn't want to work. And that's the issue I have with the mental leave. My fear is that employees would abuse it. And then what ends up happening, everyone else in the newsroom has to pick up the slack. You can't go do that story. Because this reporters out, you can't go do that show. Because that producers out you can't go do that. Because this producer and the list goes on and on.

Zak Dahlheimer 31:34

Absolutely. And then like you said earlier, you're you're open to the idea, but you want to investigate from all perspectives on the table is say, if you weren't from a company standpoint, just to make sure to weigh say, well, the pros and the cons before making a final decision on that. What about because I want to make sure if you want to touch on this, but the therapists local like in the market to get paired up with the station? What are your thoughts on that? If you want to weigh in on that?

32:06

No, I like it. You know, when I was in Denver, I was working with a psychologist there that would help students. And I would talk to her about stories in the news. And getting her take and sometimes having her on the air to help you know, other parents navigate some of the challenges that they're hearing and seeing in the community. But as far as maybe coming in and talking to, you know, the employees Sure, but maybe not like in a closed one on one but maybe as a group. So yeah, no, I, I, I would be open to that.

Zak Dahlheimer 32:58

Maybe more so like in having like focus groups or to help maybe have like, sit downs like a roundtable with employees where they can kind of be in a safe space to talk about it, maybe even with a therapist in there, too.

33:11

Right. And this is where I'm trying not to. I wouldn't want the doctor to violate any covenants, reality rules, or you know, especially if employees were her patients or clients. It just depends, but overall look, I'm a big fan of therapy. I'm a big fan of the mental wellness. You can't be your best unless you're going in for checkups. It's like a car. You got to go in and get your tuneups. Those are tuneups, right, that's to help you. This is someone who is trained to help get in there. It's part of your well being. And that's where I go. You just need a tune up.

Appendix IV: Research Field Notes

WTKR

1. Y and Signed — Participant #10 — ALL SET UP FOR 9/9 11:00AM
2. Y and Signed — Participant #4 — ALL SET UP FOR 9/2 11:30AM
3. Y and Signed — Participant #3 — ALL SET UP FOR 9/10 12:30PM
4. Y and Signed — Participant #1 — ALL SET UP FOR 9/2 1:30PM
5. Y and Signed (participating anonymously) — Participant #6 — ALL SET UP FOR 9/8 11:00AM

Scripps

1. Y and Signed — Participant #7 — SET UP FOR 9/8 8:30AM
2. Y and Signed — Participant #8 — SET UP FOR 9/8 5:00PM
3. Y and Signed — Participant #5 — ALL SET UP FOR 9/1 7:00PM
4. Y and Signed — Participant #9 — ALL SET UP FOR 9/8 1:00PM
5. Y and Signed — Participant #2 — ALL SET UP FOR 9/2 11:00AM

TV News Manager

- Y and Signed — Participant #11 (participating anonymously) — ALL SET UP FOR 9/19 1PM

Email for consent forms:

Thank you for your interest in this research project.

Please see attached the consent form to be signed and returned by participants before taking part in this research project.

A phone call will be scheduled at your convenience to go over the consent form and give you an opportunity to ask any questions prior to deciding whether to give consent to participate. Please let me know what day and time works best for you to schedule the phone call.

Following our phone call, you will have 48 hours to consider participation and ask questions before deciding whether to give consent to participate.

Thank you.

Field Note Log 9/30/22

All 11 interviews (10 field journalists and TV news manager) completed via Zoom and transcribed via Otter. 2 interviews chose to be anonymous. Lots of talk on personal experiences, how they felt in situations (related to cognitive appraisal theory). Tons of dialogue on areas of opportunities to address mental health with field journalists.

Checking in with Jim and Zach on 10/21. Goal is to have most, if not all, of rough draft of project document done and emailed to them by 10/14. Hope to go over it on 10/21, and make any changes, revisions, additions and knock out PPT before official defense week after Thanksgiving.

Note from Jim and Zach on final project layout

From Zach:

Intro: organize into 2 sections (background and approach/objective)
Here's the issue and the problem, and then approach

Lit review: bridge to past work to present study
Here's what's been done, here's what's not been done, what not been done is a problem, how research is going to address problem

Add a section at end of the method — describing the setting: I studied this news organization because of why...

Interviewed as many people as possible in this case site: reasoning by 10 interviews: naturalistic approach — field notes (go into the appendices)

Use otter and transcription notes will be put into appendices

Notes from Jim

Clear delineation from personal experiences and academic intentions: make sure there's a break

Protecting anonymity: find a way to ensure some anonymity
If not pseudonyms, numbers work
Make sure interviews are stored protectively

Try casting net a little wider: stay in Scripps — but reach out through Cincinnati,
Justify where you draw boundaries of case

Add a Discussion at the end after results

Theoretical app: how does work address theory, does it add/dispute

Practical app: how we can take work and apply it to a transferable case

Ideal Setting Layout of Project

1. Intro

2. Lit Review
3. Methodology (sample size, background of participants)
4. Project Results
 - a. Breaking News (personal experiences, job expectations)
 - b. Severe Weather (personal experiences, job expectations)
 - c. Cognitive Appraisal Results
 - d. Trauma Training and Areas of Opportunities
5. Discussion
6. Appendices
 - a. Project Proposal
 - b. Transcription Notes from Otter
 - c. Field Notes
 - d. Zoom interview files (ones that agreed to have them as part of the final presentation)

Appendix V: Project Proposal

INTRODUCTION

Background

Roughly 8:00pm on a September night in 2018, the reporter has been with their photojournalist for 8 hours and counting in the middle of a deadly hurricane making landfall. As the rain pours and wind howls through rural North Carolina communities, the duo braves the elements, including downed power lines and flooding among other conditions, to send live and recorded reports back to the newsroom for wall-to-wall coverage. As the day turns to night, they get ready for their next live report. A water rescue is currently underway near a hospital. Electricity is out and very few, perhaps only one, of the streetlights are lit. Water has taken over the road, at least 8 inches deep, which leads the reporter and photojournalist to stay on the sidewalk next to the barrier for safety. As the photojournalist tries to wipe away the water that's been taking a toll on his camera and rain gear, the crew goes live. Within a matter of seconds, the reporter hears what sounds like a tree coming down very close to him. While live on-air, he ducks out of the way, and eventually the reporter and photojournalist leave the scene to take shelter as a tornado warning commences.

The year before, on a Sunday afternoon, a TV news anchor volunteers to go grab video of a motorcycle crash on a nearby mountain. When he gets to the scene, he realizes he beat the first responders to the scene. How does he know? The motorcycle is laid down at an angle on the side of the road, and the man riding the motorcycle is about three feet from it. As the anchor gets video of the scene, he notices the man's body and stops recording. What stood out to the reporter was the man's facial expression as his lifeless body laid on the ground. A disturbing image, the anchor turns away and goes back to his car to take a breath and gather his thoughts. Eventually, first responders show up, set up a scene and cover the man's body with a sheet. The anchor,

composed after what he saw, went back to shooting video for an update on the evening news he would present from the desk later that night.

These two experiences are not hypothetical. These are factual. These events have stuck with me over a now roughly 10-year career in TV news, and arguably have impacted my mental health on the job and after I leave the newsroom. These are just a couple of examples of situations TV news journalists are often assigned to cover for their stations: breaking news and severe weather. Yes, there's an understanding that we may, and will, be called upon to cover these assignments as part of our job duties. Some are routine: reporting in front of crime scene tape, interviewing law enforcement, witnesses, loved ones of those impacted by the breaking news and severe weather. However, personal colleagues have also responded on the front lines of mass shootings as information was developing in real time, delivering reports inside a studio as the roof was getting ripped off and water was pouring in during a Category 5 hurricane, and even had to seek safety because of a shooting taking place at a vigil for gun violence. Exposure to events such as murders, shootings, crashes, mass casualty: all have had an impact on me. These experiences my colleagues and I have experienced over my career have made me want to investigate what I believe is an area problem in journalism: trauma for TV news field journalists along the front lines. The goal with research work related to this area problem of journalism is to create a conversation regarding mental health of TV news field journalists, including what they're experiencing and the need for resources to assist them personally while serving their communities.

Most, if not all, journalists cover some type of traumatic event (2021), especially camera operators (MacDonald et al., 2021). For instance, a survey of 117 international camera operators, specifically 107 male photographers and 10 female photographers, showed

photojournalists/camera operators are arguably the first line of exposure to traumatic events. When asked about the frequent exposures to work-related post-traumatic events, results showed more than 90 percent were exposed to events involving an injured or dead child, fire, and motor vehicle accident (MacDonald et al., 2021). The next highest, roughly 89 and 84 percent respectively, were murders and natural disasters (MacDonald et al., 2021). In the same study, the sample indicated greater levels of PTSD symptoms than expected in the general population, and there were fewer differences regarding symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress (MacDonald et al., 2021). More than 40 percent of participants were also considered to possibly be at risk of PTSD.

According to the Dart Center For Journalism and Trauma, the vast majority, if not all, journalists have been exposed to traumatic events related to work (Smith et al., 2015). Furthermore, research suggests an argument for increased organizational support, as well as trauma training for work, whether that would be in the classroom or within their current line of work with their parent company (Smith et al., 2015).

Dworznik and Grubb conducted a study specifically looking at the argument for journalism trauma training in the classroom. This study involves a mixed-methods approach, interviewing students covering a death-penalty murder trial, and surveying journalism students (Dworznik & Grubb, 2007). The students advocated for trauma training in the classroom prior to graduating, as well as how to approach certain subjects when covering news stories that can be considered traumatic. It also found that trauma wasn't being addressed in the classroom, and they were being more aware of traumatic events through their internships.

Objective

The purpose of this research project will be examining the issue of journalists who consistently cover breaking news, wall-to-wall news events, severe weather, within the field, are impacted from a mental health standpoint. To do this, I'll be conducting semi-structured interviews with TV news field journalists and, if applicable, a TV news manager.

From a theoretical standpoint, the model which will be used to help guide questions in the project's interviewing process is the cognitive appraisal theory. This theory will weigh a journalist's response when exposed to stressors in the field while on an assignment (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020). With backing from Lazarus and Folkman in 1984 and Ellsworth and Scherer in 2003, cognitive appraisal theory (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020) argues, "when someone is exposed to a stressor, the stressor is appraised in order to elicit an appropriate emotional response." (p. 158) The cognitive appraisal process consists of two parts: primary appraisal where a person establishes the importance of the stressor, and the secondary appraisal which looks at the ability to cope with the stressor (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020).

The sample size for this project will be TV news field journalists who've been in the industry from 2015-present. This will help provide a contemporary yet wide net of folks with experience within that time frame and have covered a variety of different breaking news and severe weather events. I plan on interviewing 10 field journalists (anchors/reporters, photojournalists and meteorologists with field experience). The reasoning behind the number of participants is to meet the time given to work on this research project, as well as to give the project a case study treatment. This will be explained further in the methodology section. With qualitative data gathered from the semi-structured interviews, I will review, analyze, and summarize findings and trends for this project. Overall, the purpose of this research is to look at

trauma in journalism by answering the following research question: What are the mental health impacts TV news field crews experience from consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather?

LITERATURE REVIEW

What Do Journalists See?

What happens when journalists get on scene and are amid their reporting? What do they experience?

A study by Dadouch and Lilly (2021) looks at journalist post-trauma psychopathology. Dadouch and Lilly (2021) surveyed journalists and found, when looking at exposure to work events within the past year, more than 82 percent reported on injuries or deaths (Dadouch & Lilly, 2021). Rounding out the top three work events were murders at more than 68 percent and a person's life-threatening illness at nearly 68 percent (Dadouch & Lilly, 2021). Other work events reported include motor vehicle accident, sexual assault, physical assault outside the family, people hurt or killed in a fire, other types of events involving injury or death, physical assault with the family, mass casualties, torture/kidnapping, people hurt or killed in a natural disaster, airplane accidents and war zones (Dadouch & Lilly, 2021).

Authors Backholm and Bjorkqvist (2012) investigated associations between trauma and PTSD. Overall, they learned that exposure to potentially traumatic assignments is common within the journalism industry. More than half (55 percent) of surveyed participants reported working with at least one potentially traumatic assignment in the previous year (Backholm & Bjorkqvist, 2012). The report also indicated the more frequent types of assignments like this to have taken place within the same time frame, with the highest being motor vehicle accidents as 37 percent reported having been exposed at least once or more times (Backholm & Bjorkqvist, 2012). Following motor vehicle accidents were deadly fires at 20 percent and people with life-threatening illnesses at 18 percent (Backholm & Bjorkqvist, 2012).

More proof is present from these studies of journalists having to cover traumatic events as part of their work. A portion of the focus of the studies referenced so far were the assignments they covered and elements they were exposed to. Some of the common events seem to be motor vehicle accidents, injuries/death, murder, and life-threatening illnesses. But how do these types of events impact journalists on assignment?

Mental Health Impacts and Use of Cognitive Appraisal Theory

The cognitive appraisal theory is a useful framework for understanding mental health impacts in TV news field journalists. The aforementioned theoretical framework (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020) argues, “When someone is exposed to a stressor, the stressor is appraised in order to elicit an appropriate emotional response,” (p. 158). The cognitive appraisal process consists of two parts: primary appraisal, where a person establishes the importance of the stressor, and secondary appraisal, which looks at the ability to cope with the stressor (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020). More specifically, when someone is confronted with news reports, a person evaluates the severity of the stressor as well as the extent to which the news impacts them, and whether the news is something within or beyond their control (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020). de Hoog and Verboon (2020) collected data from Dutch men and women who reported their news exposure and affective states multiple times a day over a 10-day period. Results showed news perceptions that were negative were related to more negative affect rather than positive affect (de Hoog & Verboon, 2020). Also, de Hoog and Verboon (2020) state the findings to their study show, “The more severe the news was perceived and the higher perceptions of personal relevance, the stronger the affective response,” (p. 168). Therefore, de Hoog and Verboon (2020) argue their study’s findings, “Support the cognitive appraisal theory as a relevant framework for explaining the effect of news perception on emotional states,” (p. 168).

Shweder (1993) states Lazarus's definition of cognitive appraisal as, "an evaluation of the significance of what is happening in the world for personal well-being," (p. 323) One view of the cognitive appraisal theory, as Yarwood explains, is emotions cause appraisal. For example, a person could hear gunshots and experience fear, which is then followed by cognitive appraisals of ability to cope and unexpectedness (Yarwood, n.d.). On one hand, Yarwood says, people could feel angry and not know why, and therefore look for a reason (Yarwood, n.d.). This can relate to journalists covering breaking news or severe weather, when unexpected events take place or new information comes out and they have to react to it personally while focusing on reporting the details to their viewers.

The cognitive appraisal theory is incorporated by Balzarotti and Ciceri (2014), who state news reports can bring out emotions in people (Balzarotti & Ciceri, 2014). The authors' study also showed that when those taking part reported their emotions in response to a news story, results showed a report with mutilations caused by bacterial infections brought out more fear than a story about mutilations caused by land mine explosions (Balzarotti & Ciceri, 2014). It also stated that reports that were positively framed created less fear than those negatively framed, with effects mediated by dimensions of unpleasantness and coping potential (Balzarotti & Ciceri, 2014). More specifically, Balzarotti and Ciceri (2014) state, "Positive framed reports led viewers to the evaluation that the traumatic event was less unpleasant, as well as that there was more opportunity to cope with it; these evaluations led viewers to experience less fear," (p. 372).

de Hoog's and Verboon's study focuses on the theory's application from a viewer's perspective, not TV news field journalists covering the events in real time on the front lines. For the basis of this literature search, no research on how this theory is applied to TV news field journalists covering breaking news and severe weather, having to process (appraise) what they

witness on scene, and how they choose to react while doing their jobs, could be found. This study will work to fill any gaps in existing research regarding the application of this theory towards TV news field journalists. de Hoog's and Verboon's application of cognitive appraisal theory to viewers' exposure of news reports is the closest to how I intend on applying it on TV news field journalists' exposure to raw news events happening in real time. Journalists are on the front lines exposed to raw news events firsthand and must either report/show the complete raw event as it's happening or channel important parts of the event in an ethical manner that is suitable to news consumers. While they're exposed to stressors of breaking news and severe weather, which type of emotional/mental health response will they illicit? How will the journalists try to cope with the stressor in the immediate aftermath of reporting and beyond? This also elicits the question to ask participants in the interview process for the research on how they respond to certain events, as well as if they can recall specific coverage of a certain event and how they responded at that time and afterwards.

Journalism and Mental Health

Scholars examining the issue of mental health effects on front line journalists have found one common impact: posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), PTSD (2013) is a disorder that can occur after someone experiences or witnesses a traumatic event, including serious accidents, natural disasters, terrorist acts, war, rape or who have been threatened with death, sexual violence, or serious injury (Torres, 2020). The APA defines triggers of PTSD to be exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation (APA, 2013). These exposures, according to the APA, must result from at least one scenario such as direct experiences of traumatic events, witnessing events in person, learning events happened to close family or friends and experiencing first-hand

repeated or extreme exposure to the event's details. Finally, regardless of the trigger, it causes significant distress or impairment in the person's social interactions, capacity to work, other important tasks.

MacDonald et al. (2021) found greater levels of PTSD symptoms than expected in the general population of camera operators, and there were fewer differences regarding symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress (MacDonald et al., 2021). 47 camera operators, or more than 40 percent of participants, were also considered to possibly be at risk of PTSD.

Feinstein (2004) wrote, regarding a study conducted on nearly 50 journalists working for a New York-based news organization following the 9/11 attacks, that PTSD symptoms were common among them in the months following the attacks (Feinstein, 2004). 30 percent of participants reported losing a friend in the attacks, and roughly 12 percent lost a colleague (Feinstein, 2004). It appears with the two examples above there's been an emphasis in past studies on PTSD when looking at journalists, including those in TV news, being exposed in the field when covering assignments.

What about journalists who continue to cover traumatic events? Dworznik (2006) dove into how journalists make sense of what they experience on a routine basis, interviewing 26 reporters and photojournalists from a large midwestern market on past experiences (Dworznik, 2006). The study indicates all respondents detailed their stories of trauma while on the job around one of four motives of personal narratives: purpose, justification, efficacy and control or self-worth (Dworznik, 2006). The study also suggests, while people working in news don't admit to any emotional impacts from covering traumatic events, they could still find methods to process events or to make sense of what they see while on the job (Dworznik, 2006).

Newsrooms also regularly receive and rely on user-generated content (photos and videos taken by the public and submitted to newsroom for potential publication), some of which may involve potentially traumatic situations. Feinstein et al. (2013) looked at psychological impacts in newsroom journalists witnessing violent images (Feinstein et al., 2013). More than 40 percent of respondents indicated they're exposed to user-generated content daily (Feinstein et al., 2013). The findings indicated higher scores on indices measuring PTSD, depression, and psychological distress (Feinstein et al., 2013).

Smith et al.'s study on journalists covering traumatic news stories looked at more than 160 journalists from different organizations at risk for PTSD following their coverage of work-related traumatic stories (Smith et al., 2018). More than 79 percent were witnesses to potentially traumatic events as part of their job. Nearly 10 percent of the sample's participants met criteria for probable PTSD.

So far, we've looked at potentially traumatic impacts from events that occur on an often basis, such as car accidents, illness, and death. But what about journalists having trauma training and resources to help them before and after exposures in the field?

Trauma Training and Resources

With various examples of exposure to potentially traumatic events among journalists, what about training for workers within this industry to prepare them for these types of events? Studies address the lack thereof, and need for trauma training in the classroom, and potentially on the job, for journalists and those studying to be journalists upon graduating from college.

Maxson interviewed more than three dozen journalism graduates in terms of whether they received some type of trauma training (Maxson, 2000). Of 41 journalists who were interviewed, 14 took part in trauma training. Maxson added, "Several interviewees spoke of the lack of

sensitivity the producer/editor felt for the job of the reporter and the privacy of the victim,” (p. 82) when it came to newsroom priorities in accordance with protecting victims (Maxson, 2000). Furthermore, all 41 who were interviewed for this study indicated trauma training would be “a potentially useful exercise” (p. 84).

Seely (2020) examines trauma training in her study of 254 print journalists, and the extent of their preparation for trauma on the job while in school (Seely, 2020). Those who got some education of trauma reported higher levels of being aware to traumatic effects, such as anxious thoughts, sadness, and guilt (Seely, 2020). More than half of respondents, 53 percent, reported never getting any sort of trauma training.

Hill et al. (2020) also looks at preparing future journalists for traumatic events being a part of their work expectations. The authors argue journalists experiencing work-related trauma can be susceptible to mental health issues, including PTSD and burnout (Hill et al., 2020). The study also looked at worldwide studies addressing limited number of courses focused on trauma training for journalism students. Just 12 percent of universities within the United States offered trauma and journalism work classes (Hill et al., 2020). The group recommends putting in classroom training, making sure “essential” contacts, literature and resources are available and making sure normalization of reactions to trauma while working in journalism are promoted (Hill et al., 2020).

Weiss (2013) detailed research posted on the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, in which roughly 93 percent of journalism educators surveyed said their college or department did not offer any classes in crisis training or trauma (Weiss, 2013). Also, 73 percent of respondents indicated interest in teaching a course on this subject to future journalism students (Weiss, 2013).

Aside from the need for trauma training, one report addresses media companies being held accountable for protecting their employees. Calumbrian (2021) breaks down a specific case involving *The Age*, an Australian media company, being found responsible in court for one of their former journalist's psychological traumas (Calumbrian, 2021). The author calls the case "a wake-up call" to media companies around the world (Calumbrian, 2021). According to Calumbrian, the journalist, known in the case as "YZ," filed a lawsuit against *The Age* for PTSD she claimed she accumulated while covering traumatic events, including 30 murders, gang-related crimes, suicides, car crashes and natural disasters. The court said the company provided "insufficient psychological support" to the journalist, and "YZ" was awarded \$180,000 in damages due to PTSD. In conclusion, the study argues the need for media companies and journalists to be more open regarding mental health issues, giving journalists the option of choosing whether to cover an event that may be psychologically harmful to them. It also allows us to ask the question to interview participants in this research whether journalists have received any trauma training before starting their career, or at any point during their career. Also, what do they believe can help TV news field journalists who consistently cover breaking news and severe weather on the front lines?

Approach and RQ

Past studies indicate journalists face significant risks of developing mental health issues, including PTSD, through covering traumatic events. Numerous reports have detailed exact conditions, including PTSD. They've also identified exact assignments on what journalists, including those with field experience in TV news, have covered, how they justify continuing to cover these types of events and advocating for more company accountability and trauma training at schools for both current and prospective journalists. However, there's little, if any, research on

looking at the impacts TV news field journalists who consistently cover both breaking news and severe weather as part of their expected job duties. Also, no research could be found regarding the application of the cognitive appraisal theory to mental health impacts surrounding TV news field journalists. This study will work to fill those gaps. By doing so, the following research question is posed: What are the mental health impacts TV news field crews experience from consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather? To answer this question, semi-structured interviews with TV news field journalists will be conducted to look at their career experience, including covering traumatic events related to breaking news and severe weather, questions guided by the framework of the cognitive appraisal theory, any training and/or resources to help them following their experiences, and their view on any areas of opportunity to help fellow TV news field journalists who cover breaking news and severe weather regularly.

METHODOLOGY

The primary sources for this research will be 10 field journalists in television news (reporters and photojournalists). My sampling frame will be those with TV news field experience from 2015-2022. It will also consist of the following option: 10 field journalists from WTKR-TV/WGNT-TV, the CBS and CW affiliates for the Norfolk-Portsmouth-Newport News market, and other commercial TV news stations owned by the same station ownership group, The E.W. Scripps Company. By going outside the Norfolk-Portsmouth-Newport News market, it allows the research not to be limited to simply one geographical area, yet still maintain the case study approach. Executing the project as a case study within the E.W. Scripps Company allows for attainable expectations when recruiting participants, as well as a potential publication opportunity to help address any issues related to this area problem of journalism within the TV news industry. The E.W. Scripps Company also has stations in a variety of different areas around the United States, therefore, giving the project potential to gather a variety of results amongst TV news field journalists (i.e., hurricanes vs. tornadoes).

I have approval from WTKR's News Director and General Manager for this option. If the opportunity would lend itself, I would like to speak with someone with a management position either at WTKR/WGNT or The E.W. Scripps Company about findings from interviews with the field journalists, any personal experiences the manager has had, and how does the manager address this area problem of journalism to help the industry and employees at large. As of now, the exact participants are still to be determined.

Semi-structured interviews will be the primary method for this research. According to Jamshed (2014), semi-structured interviews are interviews with depth where participants must answer preset open-ended questions (Jamshed, 2014). This method seeks to allow participants to

provide responses with some flexibility pertaining to a vast amount of information about their career, including their own personal experience covering traumatic events related to breaking news and severe weather, questions guided by the framework of the cognitive appraisal theory, any training and/or resources to help them following their experiences, and their view on any areas of opportunity to help fellow TV news field journalists who cover breaking news and severe weather regularly. The goal is to find any thematic analyses to address the main issue of TV news field journalists' mental health impacts related to consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather.

There's a lot of flexibility with semi-structured interviews, as researchers can vary the order of questions and ask follow-up questions to get deeper into the topics addressed or clarify participants' responses (Brennen, 2013). Other benefits for the use of semi-structured interviews in qualitative research are allowing informants freedom to express views in their own terms, as well as providing reliable, comparable qualitative data (Cohen, 2006). While there are arguably many strengths to semi-structure interviews for qualitative research, there are also weaknesses. One being the possibility of data loss when interviews are not conducted face-to-face (i.e., through online video conferencing tools) or written interviews (Kakilla, 2021). Also, it's not ideal for group settings because the method requires active listening (Kakilla, 2021). Therefore, this is why interviews will be conducted individually.

For WTKR/WGNT, these interviews will be audio and video recorded and conducted either through Zoom or in person at their Norfolk, VA newsroom. These participants will be recruited in person. As for any other interviews outside of WTKR/WGNT, they will be conducted on virtual video conference due to travel and time constraints related to completing this research. These participants will also have the choice of using either pseudonyms or project

identification numbers if they do not want to use their names in this research. They will also have the choice of whether they'd want their recorded interview to be displayed as part of this research project's final presentation, as well as the option to review the video elements regarding their recorded interview prior to the project's presentation.

The following is a list of sample semi-structured interview questions for TV news field journalists involved in this study:

Basic Information

- What Is your name and job title?
- How many years have you worked at your current job?
- How many years have you worked in as a TV news field journalist?
- What other job titles have you held?
- What types of responsibilities come with your job?
- What types of responsibilities came with your previous job?
- What made you want to get into journalism as a career?

Experience Covering Consistent Breaking News and Severe Weather

- Throughout your career, how often have you had to cover breaking news and severe weather in the field?
- Is there a particular news event that stands out to you?
- Why does that particular news event stand out to you?
- Has consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather on the job impacted you personally?
- Has consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather guided your career path?

Cognitive Appraisal Theory

- When you're sent to a breaking news or severe weather assignment in the field, what immediately goes through your mind?
- When you arrive at the scene of a breaking news or severe weather assignment, are there any particular stressors that come to mind you experience on a consistent basis?
- When you come across something at a breaking news and severe weather scene, how do you assess and cope with the situation?
- Do you regularly exhibit any emotional responses when covering breaking news and severe weather?
- How do you assess constantly going to cover breaking news or severe weather events that can be traumatic?

Moving Forward

- How has consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather in the field shape you as a journalist and impact your career?
- Did you receive any trauma training before or during your career to help you with this type of coverage?
- What resources, if any, have been available to help your mental health from covering these events?
- Are there areas of opportunities you'd like companies to explore when it comes to helping the mental health of field journalists who have covered consistent breaking news and severe weather?

Below are sample questions for the psychologist or mental health worker:

Basic Information

- What Is your name and job title?

- How many years have you worked at your current job?
- What is your experience in evaluating factors related to mental health?
- What is your experience been working with TV news field journalists on mental health?

Evaluating Findings

- Without giving an exact diagnosis, what factors are you seeing when it comes to responses from these field journalists related to consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather
- How can this type of exposure impact someone's personal and professional life?
- Any areas of opportunities for companies to help employees from this perspective?

Below are sample questions for the TV news manager, if applicable:

Basic Information

- What Is your name and job title?
- How many years have you worked at your current job?
- Do you have any experience working as a field journalist in TV news? If so, what and for how long?

Experience Covering Consistent Breaking News and Severe Weather

- At your current position, how often has your news organization had to cover breaking news and severe weather in the field?
- Is there a particular traumatic event that stands out to you, personally or professionally?
- How, if applicable, has that impacted your professional life?
- Why does that particular traumatic event stand out to you?
- Has consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather on the job impacted you personally?

- Has consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather guided your career path?

Moving Forward

- How has consistent coverage of breaking news and severe weather in the field shape you as a journalist and impact your career?
- What resources, if any, have been available to help you and your station's employees' mental health from covering these events?
- Are there areas of opportunities you'd like companies to explore when it comes to helping the mental health of field journalists who have covered consistent breaking news and severe weather?

The reason why I chose WTKR-TV/WGNT-TV as one of the stations to recruit participants is because it's currently where I work. WTKR-TV/WGNT-TV also has covered a variety of breaking news and severe weather events, which benefits this project's sampling frame. I also believe 10 field journalists is a good round number given the time constraints to execute this research project.

I plan to conduct the interviews with the field journalists first. After that, the interview with the manager, if applicable, will follow. Once the interviews are gathered, they will be stored via OneDrive and will be transcribed with Otter. The transcribed responses will be shown in written form, and with some participants with permission, they will be shown as part of a video presentation with PowerPoint slides to illustrate the findings in this study. As far as publication goals, I intend to pitch this to the Reynolds Journalism Institute and The E.W. Scripps Company. The hopes are this will help create a conversation to help TV news field journalists who often cover breaking news and severe weather events and lead to a standard set for companies in terms

of making sure their employees have all the resources they need to help them continue serving their communities.

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