Headlines

promoting mental health in the media

Working with mind

Vicarious Trauma

A guide for journalists and newsrooms to recognise vicarious trauma and mitigate against it

This guide will look at what vicarious trauma is and why it affects journalists – and then detail some of its signs and symptoms. It will also reference trauma and its individual impacts, and offer practical suggestions for individuals and newsroom leaders on how to prepare for exposure to disturbing material.

It will also signpost to additional resources where further support may be needed.

These insights are drawn from our experience of the journalism industry, and contributions from Mind, the mental health charity. We also include good-practice tips from practitioners in the field of journalism, experts in trauma reporting and clinicians.

Introduction

What is vicarious trauma?

'Trauma' comes from the Greek word for wound

'Vicarious' derives from the Latin, meaning taking the place of another

Vicarious trauma is exposure to someone else's trauma. It can have a significant mental health impact and, if not mitigated against or treated effectively, can be a pathway to post-traumatic stress disorder.

It's an individual experience

What's traumatic is personal. Other people can't fully know how we feel about our own experiences or whether they were traumatic for us. We might have similar experiences to someone else, but be affected differently. We may also find something traumatic at one stage in our lives, but not another.

In our day-to-day work, we may all come across potentially traumatic events and experiences. Not all of us will find them traumatic.

Something being traumatic is a combination of the following:

- The event
- The timing of the event
- What is going on in that person's life
- That person's history and identity

Trauma can sometimes directly cause mental health problems, or make someone more vulnerable to developing them. Some conditions are also known to develop as a direct result of trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and complex post-traumatic stress disorder (complex PTSD).

How can it impact journalists?

As journalists we can experience vicarious trauma through exposure to violent, distressing or graphic material across all forms of media, such as:

• Interviewing survivors of trauma

• Hearing distressing testimony

• Researching stories, both written and visual

• Encountering violent images online

• Through user-generated content

• Witnessing the aftermath of traumatic incidents

• Fact-checking, misinformation and disinformation

• Online harassment

It's natural to feel sad, angry, and frustrated when we bear witness to the suffering of others, or after we are exposed to traumatic material. Generally, these responses are short-lived and do not impact our daily lives.

However, vicarious trauma can become a reality when individuals are exposed frequently or repeatedly to traumatic material – and can result in symptoms that endure, affecting our mental and physical wellbeing. In addition, there are occasions when someone may experience vicarious trauma through a single event.

Journalists who have previously experienced trauma, even where it is not related to their work, or those who identify with aspects of the graphic content, may be impacted more.

The signs and symptoms of vicarious trauma

Sadness, anger, frustration, and other emotions are normal responses when we bear witness to the trauma of others. However, sometimes such feelings continue beyond a few days and could, along with other signs, be symptoms of vicarious trauma.

According to Professor Anthony Feinstein, who has spent decades researching the impact of journalists' work on their wellbeing, symptoms take on clinical significance when they:

• **Interfere with work**

• **Disrupt relationships**

• **Cause distress**

• **Create combinations of the above factors**

These symptoms vary from person to person, and can be physical, psychological and behavioural. Learning to recognise your body's normal response to an abnormal experience is helpful.
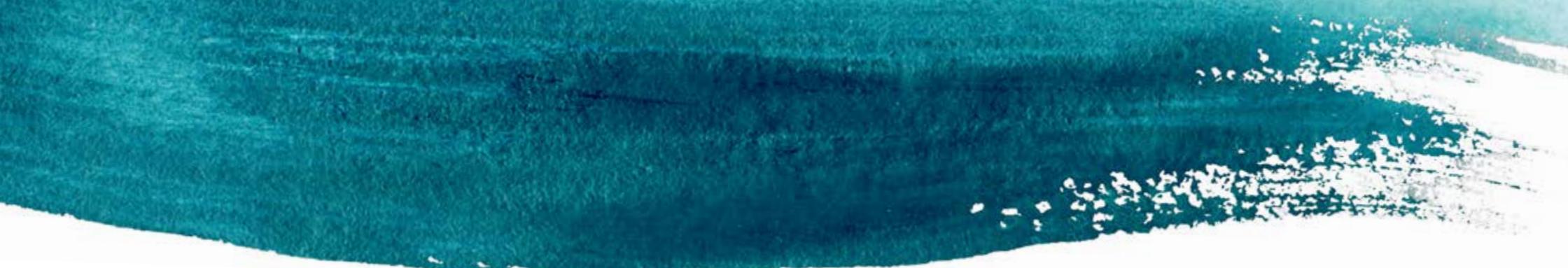
Mental health effects of trauma

According to the mental health charity Mind, the side effects of trauma can develop into more pronounced mental health symptoms. Mind has this **list of useful contacts** to explain what trauma is, how it can affect your mental health and how you can seek help. If you are experiencing any of the following, we strongly suggest you speak with your doctor or GP.

- **Flashbacks:** reliving aspects of a traumatic event or feeling as if it is happening now, which can happen whether or not someone can remember specific details of it.

- **Panic attacks:** a type of fear response. They're an exaggeration of the body's response to danger, stress or excitement.

- **Dissociation:** one way the mind copes with overwhelming stress. A person might feel numb, spaced out, detached from their body or as though the world around them is unreal.

- **Hyperarousal:** feeling very anxious, on edge and unable to relax. A person might be constantly looking out for threats or danger.

- **Sleep problems:** someone might find it hard to fall or stay asleep, feel unsafe at night, or feel anxious or afraid of having nightmares.

- **Low self-esteem:** trauma can affect the way someone values and perceives themselves.

- **Grief:** experiencing a loss can be traumatic; this includes someone dying but also extends to other types of loss. A person can feel that trauma has caused them to miss out on some things in life, which can also lead to feelings of loss.

- **Self-harm:** hurting oneself as a way of trying to cope. This could include harming parts of their body which were attacked or injured during the trauma.

- **Suicidal feelings:** including a person being preoccupied by thoughts of ending their life, thinking about methods of suicide or making plans to take their own life.

- **Alcohol and substance misuse:** a way someone might try to cope with difficult emotions or memories.

What is dissociation?

Dissociation has two components:

1. Detachment from the overwhelming experience

2. Compartmentalisation of the experience.

When something is overwhelming and there is no escape, the body freezes and the mind dissociates as a way to survive.

When the event is over, the experience is put away – compartmentalised – as though it goes into a room in the mind and the door closes, but not always completely. This is one reason why people later experience symptoms like nightmares or flashbacks to the event.

If dissociation becomes the go-to response to threat, it can be useful to learn grounding techniques to help a person stay present.

Mitigating against the risk of vicarious trauma

Graphic content that can lead to vicarious trauma has been described by Gavin Rees at the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma as radioactive or toxic material. Its impact is cumulative. With this in mind, it's important we are able to limit our exposure.

When we are preparing to cover dangerous assignments, there are steps we can take before, during and after the story. These can help us to prepare for our work, understand the risks we might face to our safety and mitigate against them, and ensure we have robust support structures after we return from these assignments.

We can use a similar process for vicarious trauma, thinking about how we can prepare, protect ourselves during exposure, and support ourselves afterwards.

We have separated suggestions into four areas (noting that there may be crossover between sections).

Self-care

Technical tips and ways of working

Supporting colleagues

Changes to newsroom culture

> "I am now more aware of what my triggers are. I feel more confident that this is not something we need to be ashamed of. You now know which stories are much more difficult to cover. I actually don't think that's a weakness. It's a strength because you then take more care and consideration when it comes to tackling those particular issues as a journalist.

– Dhruti Shah, freelance journalist

1. Self-care

Prioritising general wellbeing during times of heightened stress is vital: we should ensure we **take breaks, stay hydrated and eat properly.**

- **The first two letters of mental health start with 'me'.** We will be more effective in our journalism and helping others, if we look after ourselves.

- **Prepare yourself.** If you're about to engage with something graphic, it makes sense to prepare yourself emotionally for what you're about to be exposed to and to remind yourself of the purpose of your work.

- **Breaks, exercise, hydration, eating.** Being connected to the news often finds us tied to our screens. It's important to remember to eat well, stay hydrated and ensure we move physically.

- **Ensure you switch off.** Giving yourself permission to disconnect, silence notifications or delete certain apps, can help you rest, recalibrate and return to work better able to do your journalism.

- **Sleep well.** Create a routine where you step away from your laptop or phone. Try to avoid viewing disturbing imagery close to bedtime, and – where possible – ensure you don't view them in the same place you sleep, or relax.

- **Find something meaningful to you outside of journalism.** It's healthy to have a pastime where we can switch off from professional life: be that meditation, mindfulness, exercise or sport, being out in nature, creative practice (writing and art) or something else.

- **Establish a way of checking in with those you trust who recognise what you are going through.** You can have formal lines of communication with someone you report into. But if you don't feel able to speak with a line manager, it can help to speak with a trusted work colleague. It may be more difficult to have these conversations with those closer to home, who work outside journalism.
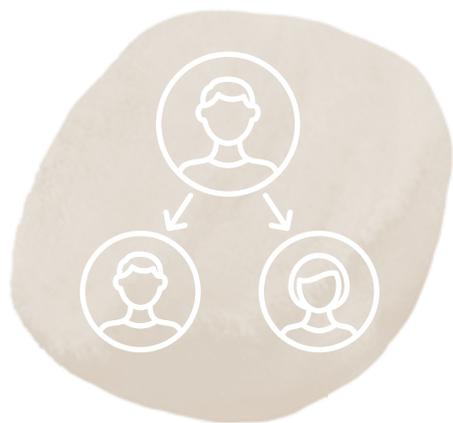
The pandemic reduced our ability to be spontaneous and distanced us physically from colleagues. But connecting with people we trust is important, especially when we have experienced something difficult, so we should try to build a network of peers to connect with for support and solidarity.

> " Sit down and have a little mantra: 'I'm going to be doing research on Ukraine now. I might see something horrible, and I'm prepared to see something horrible.' You can put up your own bulletproof glass before you start researching, watching or listening to this content.

– Sam Dubberley, Human Rights Watch

> " Limit what content you look at in terms of time, or in terms of space, or in terms of the way you view it. Minimise what you're looking at on your screen, potentially with your audio muted if possible. If you need to focus on one specific thing within that image, sometimes that's easier. Resist the temptation to endlessly scroll backwards and forwards through things. Remember to really take breaks and recognise the purpose, the meaning and the motivation behind why you're doing this. You're doing this for a reason.

– Hannah Storm, Headlines Network

2. Technical tips and ways of working

Limiting exposure: time, length, size and sound. If a journalist needs to read, view or engage with graphic content, there are several ways to minimise its potential impact.

- **Actively schedule breaks away from the content.** It is often tempting to keep going, so it can be helpful to schedule reminders to take breaks. When you do so, try to change your environment and get away from the material, both mentally and physically. If you can, try to work out when your best working time is – is it in the morning or evening?

- **If working from home, try to keep a specific place for viewing work material.** Home and work life blurred during the pandemic. We may still need to work from places where we normally relax – bedrooms, kitchens, living areas – or in shared living spaces. Consider if there is a way to specifically separate your personal and professional life, especially where there's a chance the material you're exposed to may be unsettling.

- **Minimise your screen.** If you don't need to see every tiny detail of the image you're working on, consider minimising the screen. Doing so may reduce the impact on you of traumatic/graphic material.

- **Break down the sequence to create a panorama.** If you're verifying content and have to go into a video to analyse granular details, you can create a panorama by taking a series of screen captures of the video and aligning them to create a still image. This means you can avoid scrolling through a video to examine details in different frames.

- **Start with the sound off.** The audio aspect of material can be distressing – be that the sound of others in pain or grief, or noises related to violence, such as weapon fire. We don't always need to hear the sounds to know what is happening, and we rarely need to hear the sound on first exposure to that material. Consider muting the audio, either the first time, or throughout, or lowering the levels.

- **Building distance.** Experiment with different ways of building some distance into how you view images. Some people find it helpful to concentrate on certain details, such as clothes, and avoiding others.

- **Limit scrolling.** Vicarious trauma often comes as a result of repeated or continuous exposure to graphic images. Therefore, when you can, try to avoid scrolling backwards and forwards through troublesome material.

- **Know the brief.** Being clear about what is required and sticking to that brief will help you avoid going down rabbit holes or off on tangents. This will help limit exposure to non-essential material.

- **Create a buffer between work and home lives.** This might mean creating an artificial commute or having a ritual that marks the end of the work day – such as making a cup of tea, changing out of certain clothing, or simply shutting your laptop and taking a break.

> " If you're in a newsroom or office where you've got colleagues around you, you have opportunities to vent straight away and say: 'Oh, my goodness, this is just awful. I can't believe this is happening.' But if you're working by yourself or isolated in your own home, you don't have those people immediately around you to have that moment. One of the things that I found really effective is to have a few colleagues who I have regular drop-ins with once every couple of weeks. We might talk about nice stuff. But then we'll also talk about things we have found challenging over the last couple of weeks.
>
> **– Natasha Hirst, freelance photographer**

> " It's important that if you lead a team, you create a culture where it's ok to talk about the challenges of reporting remotely. If you're not creating that culture in a team, you're setting yourself up for problems down the road. Setting up that culture, however, is hard. It feels very contrived – because it often is. You have to work through that first bit of pain of saying: 'Hey, we're going to talk about feelings. We're going to talk about how everyone's doing.'
>
> **– Sam Dubberley, Human Rights Watch**

3. Supporting colleagues

- **When sharing material, ask yourself if it needs to be shared.** If you're passing on disturbing material to a newsroom colleague, consider if it's absolutely necessary for them to be exposed to the content. In other words, is it likely that this material will be used in output or to help verify output?

- **If it does need to be shared, warn people in advance what they are going to be exposed to.** Create a way in your content management systems, archives or spreadsheets to flag distressing material and to record what has been viewed. This can help avoid unnecessary duplication or over-exposure. Remember others we may not immediately consider who might be exposed to toxic material, such as IT workers, archivists and receptionists. The Film & TV Charity has **this link** which may be helpful to journalism colleagues.

- **Be aware of the signs and signals that someone might be struggling.** Are colleagues acting out of character – such as being argumentative or unusually quiet? A simple 'are you ok?' can elicit a response.

- **Offer to speak with them or find someone they can trust.** If a colleague is struggling, offer to be a listening ear. Or with their permission, approach someone in management who the colleague feels comfortable speaking to.

- **Have regular check-ins – particularly when working from home.** It's harder to spot if people are struggling when they are working in a distributed or remote setting. Having regular virtual as well as physical check-ins allows people who are largely working solo to flag up any potential issues. Set aside time for this in shared calendars.
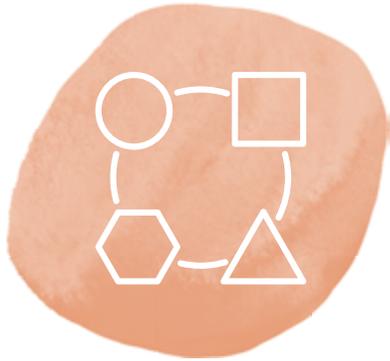
4. Changes to newsroom culture

Actively create a culture that acknowledges it's hard to deal with graphic material. It may feel awkward to begin a newsroom conversation talking about feelings, but creating a space where journalists can speak freely about disturbing content is a valuable step towards creating a healthier newsroom culture. Modelling good leadership means that showing vulnerability isn't a sign of weakness.

- **Newsroom leaders must help** set the tone. Less experienced journalists may want to talk about the impact of their work on their wellbeing. However, they may feel intimidated in doing so because of concerns that speaking about their mental health might impact the stories they are given to cover. Younger journalists may likewise try to go that extra mile to prove themselves, even if leaders say not to. Leaders need to be attuned to this.

- **Creating boundaries.** Smaller news organisations might not provide access to separate work phone or laptop devices, but if yours does, they are a great way to separate your professional and personal life.

- **Be aware of people's background and lived experiences.** Talk to people about what they're comfortable covering. Our individual identities and experiences may impact how we are affected by stories, but they do not necessarily mean we should cover them all the time, or, conversely, not cover them.

- **Remind people of the value and purpose of their work.** Engaging with disturbing content can be tough, but as journalists we should remind ourselves – and be reminded by those who manage newsrooms – that we are doing valuable work to bring important stories to the general public.

- **Create spaces to connect colleagues with each other.** Are there opportunities for newsroom colleagues to talk about some of the difficult content they engage with? Being able to share your feelings in a safe space can be invaluable.

- **As line managers, check in with your team and individuals.** Don't assume your team is coping. Ask them if they are ok. Create space in team meetings to discuss how people are doing and to connect as a team – it's not just about rushing through the daily story list. Be open to sharing your feelings as well. And make sure someone is checking on you too.

- **Promote listening in a non-judgemental way.** Listen, don't try to fix or judge. Sometimes all someone might want is a colleague to open up to.

Considerations for news leaders

It's important for news leaders to recognise the reality of vicarious trauma, to model good leadership and kindness and to help create cultures where people can openly and honestly communicate. Here are some additional collated tips for managers and those in positions of responsibility in newsrooms:

Before

- **Acknowledge the risk of vicarious trauma.** Until we name it, talk about it and see it as a reality, we can't understand the risk that it poses.

- **The right to say no.** Ensure people know they can say no to a task if they need to without fear of it harming their career.

- **Expectation management.** When assigning people to cover graphic material, ensure you speak with colleagues about your expectations. Explain in advance that what they see might be difficult, remind them to limit their exposure, and check in with them afterwards.

- **Make an effort to understand your staff.** Be aware of factors that might make some individuals more vulnerable to viewing certain types of material, but also ensure those people can choose if they want to continue on this work without fear of repercussions.

- **Hybrid thinking.** Create the spaces for those who need to be in the office, noting some younger colleagues may be exposed to graphic material in a more isolated setting.

During

- **Encourage colleagues to take breaks.** You can model good management by showing that you take regular breaks yourself. Ask if your team members have taken a break.

- **Freelance perspective.** When hiring freelancers, ensure they have the relevant support. Freelancers are often overlooked when it comes to mental health support and frequently experience different circumstances compared to staff.

- **Validate and value.** Acknowledge, congratulate and thank people for their work and achievements, and recognise the purpose behind what you and they are doing. This applies to all in the team, not just the most visible.

- **Communication lines.** Have regular conversations with staff – especially those who are working remotely, or who may be isolated by other circumstances.

- **Spread the load.** Rotate people around and ensure those who have stressful tasks are able to decompress with less stressful ones.

After

- **After effects.** Be aware journalists can experience vicarious trauma often months or years down the line.

- **Spot the signs.** Look out for any unusual emotions or behaviours from staff, particularly if they are working from home or in a hybrid environment when you don't have the opportunity to regularly see them in person.

- **We are all individuals.** Recognise that different people will have different reactions to distressing content. Also recognise that people's own mental health can improve or decline over periods of time.

- **Check in with people.** Allow them the space to speak about their experiences and listen in a non-judgemental way.

- **Supporting colleagues.** Strengthen peer support, perhaps through a buddy system, as it's often easier to speak freely with colleagues than a boss.

- **Employee Assistance Programmes.** Have an accessible, confidential counselling service that you remind people about (not just in emails that people don't read). It might catch them on the day they most need it.

Conversations around vicarious trauma in journalism

Vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress were terms identified in the mid-1990s. However, conversations around their impact on journalists did not really begin until the early 2010s when graphic eyewitness media from the Arab Spring emerged on social media.

Eyewitness media (or user-generated content) is media captured by people who are not professional journalists and are not related to a news organisation.

In the race to harness the potential from eyewitness media, some news organisations failed to consider the impact that watching distressing content might have on their staff.

In particular, the task of researching graphic material, especially that surfacing from digital spaces, often fell to those relatively new to the industry, or those whose backgrounds meant they might identify with the material (e.g. linguistically, as Arabic speakers). There was also limited training or support around how to process frequent exposure to distressing content.

Acknowledging vicarious trauma as a reality

In 2014, Professor Anthony Feinstein, who had previously studied the impact of journalists' work on their mental health, conducted research into the emotional effect of prolonged exposure to graphic user-generated content. His work showed for the first time that while journalists were not directly experiencing danger, being exposed frequently to traumatic material was very difficult.

Mark Little, co-founder Kinzen

Mark Little worked as a TV presenter for the Irish public broadcaster RTE and reported from conflict zones before founding the social media agency Storyful. It was one of the first organisations to understand the importance of verifying news sources and online content – particularly as social media became a vehicle for the dissemination of user-generated content as anti-government protests took hold across the Middle East and North Africa.

'We were eyewitness journalists operating online – but of course going nowhere near a front line,' Little explained. 'But we were seeing the Arab uprisings and the first beheading videos… I remember realising that our journalists working on laptops in Dublin were witnessing more horrific and gruesome imagery than I had ever seen in war zones.'

Sam Dubberley, Human Rights Watch

'Prior to then, in breaking-news situations, news organisations had historically relied upon stories from news agencies or state broadcasters before they could deploy their own staff.

'Even when foreign correspondents parachuted in, the video sent back was highly filtered, with gory context often removed before it even hit the editing room. Videos posted to social media changed this. They offered a different side of the story – a perspective from the ground.

'Journalists could see the benefit in seeking out and embedding such video within their stories – on the death of Colonel Qaddafi, or the siege of Homs, or the rise of Daesh. News desks began to value skills in sourcing and verifying social media content for publication.'

Shortly after, the American Psychiatric Association revised the criteria in its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) to include indirect exposure to trauma as a potential source of PTSD. By doing this, it recognised that exposure to a relentless flow of traumatic images in one's line of work – as may be the case for journalists – can be a significant stressor for post-traumatic stress disorder.

The need to take it seriously now

In the past decade, vicarious trauma has become more widely recognised in the journalism industry. However, it is still regarded as a less valid issue than the emotional toll of covering stories directly.

Resources are rightly being put into training and equipping journalists working directly in hostile environments – from risk assessments to debriefs, flak jackets to first aid kits – but far less thought is given to those exposed to graphic content.

Even in 2022, at Headlines Network we hear of news editors who do not consider it seriously. They think people are not reporting from the field. However, the digital beat is still a type of field, just not a geographical one.

What has changed in recent years?

The Covid-19 pandemic brought a new layer of complexity to news reporting. Journalists, who were on the frontline telling people's stories, also put themselves in harm's way, and were often covering communities of which they were a part.

Elana Newman, a research director at the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, said at the time: 'Journalists are currently bearing witness to individual and collective grief at high levels.'

Pandemic working also changed the circumstances in which we viewed and read material. We were doing so remotely, amid increasing levels of exhaustion, unable to turn to a colleague sitting alongside us, faced with the blurred realities of work and personal life. Many of us were living and experiencing the pandemic as much as those on whom we reported.

Many journalism outfits have now introduced hybrid working. This is where work is either undertaken from home, the office, or hot-desking – where journalists find themselves sitting next to new people each time they are in the physical newsroom.

Working from home can increase your sense of loneliness, as well as potentially impacting a manager's ability to spot the signs of poor mental health and then provide support.

Disturbing new trends to be aware of: trust, disinformation, fact-checking, online harassment

The rise of social media over the past decade has brought with it additional factors that expose journalists to the risk of vicarious trauma. Dealing with misinformation and disinformation takes its toll on those interacting with false narratives, while the rise in online harassment and the diminishing sense of trust in the news media also has an impact.

Recent crises and conflicts, including Afghanistan, Ukraine, Myanmar and Yemen, have also seen journalists reporting remotely, as well as in person, with the vicarious trauma adding to the overall sense of exhaustion and burnout felt across the industry after the past few years.

Validation and recognition of our responsibilities and roles as journalists can give us a sense of agency and accountability and help us manage our mental health. It can help combat feelings of guilt about reporting from a 'safe distance' or the sensation of being powerless to disinformation and wanting to 'do more to help'.

When we face times of uncertainty, it is important to recognise what we can and cannot control and to practise activities that give us agency.

So while we cannot control conflicts or the content of graphic images from warzones, we may be able to choose how and when we interact with them.

Trust in journalism has also fallen as its practitioners have found themselves under attack from political figures and governments.

Online harassment is much more acute than it was ten years ago – and this also feeds into vicarious trauma. Women and journalists from marginalised backgrounds or groups are particularly targeted with harassment that is often deeply personal, sexualised or racist, just for doing their jobs.

It's an important and often overlooked area that does impact on journalists' well-being and one we are doing further work on at Headlines Network.

Dr Sian Williams is a registered psychologist, journalist and writer

'The thing about journalists is that one of the reasons we are resilient is we tend to sort of bend with stuff… we know it's part of the job, we know there'll be another one coming along soon. So you need to be able to ride with those events, and have downtimes, times to reflect and process, before you go into the next one. I think the difference now is that there's been a high sustained event with the pandemic… And that psychological flex, that bend, that we would normally have might not be there.'
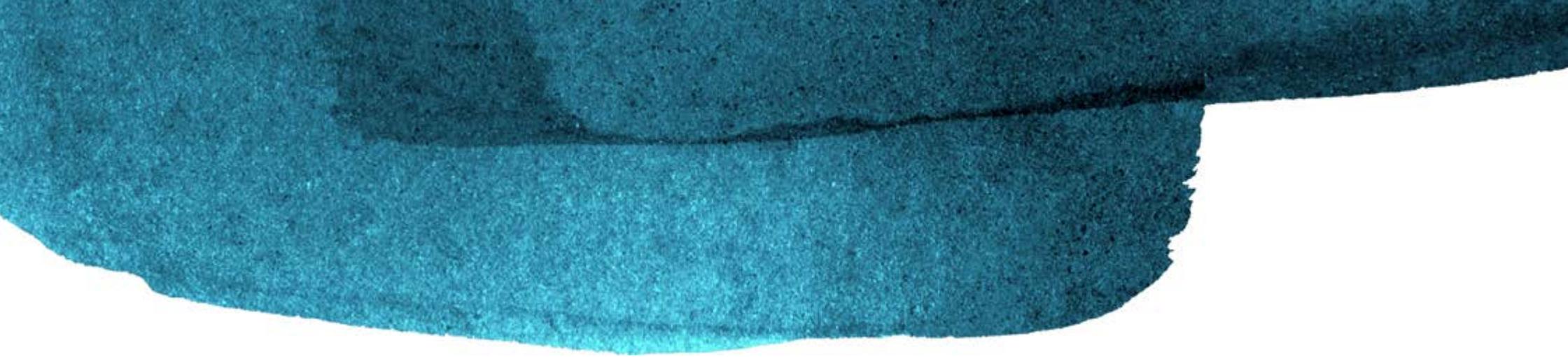
Signposting to support/further resources

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma

🌐 **www.dartcenter.org**

A resource hub and global network of journalists, journalism educators and health professionals dedicated to improving media coverage of trauma, conflict and tragedy. It is a project of Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in New York City, with international offices in London and Melbourne.

Journalist Trauma Support Network

🌐 **www.jtsn.org**

The Journalist Trauma Support Network (JTSN) is a programme of the Dart Center. It is aiming to establish an international community of qualified therapists trained to care for trauma-impacted journalists. To best serve journalists, it provides therapists with cultural competence and data security training, peer support and referral pathways.

Trust for Trauma Journalism

🌐 **www.traumajournalism.org**

The organisation works with journalists "before, during, and after they go into harm's way," bolstering their resilience and ensuring much-needed services and support. Its mission is to provide funding to sustain global initiatives that prepare news professionals for the impact of covering traumatic events.

The Film and TV Charity

🌐 **www.wholepicturetoolkit.org.uk**

The Film and TV Charity supports people behind the scenes in the UK film and television industry at every stage of their career and beyond. The 'Whole Picture Toolkit' is created by people within the film and TV industry, with support from the mental health charity Mind, to help place mental health at the heart of any production, whatever size it is or stage it's at. Many of their insights and best practices apply to colleagues in the journalism industry.

Mental health and wellbeing

Helpful definitions (provided by Mind)

For the purpose of clarity, when we refer to 'mental health' in this guide we are using it in the broadest possible sense. Some useful definitions to terms used in this guide can be found below.

Mental health
We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. How we feel can vary from good mental wellbeing to difficult feelings and emotions, to severe mental health problems.

Mental wellbeing
Mental wellbeing is the ability to cope with the day-to-day stresses of life, work productively, interact positively with others and realise our own potential. When we talk about wellbeing we are referring to mental wellbeing.

Poor mental health
Poor mental health is when we are struggling with low mood, stress or anxiety. This might mean we're also coping with feeling restless, confused, short tempered, upset or preoccupied. We all go through periods of experiencing poor mental health – mental health is a spectrum of moods and experiences and we all have times when we feel better or worse.

Mental health problems
We all have times when we struggle with our mental health. A mental health problem is when difficult experiences or feelings go on for a long time and affect our ability to enjoy and live our lives in the way we want. You might receive a specific diagnosis from your doctor, or just feel more generally that you are experiencing a prolonged period of poor mental health.

Common mental health problems
These include depression, anxiety, phobias and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). These make up the majority of the problems that lead to one in four people experiencing a mental health problem in any given year. Symptoms can range from the comparatively mild to very severe.

Severe mental health problems
These include conditions like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, which are less common. They can have very varied symptoms and affect your everyday life to different degrees, and may require more complex and/or long-term treatments.

Work-related stress
Work-related stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them at work. Stress, including work-related stress, can be a significant cause of illness. It is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and other issues such as increased capacity for error. Stress is not a medical diagnosis, but severe stress that continues for a long time may lead to a diagnosis of depression or anxiety, or other mental health problems.

Burnout
Burnout is a term used to describe a collection of experiences caused by long-term, unmanageable stress at work. Burnout can make people feel exhausted or unmotivated. People may start to feel distanced from or negative about their job. And they may worry that they're not achieving enough at work. Burnout can affect mental and physical health. It can also impact work performance.

Acknowledgements

Headlines
promoting mental health in the media

Headlines Network comprises founder Hannah Storm and John Crowley. Over the last two decades they have led newsrooms, journalism safety charities and run news sites. Both are qualified mental health first aiders and bring knowledge and lived experience around mental wellbeing. **headlines-network.com**

Working with **mind**

Mind is the leading mental health charity in England and Wales (registered charity number 219830). Mind provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. Mind campaigns to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding. **mind.org.uk**

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