LEADING RESILIENCE

A GUIDE FOR EDITORS AND NEWS MANAGERS

Working with Journalists in Ukraine

DART CENTER FOR JOURNALISM & TRAUMA

acos ALLIANCE

This booklet is adapted from a previous guide written and produced by Dr. Cait McMahon and Kimina Lyall of Dart Centre Asia Pacific in association with the ACOS Alliance. The first version focused exclusively on situations where editors are working with freelancers. This version is written in response to Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. Expanded and updated by Gavin Rees and Kateryna Ivanova, it covers all contractual situations Ukrainian news organizations may have with employees, whether they are on staff contracts or freelance.

The Ukrainian language edition of this guide is available here.

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We are also indebted to all the Ukrainian journalists and media support specialists we talked to in creating this version of the guide.

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma is a resource center 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. For more information, visit **www.dartcenter.org**.

The ACOS Alliance (A Culture Of Safety Alliance) is a unique global coalition of 150+ news organizations, journalist associations and press freedom NGOs working together to champion safe and responsible journalism practices.

The Alliance's mission is to embed a culture of safety within journalism so that independent media and journalists globally can play their essential role in upholding democracy.

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INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS GUIDE?

This is a guide on trauma-informed leadership for editors and news managers working and living in Ukraine. It offers suggestions for practical measures news organizations can take to support their staff during Russia's continuing full-scale invasion of Ukrainian territory.

In covering this war, Ukrainian journalists and media organizations have shown impressive levels of resilience and innovation. Wartime is a period of drastic, unexpected life changes and losses. It has the capacity to turn the world upside down, and yet journalists have managed to hold steady and continue to publish the news, counter Russian disinformation, and investigate war crimes with unprecedented responsiveness and depth.

This guide aims to offer concise definitions of what psychological trauma is and how it affects journalistic work. It also seeks to consolidate key ideas in one place so you have a resource that will assist you in future planning and newsroom crisis response.

War is an extreme situation that brings unique challenges. But it is important not to forget that the people we cover may also be affected by trauma during peacetime. Industrial disasters, road traffic accidents, medical emergencies, and crime—especially if it involves murder, sexual assault, or child protection issues—are common news stories that stretch journalists' craft skills and tax their emotional reserves.

All the situations above raise perennial questions such as:

- How does one interview someone who has been bereaved or abused?
- What does it take to then pass that information on to audiences in a way that helps advance necessary conversations rather than overwhelm people?
- And the prime focus of this guide: What does it take to support the psychological well-being of one's staff when they are doing this kind of work?

This resource discusses the ongoing war but also looks forward to the future—to a time when fighting finally subsides and journalists have a new but equally important role of reporting in the period of recovery and rebuilding that will follow this brutal war of aggression.

Inna Biletska, is editor-in-chief of Suspilne, Ukraine's national broadcasting company, and also head of its investigations department. Suspilne began investigating the war crimes of occupiers soon after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, and received a national award for its documentary, Bucha 22, which investigated the killings of civilians in the city of Bucha during the Russian occupation.

"I work in the team as a journalist and editor, and I have to make managerial decisions. I constantly keep in mind that everyone is under a lot of pressure right now, and I always discount stress: If there are any conflicts in the team, they are largely caused by stress. That's why I try to resolve them as quickly as possible and [also] live with them."

CORE POINTS

This guide assumes these foundational points:

- News gatherers are highly likely to be exposed to trauma during their course of their work. This is true in peacetime as well as during war.
- Distress and other powerful emotions often come up while reporting on violence. These are common and expected responses. They don't in themselves imply longer-term difficulties related to mental health.
- The best way to respond to these risks is to become informed about trauma and its potential impact on news gatherers and to actively support and engage with your team about these issues.
- Resilience is a normal response—most news gatherers can and do cope well with this aspect of their work—but sometimes the impact can be longer lasting.
- Media organizations themselves play a crucial role in shaping purpose and journalistic mission, as well as offering other kinds of social support, all of which helps mitigate potentially longer lasting mental health consequences.
- Trauma-informed journalism leads to more insightful and considerate treatment of vulnerable sources and more effective story choices. It is journalism that will better serve your audiences in the days and years ahead.

EDITORS' RESPONSIBILITIES

The role of an editor presents significant challenges, even in peacetime. These only increase during wartime. As a manager, you will have concerns about the financial viability of your news organization, and crucial decisions to make regarding the physical safety of staff working on potentially dangerous assignments.

On top of that, the legal and ethical duty you have for the psychological safety of any staff member you assign to a story can appear daunting and at times overwhelming.

The good news is that taking a proactive stance on psychological and emotional safety doesn't only help safeguard staff. It can also help lighten other financial, administrative, and ethical loads. Our experience working with news organizations in different contexts around the world suggests that trauma-aware media teams are more likely to:

- Make better planning decisions regarding physical safety.
- Reduce conflict between colleagues.
- Reduce levels of emotional burnout.
- Retain staff more effectively.
- Believe their work has value.
- Produce insightful journalism that is more relevant to audiences' needs.

While editors have ultimate responsibility for the big ethical and legal decisions, creating a more trauma-aware culture is not a job for one person alone. The aim is to spread insight and knowledge throughout the organization, so that staff at all levels feel supported and in turn able to support others in simple, practical ways.

War generates and amplifies emotions—feelings of guilt, shame, and anger are common. Journalists' sense of trust and confidence in others can become diminished, impacting team morale and decision-making capacity in ways that are often hard to notice, track, and address.

These can be challenging themes to discuss in a newsroom, but being aware of and transparent about these pressures can help teams manage them without taking much in the way of time or resources.

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is the experience of severe psychological distress following exposure to a terrible or life-threatening situation. Typically, these scenarios involve, death, injury, sexual violence, or the threat of those things.

POTENTIALLY TRAUMATIC EVENTS

The technical literature describes events that can give rise to trauma reactions as *potentially traumatic events* (PTEs).

The language is important, as exposure to violence doesn't mean someone will automatically develop a long-lasting psychological injury. While that can happen, it is not the most common outcome.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), fifth edition,[1] recognizes that PTEs can be experienced directly or indirectly.

Typical events where journalists may experience direct, on-the-scene trauma exposure while reporting include:

- Witnessing death or physical injury.
- Witnessing or being the victim of physical or sexual assault.
- Covering armed conflict.
- Physical injury.
- Detention or kidnapping.
- Receiving personal threats of physical or sexual assault.
- Natural or human-made disasters.
- Transport crashes.
- Terrorist attacks.

SECONDARY AND VICARIOUS EXPOSURE

Secondary or vicarious trauma refers to indirect exposure to all the above events and can impact people as much as direct exposure.

Secondary exposure refers primarily to situations in which loss and injury happens to people one is emotionally close to, such as family, colleagues, and friends. The sudden and unexpected death of a family member is one example of this.

Vicarious trauma can be induced by work-related exposure to situations that a journalist did not directly experience but that involve immersive engagement with the content—for example:

- Viewing or editing graphic material that depicts injury or death.
- Viewing threatening images, videos, or other material on social media.
- Listening to accounts from survivors or victims of traumatic events.
- Covering harrowing court cases.
- Working on social justice stories that involve maltreatment.

The DSM-5 makes it clear that indirect, immersive exposure to content that relates to death and injury through the course of one's work can qualify as a PTE.

1 - American Psychiatric Association (2013). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). American Psychiatric Association Publishing.

COMMON TRAUMA REACTIONS

Individuals respond to trauma in different ways. Those reactions may also be different at different times, and not all are negative. For example, people may experience a greater sense of connection and alertness, as well as focus on what needs to be done.

The potential consequences below, however, are more disruptive and can interfere with people's capacity to work and connections to others. The following may be low level and barely an issue, or they can be much more marked:

- Intrusive reexperiencing (pictures or sounds of the event or content coming back).
- Physical reactions—shakiness, feeling on edge.
- Emotional and physical exhaustion.
- Reduced concentration.
- Irritability and anger.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Feelings of guilt, shame, and helplessness.
- A desire to avoid painful reminders.
- Feeling disconnected from what is happening; spaciness.
- Withdrawal from social contact.
- Emotional numbness.
- Low mood.

Accurately reading these reactions for what they are may be hard. Individuals may not notice them consciously or understand how specific changes have occurred.

For example, a journalist may express the feeling of an existential crisis by saying, "I am no good at my work," "My colleagues don't understand me," or "Journalism is pointless." They might be experiencing feelings of isolation and fragmentation that come principally from high levels of vicarious trauma exposure.

Distress is a design feature of being human. It doesn't imply longer-term psychological injury. People can experience distress and still be highly resilient.

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RESILIENCE IN JOURNALISM

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience is a word that is often used but rarely defined. This guide relies on a specific definition, informed by psychology research.

Resilience is the process of successful adaptation to difficult life experiences. It is not a fixed constant or an inborn character trait, with some individuals born strong and others not. And resilience doesn't mean these challenges don't affect people.

Distress reactions are likely to occur in the immediate aftermath of significant trauma exposure. They usually settle down naturally when safety is restored and the level of threat is reduced.

Wartime, however, complicates this picture, as the outside threat is ongoing. Individuals' war-related stress levels fluctuate depending on specific experiences and events but are generally higher than they would normally be in peacetime. (People may describe this as living in survival mode.)

Some adaptation happens naturally, and some is more about what individuals and communities actively do to adapt.

On an individual level, most trauma experts believe emotional and cognitive flexibility are key skills that strengthen resilience. That means knowing how to recognize distress reactions and problem-solve in ways that create options and some sense of control, however bad things may be. This is also called *active or positive coping*.[2] Practicing appropriate self-care is part of this.

Resilience is not just something individuals do by themselves. It has a crucial collective dimension. People are social animals. We do best when we feel supported by colleagues and social networks.

Alla Sadovnyk, a journalist at Suspilne, the national public broadcasting company, has adapted to working on investigations of war crimes that require intense involvement with vulnerable contributors. Alla is one of the producers of the National Award–winning film Bucha-22, which illustrates how empathy and detachment are equally important.

"Recently, I started to catch myself thinking that the more we communicate with people, the less I feel.... Maybe our brain is asking us: How much more pain can you take? So now it seems that work is a little easier than it used to be. It hurts a little less. I don't know if it's for the better or vice versa. From a professional point of view, it's probably better.

On a personal level, we remain as gentle in our interactions with people, and we understand pain in the same way, but we don't let it destroy us from the inside.

I try to find warm moments even in our difficult work. Every time we go on a business trip to the deoccupied territories and talk to people, we are greeted with incredible warmth, and we realize how beautiful our people are and how beautiful our country is. And this helps to keep us afloat."

2 - The American Psychological Association's definition is widely used: https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience

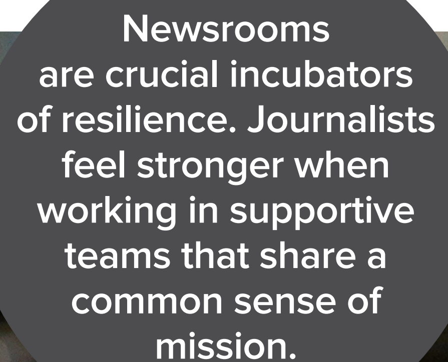
THE ROLE NEWSROOMS PLAY

In the newsroom context, we know from research that some features built into journalistic work itself are protective factors that promote resilience.[3] These include:

- Being part of a team.
- Working in accordance with one's professional and moral values.
- Investment in craft skills.
- Readiness to take on new challenges.
- The ability to see things from different perspectives (to detach as well as to empathize).
- The belief in a shared journalistic purpose.

News organizations sometimes overlook the opportunities for promoting resilience that already exist in the work and assume that mental health support for journalists is primarily a matter of providing access to individual therapy from clinicians outside the organization. While such assistance can be invaluable in some cases, that is only one potential dimension of support.[4]

Journalists are most likely to retain resilience on trauma-related assignments when they feel able to do their job well. Dimensions to this include having appropriate training, adequate time for rest and recovery, and faith that the organization as a whole has the capacity to navigate practical and ethical dilemmas effectively. If one is feeling personally stuck on a particular issue, it is important to know there are others one can turn to for support and advice.



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3 - For a general discussion of resilience factors, see Southwick, S. M., & Charney, D. S. (2018). Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges. Cambridge University Press.

4 - For a longer discussion of mental health support, see "Providing Psychological Support for Ukrainian Journalists," a Dart Center briefing note written in association with the Global Forum for Media Development.

HOW DO STRESS AND TRAUMA CONNECT?

Trauma and stress reactions can look similar. Tight muscles, indigestion, difficulty sleeping, and so on are common responses to trauma exposure and everyday stress. The two reactions overlap because the biochemistry does, but there are important differences between them.

Stress comes from everyday pressures and concerns rather than exposure to violence or injury. The issues may, of course, be significant—worries about money, arguments in relationships, an impossible workload, and so on—but trauma interacts with individuals' emotions, memories, and sense of themselves in the world in more complex ways.

Some stress is essential: It fuels productivity and motivation. And journalists are particularly skilled at harnessing that dimension of stress to handle deadlines, competing priorities, and so on when working on difficult assignments.

Stress turns negative, however, when it is unceasing and generated by demands that exceed people's internal resources. Then it may lead to burnout and physical health issues.

General stress can also impact the likelihood and extent of a trauma reaction because of the energy and resilience it consumes. If someone's stress levels are already high, a traumatic event may become more challenging.

WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL INJURY?

Distress reactions, including the powerful moral emotions that come up when people are exposed to acts of violence—anger, shame, guilt, and so on—don't in themselves imply that someone is likely to develop a longer-term psychological injury.

Distress usually subsides with time and returns to a manageable level, back to something that approaches an individual's normal baseline. This may take some time and may be a challenging process. It could take weeks rather than days, depending on the kind of exposure, before those reactions fully subside.

In some cases, the distress persists in complex ways, which significantly interfere with an individual's daily functioning. If that happens, then it is possible for someone to be diagnosed with a mental health condition like depression, acute stress disorder (ASD), or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

MORAL INJURY

Exposure to trauma and violence can also bring other unwanted disruptions to people's picture of the world and themselves that aren't recognized as mental health conditions but may still interfere with life and require attention. For example, individuals may become more inclined to self-blame or quicker to perceive betrayal, or they may lose faith in beliefs and activities that were previously important to them.

In the last few years, there has been growing interest in moral injury, one specific dimension of this. It describes the harm that may come from exposure to acts that transgress deeply held moral codes, through causing or failing to prevent such events, through their witnessing, or through feeling betrayed by leaders in a high-stakes situation. Research into how this affects journalists (rather than the military, where it has been most studied) are still in their infancy.

But there is already good evidence to suggest that having an effective moral compass, plus a strong willingness to problem-solve ethical dilemmas, has important self-care dimensions for journalists.[5] Thus, knowing how to interview sources in an effective and sensitive, trauma-informed way may reduce the risk of moral injury.

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5 - See Southwick and Charney, Resilience, for a discussion of the moral dimension of resilience. And this summary of the research on protective factors for journalists: https://dartcenter.org/content/covering-trauma-impact-on-journalists.

Since March 2022, **Nataliya Gumenyuk**, together with Janine di Giovanni and their team at The Reckoning Project, have been documenting Russian war crimes. Nataliya discusses how the experience has taught her team to take a different, more considered approach to interviewing vulnerable sources and how those contributions are used.

These interviews are very detailed: "We have to ask questions like “How did it happen?” [and] ask for photos and look at them together....Asking about details is very painful for people.

That’s why you need to have a different attitude to responsibility and need to understand how important it is to be attentive to a person and to have enough time for these conversations.

You literally have no right to look at your phone during this conversation because it shows you are not paying attention. And you have no right to get some detail wrong.

There are no more ‘just sound bites’ or ‘just comments,’ because every interaction we have with a person who has experienced something can be extremely painful and challenging for them. We have to be hyperaware of what we are doing. For me today, this is one of the most important rules—everything else is a side note.[6] "

HOW WAR DIFFERS

When wars are ongoing, clinical specialists do not typically diagnose individuals with trauma-related conditions, such as PTSD. That is because the threat is ongoing and there is no clear-cut post-violence period or time of safety.

During war, difficulties in sleeping and concentrating may be widespread. That sense of feeling on edge and having an exaggerated startle reaction (called hyperarousal) is uncomfortable and unpleasant—and needs active managing—but it is there for a reason and plays an important role in keeping people safe.

For a soldier—or a journalist—who travels to the front line, being primed to react quickly could be the difference between life and death.

Similarly, feelings of lower mood, feeling somewhat disconnected from oneself, not being how one was before the war, and so on are also common manifestations of ongoing emergency situations, as are periods of sudden and intense emotionality, anger, and tearfulness.

Journalists often appreciate advice and help from psychologists—it may be especially useful when individuals are struggling to cope on a daily basis. During wartime, though this is about advice and support, rather than treatment.

6 - For more guidance on trauma-informed interviewing, see these two resources: Marcela Turati’s tip sheet on working with victims of violence, and this chapter in the Global Investigative Journalism Network Reporter’s Guide to Investigating War Crimes.

WORKING IN A COUNTRY AT WAR

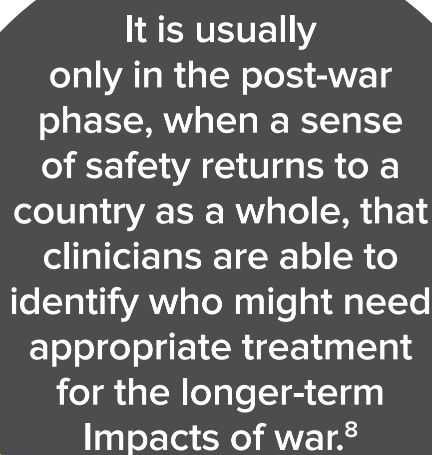
It is one thing to report on violence happening outside one's community, but another thing to be living through it. Foreign correspondents assigned to covering the war in the Ukraine have opportunities to rotate out and feel safe again. For Ukrainian journalists, there is no zone of absolute safety. Even if not directly exposed to shelling or air attacks, everyone in Ukraine is living in a constant, shared narrative—a war of national survival.

In these circumstances, media work has an even more urgent quality. Information helps dispel fear and connect communities. Journalism is also needed to counter Russian disinformation and pave the way for future redress, through the documentation of war crimes.

Many journalists have found the work itself has helped them to cope personally with the harsh realities of war. In chaotic situations, playing an active role and focusing on how one can best contribute is beneficial—a common sense idea that scientific data backs up.[7]

Straight after the full-scale invasion in 2022, most journalists in Ukraine threw themselves 24/7 into reporting. At that time, that degree of effort was both important journalistically and helpful in terms of personal coping.

Since then, however, many have discovered that continuing to work at such a pace is not sustainable. There is an important trade-off one must manage between pursuing one's sense of mission and working so hard that one risks emotional and physical burnout.



It is usually only in the post-war phase, when a sense of safety returns to a country as a whole, that clinicians are able to identify who might need appropriate treatment for the longer-term Impacts of war.[8]

© REUTERS / Marko Djurica

7 - For an overview of the relationship between active coping and resilience, see: Bonanno, G. A. (2021). The End of Trauma: How the New Science of Resilience Is Changing How We Think About PTSD. New York: Basic Books.

8 - In ongoing crisis situations, clinical psychologists typically concentrate on supportive counselling and education rather than treatment. For an overview of what people need during continuing crises, such as war, see: Hobfoll, S. E., Watson, P., Bell, C. C., Bryant, R. A., Brymer, M. J., Friedman, M. J., et al. (2007). "Five Essential Elements of Immediate and Mid-Term Mass Trauma Intervention: Empirical Evidence." Psychiatry, 70(4), 283–315. These principles can be found in best-practice guidelines from organizations such as NATO, World Health Organization (WHO), Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and European Society of Traumatic Stress Studies (ESTSS).

WAR AND VICARIOUS EXPOSURE

All Ukrainian citizens have had to confront grotesque imagery and unsettling information at times. But media professionals receive a double dose. They are also reading, viewing, or listening to harrowing material during working hours, with exposure levels highest for those collecting detailed witness testimony in investigations of war crimes.

The impact from vicarious exposure is likely to be less intense than that from direct witnessing—but it can have subtle, hard-to-track effects on mood, concentration, and well-being.

Some journalists report that they have a harder time viewing images back in the relative safety of the big cities than they do when collecting those images in areas that have experienced destruction or systematic abuse by Russian occupiers.

Images can intensify perceived impact by framing out the quieter moments in which violence is not happening. They can also persist in ways that make it harder to enjoy other potentially more positive experiences. In neurobiological terms, trauma-related thinking is tiring in both physical and emotional terms.

Feeling isolated is a common, often unrecognised consequence of trauma exposure.

It is important that journalists feel empowered to talk to colleagues about difficult emotions and moral dilemmas.

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WHAT HELPS?

A useful way of discussing this in the newsroom is to see vicarious exposure as akin to radiation exposure. Journalists—just like workers in the nuclear industry—can work safely with distressing material, but only within certain boundaries.

For a nuclear worker, that means monitoring personal exposure levels and limiting times in the hottest areas of the facility. For a journalist, the equivalent may mean:

- Limiting the number of interviews they do in a certain time period.
- Adopting agile forensic strategies when working with traumatic imagery.
- Cutting down on consuming news outside working hours.
- Building in daily distancing activities that take one away from distressing content.
- Following a self-care plan that includes techniques for releasing the physical impacts of stress on the body.
- Finding small opportunities to reconnect to more positive aspects of life.

Journalists can take a host of simple, practical steps to mitigate the impact of working with harrowing contact. This guide has specific advice on working with traumatic content, and this one published by the Global Investigative Journalism Network goes into more detail on self-care during investigations of war crimes.

Management plays a crucial role in encouraging journalists to take breaks and to work to realistic schedules during intense immersive projects.

Yulia Bankova, editor-in-chief of the online media outlet Liga.net

"In the first two months after the war started, I couldn't make people take a day off or a vacation. At some point, I asked people to have some rest. In response, I heard the following: I can't stop working, because as soon as I close my laptop, the air raids, hours in basements and a constant news feed in Telegram flood me with panic.

Now everything has settled down a bit, everyone realized that this is a long-term thing and we need to plan and manage our workload.

I am trying to build a feedback system in the team, where each manager communicates with their subordinates and monitors their condition. I periodically ask my subordinates: how are you? Are you coping? Do you need a vacation?

However, not all editorial staff can speak openly about their well-being. I used to work with a journalist who has always worked with difficult topics.

She is the only person I know who would openly say "I'm having a hard time," and then take a break when she couldn't take it anymore and when she needed to reflect on something.

Journalists with deeper experience understand the potential impact of this work. Those newer to this, don't understand how to deal with it yet.

WAR HAS ITS OWN EMOTIONAL CLIMATE

One of the defining features of wartime experience is how strong emotions can rise to the surface. Some of these, like intensified feelings of love and connection, are welcome.

But trauma also stirs up feelings of guilt, shame, anger, fear, and helplessness. These big emotions can be trickier to navigate. Indeed, anyone one of us might experience them without being fully aware of where they are coming from, how they are affecting us, and what we are doing to manage them.

Journalists with long experience of crime reporting will have noticed how relatives of victims often feel guilty about aspects of an event they should not reasonably hold themselves responsible for. If a child has died in a bus crash on a school trip, a bereaved parent might blame themselves for allowing the child to participate in the first place. That sense of guilt may be disproportionate or not entirely logical—but nevertheless it feels absolutely real and has an impact on how people relate to others.

To give some more examples:

• GUILT CAN FEEL OMNIPRESENT

Often there is a strange no-win logic involved. A journalist reporting on the front line may feel guilty about causing their families to worry, but at the same time, when they are back at home, they may feel guilty for not being where the story is. During a national crisis, it is natural for everyone to wonder if they should be doing more.

Guilt often comes from a positive place—the desire to help. But sometimes the emotion can expand in a way that impedes meaningful action. Unrealistic self-blame compromises the energy and awareness needed for other things.

For example, an experienced journalist who feels that their journalism is not doing enough to win the war, may have lost sight of the vital role they are playing in mentoring junior colleagues. Ukraine's future recovery will depend on journalism's capacity to hold power to account.

• OTHER PEOPLE'S FEELINGS CAN BE CONTAGIOUS

Journalists can take on interviewees' trauma-related emotions without being fully aware that it is happening. Torture and sexual violence often leave survivors struggling with strong feelings of shame and helplessness. It is not uncommon for journalists to leave interviews with not just the content in their minds, but also some shadow of those same underlying feelings and preoccupations active in themselves. If these effects build up, and journalists do not recognize and deal with them, they can impair journalists' ability to hold space safely when talking with vulnerable interviewees.

Traditionally there has not been much discussion of this in journalism training. Trauma therapists, on the other hand, understand how important it is to disentangle their clients' reactions and stories from their own—a risk they manage by talking things through with colleagues.

• BIG EMOTIONS ARE EASILY MISDIRECTED

Anger is a classic example of this. It is often a positive, helpful emotion—a fuel for action. But it can also be misdirected. Entirely justified anger at Russian aggression and the terrible realities of this war, if not channeled appropriately, can surface and inappropriately take aim at other targets, such as colleagues or specific groups in society. That can threaten the cohesiveness of a newsroom and potentially distort how stories are written.

WHAT HELPS?

Given all this, it is important that journalists feel empowered to talk to colleagues about difficult emotions and moral feelings, such as shame and guilt, and how they might be influencing work-related decisions as well as personal well-being.

Some journalists may resist discussing personal impact because they fear doing so is self-indulgent, may threaten the objectivity of their reporting, or might intensify their feelings. The attitude that “we will fix everything after the war” and that this is not the time to talk about one’s own needs, given what others are going through, is also common.

In fact, accurately labelling difficult feelings can take some of the power out of them. Rather than getting stuck in the swamp, journalists can switch their focus back on where they can make a difference, leading to more emotionally accurate and insightful journalism.

This is not about psychoanalysis. It is not about digging into people’s feelings or forcing them to talk about things they would rather not discuss. It is about acknowledging the emotional challenges and looking for constructive ways to come together and problem-solve as teams.

Talking about these issues is not always straightforward but doing so in a practical and proactive way—which neither minimizes nor exaggerates the topic—can help.

Editors play a particular role in supporting journalists who are facing intimidation from powerful figures or online harassment from hostile groups attacking their journalism or an aspect of their identity. Female journalists, as well as those from minority groups and those in LGBTI communities, often experience the most vicious attacks.[10]

Showing solidarity is key. It is important that journalists are not left to face this abuse alone. If isolated, they can internalize this hostility in ways that generate guilt and self-attacking thinking patterns, which can significantly undermine their resilience.

As an editor, you may sometimes need to shield reporters from outside attack so they can get on with their reporting. If the attacker is a powerful figure, that might mean making it clear that you take responsibility for your publication’s reporting and taking over communication. When a reporter comes under attack online, sending them a simple note of appreciation and encouragement can make a big difference to their morale. (If the attacks contain threats of violence, more steps will be needed. See the section “Support After the Assignment” for some suggestions.)

Fear contains useful information. Everyone’s gut response needs to be part of the safety conversation.

10 - The Coalition against Online Violence has more information and resources on this: https://onlineviolenceresponsehub.org

FACTORING FEAR INTO RISK ASSESSMENT

Fear is not an emotion people usually want to feel, but when it is not overwhelming, it can be a good friend. Journalists who maintain a healthy connection to their gut instinct—that is, their capacity to feel fear in a nuanced way—are better placed to make decisions in dangerous environments.

Indeed, journalists who regularly work alongside soldiers on the front line are often surprised at how highly attuned they become at picking up slight changes in the environment that might signal danger.

Experience brings expertise, but there are situations in which exposure to trauma and threat can blunt rather than enhance journalists' ability to access risks effectively. Here are four different scenarios:

1. Being in a near-constant state of alarm is tiring. When threats are prolonged or reoccur repeatedly, journalists may start to tune them out and ignore them, making it harder to distinguish between bigger risks and smaller ones.
2. In some rare cases, a particularly intense PTE (or a series of them) may leave an individual so radically disconnected from their feelings that they are no longer able to sense danger effectively.
3. There are individuals who either develop or naturally have a higher appetite for thrill-seeking and impulsive behavior than others. If that is not effectively reigned in, those individuals can be a danger to themselves and their colleagues.
4. Lastly, some people manage fear through strategic avoidance. They push away unsettling thoughts automatically and don't seek out detail about what the threats consist of. This may look like courage, but it often proves a fragile defense when danger arrives and people are unprepared.

MANAGING TEAMS IN HIGH-RISK ENVIRONMENTS

Journalists may be reluctant to voice their fears and apprehensions, but from a safety-planning point of view, honest communication is vital. Managers need to know what their staff members' previous experience and understanding of risk is.

- Make sure to brief inexperienced staff on what that they are likely to experience (even down to sights, smells, sensations, and so forth).
- Teams operating in dangerous areas need to have fluent, open dialogue with each other. Everybody should feel empowered to call out potential issues. Groupthink, where a team drifts into following the most dominant voices, is a well-documented hazard on dangerous assignments.
- Be wary of anyone who appears entirely fearless, be that a team member or an outsider offering safety advice.
- Embrace a checklist approach where needed. The military deals with the danger of complacency among soldiers and aircrew by drilling and ritualizing the response. They insist on professional protocols. In certain situations, one needs to take specific precautions, regardless of whether one feels like it.
- Reducing time spent in danger doesn't just reduce the objective risk of being injured—it also expands the mental space needed for effective risk assessment.
- The heightened responsiveness to danger that journalists develop in places of greater danger doesn't necessarily switch off quickly in environments that are safer, at least in relative terms. Reporters can feel out of sync in ways that may be tricky to manage. It is helpful when everyone in a newsroom understands that this is a common and expected reaction.

TRAUMA-AWARE NEWSROOMS

International news organizations like Reuters, the BBC, and ABC News in Australia have had psychological support schemes for journalists in place for more than a decade.

Early initiatives, such as the response to the aftermath of the Iraq War and Afghanistan War, focused on providing staff with access to psychological safety training and clinical support where needed.

More recently, the pressure of covering the pandemic and the climate crisis, as well as the rise of online threats made against journalists, have led to an expanded focus. Now news organizations such as The Guardian, NBC News and The New York Times, among others, have started to train their staff more systematically in other aspects of working with trauma, including appropriate approaches for interviewing vulnerable sources, managing teams, working with vicarious trauma, and dealing with online harassment and intimidation.

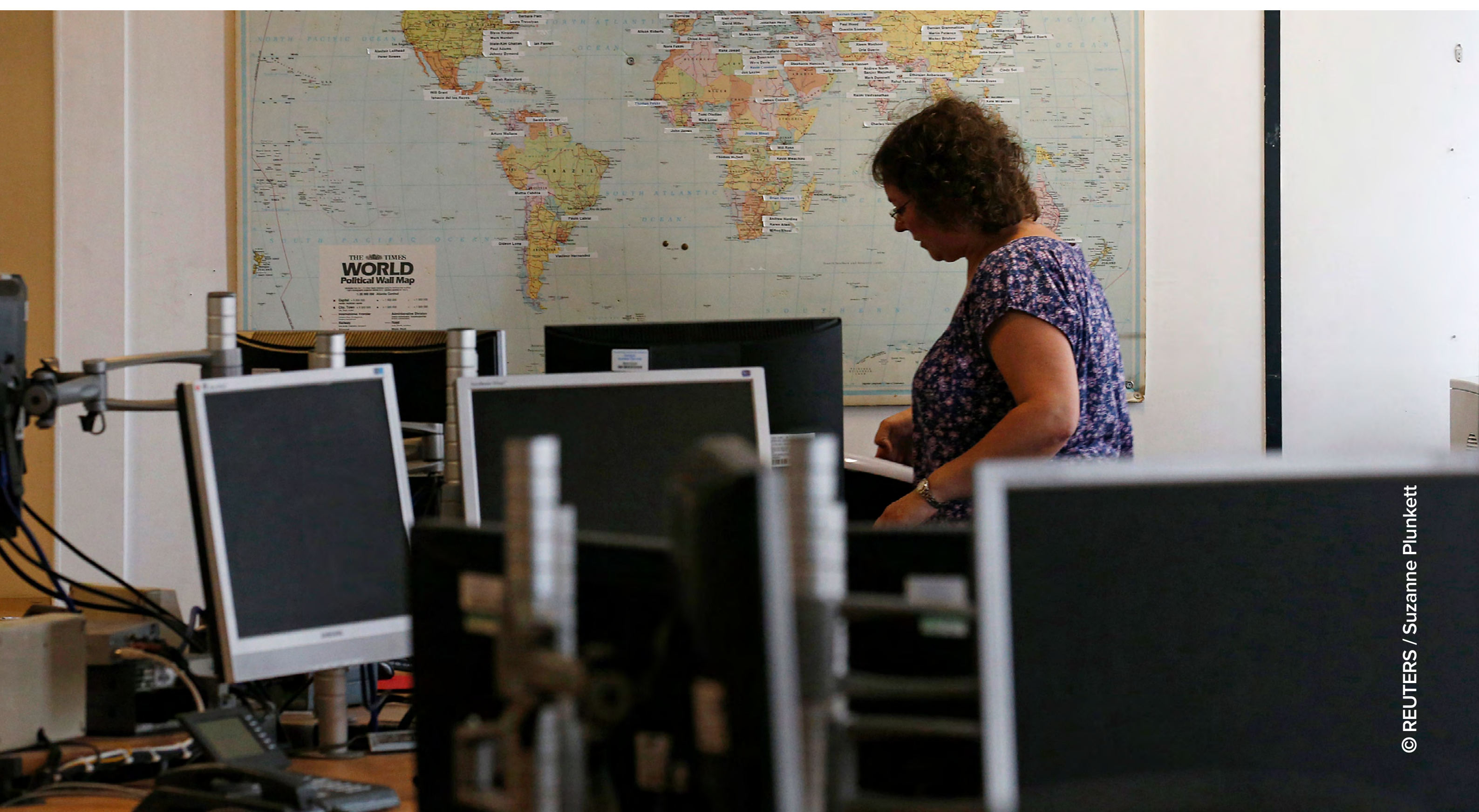
Helping your organization be more trauma aware is likely to pay dividends in three interconnected areas:

- Staff well-being and resilience.
- The ability to work effectively and sensitively with victims and survivors.
- Increased output quality in terms of how relevant it is for your audiences.

When the fighting in Ukraine finally subsides, deeper, more precise insight into the impact of trauma and what helps recovery will be essential for journalists reporting on such themes as the continuing pursuit of justice, veterans' affairs, access to psychological treatment, and the community tensions that typically arise in the aftermath of war.

The task will be to produce insightful and balanced journalism that neither exaggerates nor minimizes the trauma-related impacts and challenges that arise post-war. Journalism that fails to do so is likely to complicate individuals' recovery and lead to ill-judged policy decisions at a government level.

Journalism will play a crucial role in Ukraine's recovery and future prosperity. The more reporters understand about trauma and the specific mental health issues it generates, the more relevant their work will be.



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DRAFTING A TRAUMA MANAGEMENT PLAN

You could also consider reviewing your internal staff guidance to see where it might need updating. Creating a specific mental health and trauma protocol can normalize the need to take these issues seriously.

This document would explain your organization's policy on psychological safety. It would include sections on:

- Basic messages about what trauma is and what impact it may have.
- What resilience and active coping look like.
- What colleagues should do if they are experiencing difficulties.
- What employees can expect in terms of psychological and financial support.
- The company's policy on dealing with bullying and harassment.
- How managers should respond to a crisis.
- Relevant outside sources of support.

Such a document should make it clear that no one will face discrimination for admitting mental health difficulties. It should also make clear how provisions apply to freelancers and whether they can access the same kind of support.

Kateryna Sergatskova, a co-founder of Zaborona Media, has covered armed conflict inside and outside of Ukraine, and in the first days of the Russian invasion co-founded 2402 Foundation which helps journalists with safety training and equipment. Drawing on previous lessons learned, her team had a risk assessment matrix in place before February 2022. Here, she explains how this matrix helped Zaborona respond quickly to the crisis:

"When the invasion began, we already had the basis of a plan. Having protocols significantly reduces stress levels and helps you act when events can paralyze your thinking and will.

Due to the scale of the invasion and overwhelming fear, not every team member was ready to follow the protocols. So, we held regular group and individual calls to understand what was happening to people and how we could help them.

We relocated everyone who was not involved in collecting information in the field to safer places—especially all the editors and managers—so that decision-makers could maintain clarity of thought and avoid emotional overload.

Now, we also have checklists for trips into high-risk regions, and schedule discussions between editors and reporters, which include physical and mental health.

And training is key—we never send people to danger zones who are not prepared.

Every organisation needs to be systematic about this."

STEPS TOWARD BUILDING A MORE TRAUMA-LITERATE NEWSROOM

Trauma exposure fragments one's experience of the world. It can detach people from their sense of themselves and increase feelings of isolation from others. Any activity that restores connection or brings a focus onto shared journalistic purpose is likely to help.

As a manager, you can do many things personally to reduce the likelihood of ongoing impacts from PTEs. But this project doesn't fall just on your shoulders.

It's about broader culture change: seeding knowledge, encouraging a culture of learning from challenges and mistakes, and setting up systems that will help you and your organization manage and respond to risks. This endeavor requires a steady, long-term approach and the active participation of colleagues.

Elements might include the following:

1 Introduce training in the newsroom or encourage journalists to attend external opportunities for knowledge and skills development in such areas as:

- Recognizing common trauma reactions.
- Understanding resilience and active coping.
- Working with vulnerable sources.
- Handling graphic imagery.
- Developing leadership and management skills.
- Offering self-care and colleague-to-colleague support.
- Protecting physical safety.
- Engaging in any kind of training that increases feelings of efficacy.

2 Set up in-house working groups that explore the topics above and report back to the newsroom.

3 Make good use of any journalists in your organization with experience of and insight into these issues. They could give short presentations—anything that helps the conversation develop.

4 Encourage internal mentoring and a buddy system where reporters can check in with other colleagues (not just editors) to double-check their working assumptions about a difficult story. These small, simple measures can reduce isolation.

5 Enable journalists to take part in conferences and other fora in which they present their work to other journalists outside the organization, as well as participating in other events that reinforce a sense of community and shared mission.

6 Introduce post-assignment wrap sessions where journalists who worked on a challenging story carry out an operational debrief using a structured format. These three key questions are a useful starting point:

- What did we do well?
- What did not go so well?
- What will we try or do differently next time?

And above all, offer repeated messaging from leaders at the top, who share an interest in the issues and set a personal example of trauma-aware management.

MANAGING COLLEAGUES COVERING TRAUMA

The chapter “Managing Assignments: Before, During, and After” below discusses step-by-step actions management can take when working on specific assignments or reporting projects. Here are some more general considerations to bear in mind:

- One can’t tell how people will respond to trauma exposure before it happens. A news gatherer may be able to handle many trauma-related stories, but suddenly may find themselves unable to cope with something they would normally consider routine. There is no clear pattern; there are just general risk factors.
- Remember that all those involved in news gathering—not just the front-line staff—can be exposed to trauma. Picture and film editors, sound recordists, and others will encounter potentially traumatic material. They may also have specific training needs.
- Build fluent communication with your team on all levels. Freelancers and other news gatherers consistently report that open and frequent communication with the newsrooms is vital to their ability to do their job well. If you focus on building this culture, it will form a solid foundation for trauma-aware conversations and check-ins.
- Raise awareness and play an active role in reducing the stigma associated with mental health difficulties.
- Bear in mind that when journalists are working with trauma, their perceptions of unfair treatment may become heightened. That may be particularly likely if journalists are investigating abuses such as torture or harassment—the content they are confronting may start to affect how they interpret other power relationships.
- Given the threats journalists face from outside, bullying and harassment within a newsroom is doubly toxic. All organizations need to have a zero-tolerance policy for that kind of behavior.
- Remember that people see you as a leader and will take their example from you. If you are overworking and always the last to leave the office, they are likely to do the same.
- Do what you can to make all staff feel valued and appreciated. Never miss an appropriate opportunity to remind colleagues that it is a privilege to work with them and you are proud of the work you’ve achieved together. Simple messaging makes a big difference.

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Yevheniia Motorevska leads the war crimes investigation unit at the Kyiv Independent. Here, she describes how she and her team factor trauma awareness into their work together:

"We have a psychological support program in our newsroom where every journalist can turn to a psychologist and get professional help if they feel the need. The same program occasionally includes online sessions on coping with stress, preventing burnout, etc.

We are a small newsroom where journalists have a long experience working on human rights and corruption issues. And so we do regularly share the challenges that come up in the work. We discuss both the story itself and any accompanying emotional difficulties that arise.

As an editor, I keep an eye on my colleagues, and I make sure they have time to rest and recover. This is very important.

Protocols for interviewing witnesses and survivors are also key things for us. We are working now with lawyers from RPDI to develop a universal form of informed consent for interviews. A person who agrees to talk to a journalist needs to know where we will publish their words and have control over whether or not their information is transferred to law enforcement agencies. They may also need to understand how they will look in the video and how we plan to conceal their identity–if necessary."

TRAUMA AND THE FREELANCER

Freelancers face some specific issues that may increase the likelihood of ongoing consequences from trauma exposure. Managers who recognize these additional possible stressors will be better positioned to provide appropriate trauma-informed support to freelancers.

INSECURE RELATIONSHIP WITH COMMISSIONING NEWS ORGANIZATION

Freelancers are often in precarious positions within the commissioning agency. They may feel unable to speak out about potential risks or adverse reactions to their stories, for fear that this will result in their removal from the assignment or no further assignments.

Often there is no clarity about how a news organization will deal with trauma exposure, nor is there a defined procedure, particularly for freelancers. This uncertainty and lack of process can cause reporters to feel unsure of the support and care they will receive, thus creating more stress.

WORKING WHERE ONE LIVES

Freelancers often work in the community in which they live. Therefore, the traumatic event they are covering may be one that affects them directly or impacts close friends or relatives. They are likely to have an ongoing relationship with the story, regardless of whether they continue to work on it for the original commissioning news organization. Psychological proximity to a traumatic story increases the trauma load the reporter may carry.

WORKING IN ISOLATION

Most often freelancers don't work from a newsroom. Many operate on their own and without access to collegial support and tend to feel isolated. Isolation is known to erode resilience, while social connection and support enhance psychological well-being.

RISK FACTORS

One can think of resilience as a set of scales: On one side there is a person's professional and personal resources, on the other side the scope of challenges a person faces. Usually—including in wartime—the balance point tips clearly to the coping-well side.

But that balance can move if circumstances change.

Risk factors that can exacerbate a vulnerability to trauma exposure include:

- Exposure to a greater number of traumatic events.
- Exposure to the events for more time.
- Traumatic events that occur in one's direct community.
- A personal connection to the traumatic event.
- Stress factors outside of work.
- Negative thoughts related to the deployment.

What might move the scales is also highly individual. One person might find traumatic work assignments easier to handle than another but be more vulnerable to problems in personal relationships.

MANAGING ASSIGNMENTS

The need to assess risks applies not only to situations involving direct trauma but also to projects that involve prolonged immersion in traumatic detail: for example, investigations of torture or domestic violence.

SUPPORT BEFORE THE ASSIGNMENT

Before any assignment, managers should consider psychological well-being part of a comprehensive safety assessment.

This would start with a conversation between you and the team to better understand what is likely to occur on the assignment, what experiences members of the team have had in the past that may be relevant, what trauma-awareness training they have had, and their experiences and practices in self-care. (You will find practical tip sheets in the appendix.)

Best-practice support includes the following:

- Conduct a basic psychological health and well-being check or risk assessment. A template for this is included in the appendix.
- Talk through the possible emotional risks involved, as well as the logistics and purpose of the assignment itself. Remind the team that distress from trauma exposure is a normal human reaction and not a weakness. That distress may even inform their reporting. Trauma-aware managers can positively reduce the likelihood of ongoing impacts from PTEs.
- Reassure the team that disclosing distress will not have a negative impact on opportunities for future assignments. Follow through on that promise.
- Acknowledge and appreciate the individual's willingness to do the assignment. Feeling valued keeps people emotionally balanced and more invested in the work.
- Make sure the reporter has a direct contact for an editor or manager—someone they can approach anytime—during the assignment. This contact must be available and reliable.
- Ensure that you have updated lists of personal emergency contact numbers for all your team members, including freelancers.
- Remind your team, including freelancers, to engage in self-care while on the job. Ask them to identify the strategies that work best for them when they experience stress or distress (breathing, listening to music, and so on). If you know what some of these coping techniques are, you will be able to remind those people later. You may want to use the psychological health and well-being risk assessment to note individual self-care practices.

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SUPPORT DURING THE ASSIGNMENT

During the assignment, regular contact with each person involved in gathering the story is crucial to creating a safe and trauma-aware environment for them to work in.

- Maintain regular contact—even a quick phone call to say, "How's it going?" is helpful.
- Give words of encouragement and watch out for giving too much criticism—people have heightened sensitivities when they're exposed to trauma.
- Remind them of the importance of self-care. Healthy eating, exercise, and sleep are vital. Too much self-medication with alcohol has a negative effect. Remind them of some of the things they had earlier identified as strategies that work for them. Remind them that self-care leads to better journalism; a good night's sleep will position them to get a good story the next day.
- Send the message that it is normal to feel distress if they are surrounded by distressing events. It is OK to talk about it. Such responses are human, and it is not weak, unprofessional, or career-threatening to express them. Emphasize that signs of distress will not impact future work with your news organization.
- Manage contact with others from your organization—a badly timed phone call (especially regarding finance!) will exacerbate stress levels.
- Support them in managing other work-related stressors (logistics, accommodation, and so forth), and do not add to those stresses by making unrealistic or impossible requests.
- Consider rotation or withdrawal of a highly distressed person, but remember to discuss your reasons with them and do it sensitively. If the journalist is a freelancer, be aware that ending an assignment has a financial impact—make sure you only take this course if absolutely necessary, and keep in mind that it will potentially add a new stressor around money.

READING WARNING SIGNS

As an editor trying to assess the needs of colleagues, you may be wondering how one tells the difference between clear warning signs as opposed to levels of discomfort that require awareness and management but are not such a cause for concern.

Wartime and periods of ongoing crisis make it harder to spot unusual patterns of distress. That is because the context demands greater readiness for dealing with danger, and so people's natural baselines are likely to be higher. Their emotions may be more changeable or alternatively flatter than before.

As a rule of thumb, look out for any reactions that involve a marked and persistent shift away from the recent baseline, and that significantly impair a reporter's daily functioning:

- Explosive anger that fires up without apparent reason and that forms a repeated pattern over time.
- Other marked changes in character, such as unusual meekness.
- Images or thoughts related to a project that intrude at unwanted moments, are unusually persistent, and don't diminish over time. Flashbacks, in which people experience events as if they are happening again, are one example of this.
- The sense that life has become meaningless or foreshortened.
- A persistent and generalized feeling of numbness or deadening inside.
- Unusual self-isolation and withdrawal.
- Increase in self-medication (alcohol, drugs, compulsive overworking, and so on).
- Unusual risk-taking with no real regard for self or colleagues.

These are all signs that somebody needs extra support. That doesn't necessarily mean they should stop all work. In fact, doing so may be destabilizing. But clearly, if a journalist may have become a danger to themselves or others, you need to factor that into what kinds of work you assign that person to. They shouldn't be in a position where they are making safety decisions for other colleagues.

SUPPORT AFTER THE ASSIGNMENT

It is essential that managers contact any team member who has been through a distressing experience. This is good management practice in any case but is especially important in the aftermath of trauma. It can be a step that gets overlooked when managing freelancers, but it's one you should not ignore.[11]

- **CHECK IN**
  Open a line of conversation about how the reporting experience went, both logistically and emotionally. Don't be afraid to talk about emotions—they are normal. Remember to do this for freelancers as well as staff members.

- **ASSESS PRACTICAL NEEDS AND SAFETY**
  Are they physically safe? Is there somewhere they need to be or something they need?

- **STABILIZATION**
  Scan who seems to be faring OK and who is "wobbly"—the challenge will be to do this via email and phone. Pay attention to those who seem to be experiencing intense or unusual emotions (for them). Check for severe signs like disassociation or hyperventilation. Offer counseling if they are overwhelmed or you feel out of your depth.

- **EDUCATE**
  Remind them that any distress is a typical human response following a potentially traumatic event—explain that most people feel a lot better in three to four weeks. Check for the reactions listed on page 7. Utilize humor. Encourage them to focus on something they can control.

- **SOCIAL SUPPORT AND FOLLOW-UP**
  Encourage your colleague to maintain support from family, friends, and social networks. Acknowledge their work with thanks, public recognition, and emails—saying thank-you goes a long way to assist well-being and leads to better work performance.

It is important to check in with them again in three to four weeks to see if any of these reactions are unrelenting and still occurring. Remember that during wartime people operate at a higher baseline—everyone's reactions are likely to be somewhat elevated. Pay particular attention to unusually intense reactions that are interfering with someone's ability to function. (See the box above, "Reading warning signs.")

You can also use this contact to once again express appreciation for the work they did. If they are continuing to experience troubling reactions, refer them to a trauma specialist or medical practitioner that understands psychological trauma.

Remember that you also participate in the ripple effect of trauma. Notice your own emotions, and don't be surprised if you feel some of the above reactions or others that seem out of the ordinary. Make sure you apply self-care and talk to someone as well.

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11 - McMahon, C. (2018). "Psychological First Aid for Journalist Peer Supporters—CASES." Presentation to Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) 2018 Peer Support Conference, Brisbane, Australia.

Artem Dzhepko, journalist of the We Are Ukraine project[12]

"It is very difficult emotionally. Now I don't need a specialist to keep my sanity, but I don't rule out that I will need one in the future. How do I cope? I talk to my family, call my wife, tell her almost everything. And she supports me. She also tells me about what's going on at home, how the cat was running around all night and kept her awake—she switches me to something mundane, homely, and warm. I think only my family helps me.

"When I came back from a business trip, my wife and I used to go for a lot of walks, sit in the park in the shade, and talk. I would also go shopping with tools
and buy something. Working with your hands, when you're covered in dust and rattling a hammer drill, effectively switches your brain. And my cat is an anti-stress. I love him very much; I play with him with pleasure. Perhaps also sports. But when you're on a business trip, sports fade into the background, because work and sleep come first.

"I perfectly understand people who, to be honest, drink. It is very difficult to go through all this—even if you have not been in the occupation yourself, but have only heard about it, even when it was not your colleague who died, but a person you have known for only a few days....I'm not drinking, because I know it just won't help."

12 - When we talked to Artem, he was covering the war as a journalist. Artem is currently the head of the press service for the Joint Assault Brigade of National Police of Ukraine.

SELF-CARE FOR EDITORS AND MANAGERS

As a manager, you have a duty of care to your news teams to identify risks and support their well-being.

But your own self-care is also vital. As a leader, you need to stay resilient in the face of stress, vicarious trauma, and their potential impact. Doing self-care will also demonstrate to your team that you are willing to lead by example.

Be aware that as an editor, you are also exposed to traumatic content—electronically or working through story angles with your team—and this can place you at risk.

Here are some tips to keep yourself trauma aware and trauma resilient:

- **SELF-CARE BASICS**
  Make sure you cover the essentials: sleep, nutrition, exercise. Take your annual leave and take breaks throughout the day. Don't follow the news cycle 24 hours a day.

- **EYE ON THE SIGN**
  Watch for the same signs you are looking for in your teams: uncharacteristic behavior, isolating yourself, feeling jumpy or on edge, outbursts of anger, unusual lack of care or connection to your work, excessive alcohol consumption or drug use. Take heed of the warning signs—seek peer support from other managers or editors in your organization or through your networks. If necessary, seek professional support.

- **KNOW WHEN TO CALL IT**
  You may also feel pressure to get the story at all costs. Make sure your editorial team has discussed various scenarios, so you know when it is right to call your team off a job for their safety and well-being. These prior discussions help make those in-the-moment decisions easier.

- **OWN YOUR RESPONSE AND YOUR RESPONSIBILITY**
  A burden of leadership comes with placing other people in potentially dangerous situations. Know that despite your best practices, things may not always work out as well as you planned. Respond to these situations professionally but be aware of your own potential to feel overly responsible for outcomes. Your job is to lead by example, and this is especially true when things go wrong.

- **STAY UP TO DATE**
  Keep learning about trauma and its impact on news gatherers. Develop a newsroom culture that is trauma literate and committed to excellence in trauma reporting, for both the news subjects and the news gatherers.[13]

13 - You can find more suggestions for self-care in this short guide published by GIJN and the Dart Center: https://gijn.org/resource/reporters-guide-to-investigating-war-crimes-self-care-for-covering-traumatic-events/.

APPENDIX

Psychological Health and Well-Being

Risk Assessment and Templates

RISK ASSESSMENT

A psychological health and well-being assessment is part of the news organization's duty of care to reporting teams, but it can also be a useful tool to aid planning for support and actions in the event of a risk's realization. Conduct the following for each person prior to each assignment. Be especially vigilant if children are the subject.

Using the tool: Managers can tick the boxes before assigning journalists to a story or even afterward. If any of the boxes is ticked, then the manager has a record for following up with reporters on their well-being later, as these events are often (but not always) associated with higher levels of emotional impact.

Risk assessment	Personally threatened	First-person witness	Repeated exposure through interviews or watching
Is death involved?			
Is actual or threatened injury involved?			
Is actual or threatened sexual violence involved?			
Has the team member experienced or reported traumatic events multiple times?			

TIP SHEETS

Following is a checklist to help you support your freelancers and other team members who may be exposed to trauma in the course of their work. You may want to print these and keep them on hand.

BEFORE ASSIGNMENT, IF BOXES ON THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING MATRIX ARE TICKED

- Discuss the potential for trauma exposure.
- Explicitly name what might be involved—the emotional challenges as well as the physical risks.
- Make realistic arrangements to keep in touch.
- Encourage self-care—limiting exposure, taking breaks, getting peer support.
- Discuss potential exit strategies.
- Inform journalists of what you will do to support them—create rotation plans for fatigue and trauma exposure, checking in on them, and so on.
- Make sure you have the latest personal contact details, including who should be contacted first in the worst case.
- Take note of the journalist's self-care experiences and practices; you can remind them of these later if needed.

SUPPORT DURING

- Keep in touch.
- Ensure that you listen for any concerns about physical safety, fatigue management, or distress.
- Allow and encourage close contact with home and friends.
- Leaders set an example—ensure that you as a leader take time off and apply self-care.
- Be careful with the timing and pitch of any criticism or rotation. Defenses will be down and sensitivities high.
- Check in with partners and family for long-term assignments.

SUPPORT AFTER

- Make contact.
- Check on how people are doing.
- Check their practical needs—what do people need (rotation, break from trauma stories, and so on)?
- Encourage peer and family support.
- Normalize post-trauma reactions.

TIP SHEETS

SIGNS TO WATCH OUT FOR (NOT DEFINITIVE)

- Behaving uncharacteristically.
- Self-isolating.
- Talking constantly about an event.
- Acting extremely angry, jumpy, or on edge.
- Experiencing guilt, shame, or self-blame, or blaming others to an extreme.
- Showing signs of confusion or diminished decision-making ability.
- Being more accident prone or taking more risks.
- Being uncharacteristically obsessive about work.
- Showing a lack of interest or poor concentration.
- Obviously increasing substance use or abuse.
- Uncharacteristically missing deadlines.

SELF-CARE STRATEGIES

- Do simple breathing and movement exercises while you are on assignment.
- Acknowledge what you're going through or have been through.
- Sleep and eat well, and exercise.
- Keep to routines where possible—an early return to work helps with recovery.
- Talk about thoughts and feelings with colleagues, a partner, or a trusted friend.
- If you'd rather not talk, it can help to write your thoughts down.
- Take time for family and friends.
- Take time to reflect.

MORE RESOURCES

The Dart Center website has been accumulating insight from journalists, filmmakers, and mental health experts for more than twenty years. While those resources are mostly in English, the following are currently available in Ukrainian.

REPORTING WAR

This booklet edited by Sharon Schmickle pools together the experience of international reporters who covered the Iraq War. [Uk] [En]

TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING VICTIMS OF TRAGEDY, WITNESSES, AND SURVIVORS

Advice from the Mexican journalist, Marcela Turati on effective and sensitive interviewing; a GIJN resource republished by the Dart Center. [Uk] [En]

HOW TO REPORT ETHICALLY ON CHILDREN AFFECTED BY THE UKRAINE CONFLICT

Advice from specialist reporter Irene Caselli. [Uk] [En]

WORKING WITH A TRAUMATIZED CHILD: CREATING A FRAME AND MINIMIZING HARM

A tip sheet from Kate Porterfield on age-appropriate interviewing strategies. [Uk] [En]

GIJN REPORTER'S GUIDE TO INVESTIGATING WAR CRIMES

Contains chapters from the Dart Centre on:

- trauma-informed interviewing [Uk] [En]
- self-care [Uk] [En]

COVERING CRSV

A detailed manual on how to cover conflict-related sexual violence. It is also useful for any situation in which sources have experienced torture or inhumane treatment. [Uk] [En]

HANDLING TRAUMATIC IMAGERY: DEVELOPING A STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

A guide on working with graphic imagery. [Uk] [En]

HANDLING THE DEATH OF A COLLEAGUE

This includes specific advice for editors. [Uk] [En]

PROVIDING PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR UKRAINIAN JOURNALISTS

A briefing written in conjunction with the Global Forum for Media Development that discusses how organizations can support journalists working in Ukraine. [Uk] [En]

In Spring 2024, the Dart Centre will be publishing a dedicated resources portal in Ukrainian that will be accessible on www.dartcenter.org.ua.

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