NEWS MANAGEMENT AND TRAUMA JOURNALISM
A RESEARCH PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS
BY
SHAWNA RENEE COOPER
ADVISOR: DR. ROBIN BLOM
BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA
MAY 2016
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER                      PAGE
INTRODUCTION                 3
LITERATURE REVIEW            11
METHODS                     20
RESULTS                     21
DISCUSSION                  27
REFERENCES                  34
APPENDIX                    37
Introduction

Covering crisis situations is part of a journalist’s job. Photojournalists are usually the first on a scene when a tragedy is unfolding. Not only are photojournalists documenting history, they are exposing themselves to traumatic and stressful events.

Definition of the Problem

The stigma of psychological stress is strongly felt by journalists as a characteristic of the journalism culture (e.g., Ricchiardi, S., & Gerczynski, T., 1999). Similar beliefs are present in other populations of workers dealing with trauma, conflict, and disaster (e.g., military and police responding to school shootings, terrorist attacks, car accidents, executions, earthquake aftermaths, etc.). The term describes a broad range of problems including diagnosed psychiatric conditions, such as anxiety and panic disorders, major depression, acute and posttraumatic stress, as well as less severe problems that interfere with daily functioning, such as lack of concentration, anger, and emotional exhaustion. In hopes of addressing a similar stigma for journalists, the adoption of the term assignment stress injury (ASI) is proposed. This term describes a type of injury that develops within the journalism context both on trauma assignments in the field and in the newsroom. Most importantly, journalists may develop secondary traumatic stress (STS) symptoms from witnessing the suffering of others, or experiencing firsthand a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These symptoms include: (1) re-experiencing phenomena (e.g., intrusive imagery, flash-back memories, nightmares), (2) avoidance responses (e.g., numbing out, avoiding reminders of the event, diminished interests), and (3) increased arousal (e.g., difficulty sleeping, heightened startle response, difficulty focusing, irritability) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). These reactions are a normal
response and can also be cumulative, building in intensity over time. It is this cumulative exposure that puts journalists at risk, but the context of the newsroom exacerbates the symptoms.

Preliminary Research

On April 8, 2011, Joe Hight, who was the metro editor of The Oklahoman at the time of the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing, generously agreed to be interviewed for preliminary research. That day in April marked the 16th anniversary of the Oklahoma City Bombing, and Hight has since been promoted to Director of Information and Development. He has served as president of the DART Center for Journalism and Trauma’s Executive Committee. Hight has written several articles on covering victims of trauma such as Covering a Community Tragedy, Tragedies and Journalist, and Behind the Story: The Virginia Tech Shootings. Hight defines trauma journalism as “the coverage of violence or action in which there are victims. In my opinion, that can range anywhere from natural disaster to manmade disasters.” During the Oklahoma City Bombing, Hight said that you had to think of it as the coverage of the people. As an editor, one of Hight’s duties was to manage the people of the newsroom who were covering the story.

Hight knows that journalists are trained to cover disasters but doesn’t think a newsroom can be fully prepared for something like the Oklahoma City Bombing where 168 people were killed and more than 700 injured. As an organization, Hight said that after the bombings they routinely hold workshops about dealing with victims, what you should do to take care of yourself, and different types of aspects of covering tragedies. Hight also invited previous victims to his newsroom to talk about how they felt they were
covered in the wake of a tragedy, what the news team did right and wrong, and how they could provide better next time.

Hight believes that there are several traits that a good leader should possess when faced with a tragedy. He said that you have to be sensitive to people’s feelings, and sensitive to understanding that “journalists are human beings out there rather than machines covering stories.” He thinks that the ability to pull in different departments and people who are able to cover the story is just as important as the ability to understand who can do it and who can’t cover the story. He stated:

“My job was to cover the victim’s aspect. When you are talking about victims, you are talking about 168 people who died and more than 700 were injured and so it’s a massive story to do. You have to think strategically about how to cover it. It’s an act of collaborating with people who have not covered these types of situations before, and talking to them about it and understanding their feelings about it and working with them. A leader has to be the calm in the midst of the storm. You’ve got to be the one motivating, the one that’s encouraging, and the one that is listening.”

When asked how, as an editor, in the intensity and emotion of the tragedy, if he was able to keep the coverage fair and credible, he said, “You are covering your community. You have to think about what, in a journalistic sense, what is the best and most important thing for your community—what does the communities need to hear or see? Pictures can be used in timelines, but if you sit there and you carry the same huge images over and over again instead of portraying where the community is today as compared to where it was then, then you are making a mistake in my opinion. The community progresses, and news organizations should think about doing the same thing.”

Hight then brought up how journalists will follow traumatic events the rest of their career whether it becomes part of who they are as journalists, or they feel it is their calling to continue to cover that event. Long-time exposure to an event may not be
something that is necessarily good for one’s mental health. Hight suggests that anyone
who has trouble with being exposed to certain events should seek professional help, have
positive outlets outside of work, and have a supportive work environment where it is
okay to talk about what happened.

Hight describes this as a preventative measure, and George and Jones would
describe this as having a balance of work and personal life stress. As a journalist, it is
difficult to leave your work at the office. Even Hight was not immune. He stated:

“The first time I spoke about it (OCB) I had a nightmare the night before I spoke.
I hadn’t had a nightmare up until that point, but your mind actions will try to help
you get through it, but if you don’t have those outlets and not doing the
preventative to get you through it, then you need professional help. Some of us
need it anyway. It will help you get through it. Most organizations have the
counseling programs available to their employees.”

When asked if he ever worked with a journalist who displayed symptoms of
PTSD, he said yes. When asked if having PTSD would affect a journalist’s career, he
stated it would affect his or her career, but how an organization handles the situation will
determine outcome. He hopes that a journalist in this situation would be employed by an
organization that is understanding and help that person get through the hardest part of
PTSD rather than “kick you out on the street.” He believes there is still value in a
journalist who has experienced this, and some of a news team’s most valuable people are
not immune. He said:

“You have to have value in people in the long run rather than the short-term. I can
almost pinpoint people, who will potentially have those problems. They are in a
pretty high stress beat, and they cover crime. They have had something personally
happen to them that has exasperated the situation. They turn to unhealthy outlets,
such as alcohol or other things in order to try to accommodate the pain that they
are feeling. You have to get them to a professional for help”
When asked how his newsroom coped with the aftermath of the Oklahoma City Bombing, Hight said that the organization brought in a counselor (Charlotte Wanker), and presented the journalists with different ways they could contact her. They offered one-on-one counseling, phone and email contact with the counselor, or a combination of the three to help. Hight explained that many journalists are afraid to ask for help, because it might make them look like they can’t handle the job expectations. Hight also encouraged his staff to pursue outside outlets such as family activities, hobbies, church, or going to the gym. The staff tried to do group counseling sessions, but there was a lot of controversy concerning the way those types of sessions should be handled so they did group sessions about healthy ways a person can help him or herself through a traumatic time.

Ball State University Professor of Journalism and Director of the Journalism Writing Center, Mark Massé, published a book in October 2011 entitled: *Trauma Journalism: On Deadline in Harm’s Way*. He was also interviewed in April 2011.

Massé’s definition of trauma journalism is any situation facing a journalist in which he or she is confronted with any number of difficult or negative emotions, as well as a situation that could be threatening or hazardous. He explains:

“I try to stay away from one set definition because what I found while doing my research for this book is people do get affected. Journalists do get affected in any number of ways. It isn’t always in something very dramatic like covering a war or a major disaster. It could be any number of situations where it would be classified as crisis or trauma journalism. There is also secondary traumatization or vicarious traumatization. You can have the editor reviewing videotape, going back and forth over something that is very grizzly like those who had to edit the video of the [2002] Daniel Pearl execution.”

Massé believes it is important to educate future journalists and editors about trauma journalism. He stated:
“One of my goals, now that the book is finished, is in months and years to see if we can do a better job at having more of a formalized introduction into our courses of these topics. Even if we spend a couple of classes or one week just letting students know what they are going to be experiencing, I think that is going to be important. Another thing I learned while working on the book is that unfortunately the youngest reporters are the most vulnerable. They know how to do an interview. They know how to write a story. They know how to post something online, but they are completely in the dark as far as what they are going to experience and what they can do inadvertently to harm other people if they are using improper interviewing techniques in a crisis or traumatic situation.”

Massé shared three different levels to educate journalists in trauma journalism: (1) educating the journalist themselves about what is going on and how they are experiencing; (2) understanding the sources and what the interviewing situation is doing to those sources (victims, victim’s families, neighbors, and friends); and (3) the impact of the crisis situation on communities. He believes it is going to be up to academia to prepare the next generation of journalists about these issues. He thinks that his own institution, Ball State University, could do trauma journalism workshops to raise awareness first before getting classes on trauma into the curriculum. Massé encourages giving practical suggestions to the faculty about how to teach it, implementing some of these approaches into the course where they think they can do it, such as in an interviewing course.

Massé agrees that even seasoned editors and journalists are not immune to being sensitized during their careers, and have made bad judgment calls in a trauma situation. Massé interviewed a newspaper editor for his book, who had a short posting on a college media advisors listserv. She was sharing her guilt about something that happened years earlier when she was a managing a reporter who witnessed a man killed in a construction accident. The reporter asked this editor if it would be okay if she didn’t cover the story. This young woman had not shared anything with the editor about what she was dealing
with in her personal life. This editor considered herself a progressive, but wanted the job done. She essentially responded, ‘Ah, come on now, you know you got to cover the story,’ and the young women did. She came back with blood all over her shoes and terrified. Even then, the editor still didn’t think about this reporter being in shock or know this reporter was experiencing a personal tragedy and was in counseling. Massé explained that this death on the construction site wasn’t just another assignment. This was triggering event of negative emotions for the reporter. Later, the editor said, ‘How could I have done that? How could I have not been sensitive? Why didn’t I say, “you look like you are going through some stuff and why don’t we talk about it?” Even an experienced editor can make the wrong call.

Massé inffers that a good manager in a newsroom should possess awareness of what the staff is going through at all times, and be sensitive to reading staff members emotions, especially those who have been out covering something traumatic. He hopes that with time, this awareness will become part of the culture of the newsroom and instinctive to have those sensitivities.

Having strategic, programmed decision-making techniques in place in times of trauma also enhance the effectiveness of leadership. Massé interviewed Scott North, a veteran reporter and editor in Washington State, who implemented a rotating staff plan while they were covering a very long murder trial as to not have one or two people covering the story for long periods of time. These journalists were witnessing murder evidence, pictures and testimonies for hours and days at a time, and using the team approach would give these reporters less exposure time. Massé explained that Joe Hight also used this approach in the Oklahoma City Bombing. He said:
“Joe had rotating teams of reporters covering the Oklahoma City Bombing. So it wasn’t just one or two guys covering this beat for a month. So knowing how to use personnel, being aware of the situation, and then some common sense things like reminding people that you can’t be tempted to work around the clock. You have to use some methods of relieving the stress and relieving the pressure whether it is exercise or whether it is that you need a day off—whatever it is that is going to relieve the stress. It isn’t really fancy. It isn’t where these editors or these managing personnel have to know any exotic methods of leadership. It is really just having a sense of people and trying to look out for their own best interests I can’t emphasize enough that being aware and being sensitive to what is going on.”

In the people who Massé talked to about having PTSD, they all said it affected the longevity of their careers. “There are people, who have been pretty gutsy about it and basically telling their employers that they are going through counseling. Others have kept it relatively quiet and just dealt with it. I have had some people say some they were fired because of PTSD. Because of the liability issues and legal side of these things, it is going to be very rare to find a boss who is going to say ‘yeah, we fired a person because they have PTSD. They are going to say ‘of course not, we provided counseling.’ Maybe the person got fired because their drug addiction or drinking got out of hand, which was a result of their PTSD. That is one of those dark areas or shady areas where you are never really going to get a clear answer.”

Dr. Jim Willis (2010), professor of Journalism at Azusa Pacific University, weighs in on young journalist in his book The Mind of a Journalist:

“It is often said that daily journalism is a ‘young person’s sport,’ but the economics of the business—especially the cutbacks in print media news organizations. First, reporting is a demanding job...many journalists see more as a mission or a calling. Missions and callings are easier to carry out when one is young and relatively unencumbered by a family and the needs that must be attended to there. Second, reporting doesn’t pay that much. The Weaver study quoted showed the average reporter in America making about $43,000. In today’s economy, that is a salary that is more befitting a 20-something professional than
on in their 40s or 50s. Third, the idealistic view of journalism that brings many
people into this profession often gives way to the grimmer realities of the news
business as times goes on. (124-125).

David LaBelle (1993) felt so passionately about trauma journalism and the
photojournalist, he self-published a book called book Lessons in Death and Life. LaBelle,
director of the photojournalism program at Kent State University and veteran newspaper
photographer, recalls in the book the day he felt like calling it quits early in his career:

“As I wept in my car, I realized I had photographed dozens of accidents and
deaths. Why did this one cut so deeply? Finally, it struck me. Out of helplessness,
out of the impotence of only being able to make pictures, I had done what I had
scorned in others—I had irrationally misplaced the blame for accident onto
myself and decided I would somehow punish myself and purge whatever guilt
feelings I carried by quitting photojournalism. Seeing a little boy die in the street
and being unable to help or to change what was happening were what hurt me so
badly, not the tragedy itself (p. 69).”

LaBelle’s book focused on the reality that photojournalist’s work can have a
cumulative affect and not all tragedies have to be as big as witnessing a one-time
catastrophic event.

Literature review

Among those professionals at the highest risk of stress, psychiatrist Frank Ochberg
(1996) finds, surgeons and journalists have most strongly resisted outside help.
“Journalists, by habit or culture, refuse to feel their grief, their horror, their anxiety,” says
Ochberg who helped develop a Michigan State University journalism training program
on how to cover trauma and its victims. Talk to reporters who have written about some
aspect of horror, and Ochberg’s assessment rings true.

Perceptive trauma reporting can encourage accountability, strengthen the resilience
of individuals and help the public to meaningfully engage in issues that can add great
value to the quality of their lives (Rees, 2013). However, as Rees explains, there is urgency for this type of reporting, but no training or education given to journalists trying to meet the challenge of work/life balance. Violence and loss take a toll on people, yet the trauma journalist is expected to maintain the highest ethical and journalism standards in reporting, but not be prepared for or manage trauma properly.

Journalists suffering emotional effects from the trauma they cover are not a new topic. Studies have demonstrated that war correspondents are significantly more likely to show signs of post-traumatic stress and depression versus reporters who have never been on the battlefield (Feinstein et al., 2002; Matloff, 2004; Strupp & Bartholomew, 2003). Journalists have also mentioned suffering from symptoms of emotional distress following their coverage of large-scale disasters such as the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City (Coté & Simpson, 2000) and the collapse of the World Trade Center in New York City (Feinstein, 2004; Strupp & Cosper, 2001).

What about everyday trauma? What are the emotional effects of repeated exposure to the fatal accidents, murders, and kidnappings that make up the bulk of some local journalist’s work? What are the consequences of interviewing those in the midst of terrible suffering and pain following their own victimization or the victimization of a loved one? While the topic has generated a great deal of discussion, it has only recently become the focus of empirical research. Caught in the middle is the journalist who, because of increasingly sophisticated technology, is able to cover violence, suffering and chaos from the center of the crisis. Given the increasing emphasis on stories of death and violence, the question of whether reporters and photographers are emotionally affected by their daily exposure to these types of stories acquires greater significance (Simpson &
Psychology literature shows that emergency ambulance workers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and symptoms of traumatic stress at a rate of 22 percent (Bennett et al., 2005). Police officers also suffer PTSD and traumatic stress symptoms similar to those found in soldiers (Violanti, 1999). Cote and Simpson (2000) argued that journalists suffer in much the same way because their job requires them to visit the same scenes and encounter the same victims that the police and rescue personnel do. The authors argued, “Journalists can become trauma victims simply by doing their work by visiting scenes of destruction, talking to and photographing people who have been injured or traumatized” (p. 42).

Despite increasing interest in the issue of journalism and trauma, there are only a few studies published in academic journals that focus on discovering and verifying an actual relationship between covering everyday crime and violence and the traumatic effects on the journalist who covers it. A 1994 study of journalists who witnessed an execution was the first to look at the effects of witnessing a trauma when there is no personal physical risk and when the witness knows ahead of time what they will be seeing. Results showed that those who witnessed the execution experienced a high prevalence of dissociation and reported symptoms similar to those who have suffered through a natural disaster (Freinkel et al., 1994).

Simpson and Boggs (1999) published an exploratory look at trauma symptoms among newspaper journalists. Seventy percent of their respondents mentioned feeling “stressed out” following their coverage of a traumatic event. The longer a person had worked in the news industry, the more likely they were to report symptoms of avoidance
and intrusion or flashbacks from the traumatic events they had covered. The authors argued their results showed that journalists are surprisingly similar to public safety workers in both their experiences and their emotional responses.

Pyevich, Newman, & Daleiden, (2003) looked at symptoms of PTSD among photojournalists. Total assignments, personal exposure, and social support were all significant predictors of whether or not a photojournalist would suffer from symptoms of PTSD. Results showed that photojournalists actually experienced PTSD at a level lower than that of emergency workers. Only a minority suffered symptoms of actual PTSD, but a larger minority suffered from some form of trauma-related symptoms.

Pyevich et al. (2003) surveyed 900 newspaper journalists about the number of traumatic events they had witnessed during the year 2000. Ninety-six percent were exposed to at least one work-related traumatic scene in which a person was hurt or killed during that 12-month period. The authors noted that journalists with greater exposure to traumatic events evidenced more negative views of the world and their profession, but only 4.3 percent reported enough symptom severity to be classified as suffering from PTSD.

Fedler (2004) took a historical perspective and investigated how the issue of traumatic stress was dealt with in the early days of journalism. The anecdotal evidence from books and magazines about early journalists suggested that witnessing calamities was one of nine reasons that contributed to their emotional distress and burnout. This trauma led to the development of several symptoms of compassion fatigue and PTSD, including recurring nightmares and alcoholism. War photography, by its nature, may attract individuals who seek out risk, danger, and the adrenaline rush, therefore
predisposing them to PTSD. Such a reductionist explanation does not, however, do justice to the complexity of issues motivating war photographers. Feinstein (2004) believes PTSD has three detrimental components for previous war journalist: re-experiencing, avoidance, and arousal. For war photojournalists re-experiencing memories (triggered or unsolicited), these intrusive flashbacks can be life debilitating as their reality is now distorted by witnessing the violence of combat and war. Avoidance (emotional or behavioral) is a PTSD coping mechanism war journalist use try to get through their lives without dealing with any of their issues. They may avoid watching the news or talking specifically about what happened as if it did not transpire. There are also war journalists, who are suffering from arousal PTSD, who can never fully relax. They are always on full alert, are constantly stressed and anxious. All three components of PTSD are injurious to a person’s state of mental health.

Browne, Evangeli and Greenberg (2012) explored the psychological impact of experiencing work-related trauma among journalists. The study predictably discovered that higher levels of exposure to trauma were notably correlated with higher levels of PTSD symptoms.

Leadership

Joe Hight described his leadership style as showing his staffers mutual respect instead of being authoritarian or lackadaisical. George and Jones (2007), authors of Understanding and Managing Organizational Behavior (5th Edition), would define Hight’s leadership style as a relationship-oriented approach: “Leaders who are relationship-oriented want to be liked by and get along well with their subordinates.
Although they want their subordinates to perform at a high level, relationship leader’s first priority is developing good relationships with their followers.” (p. 397).

During the course of Himmelstein and Faithorn’s (2002) investigation, the authors consulted news managers and other broadcast executives with whom they were acquainted to determine which journalists might offer the greatest insight into the question at hand. This resulted in the selection of four highly successful veteran journalists, all with extensive experience as foreign correspondents, working for national news organizations. These news veterans have had ample time to ruminate on their own experiences covering a broad range of catastrophic events, and have observed the responses of countless colleagues with whom they have worked over the years. In short, “they have seen it all.” What has emerged from these extensive conversations is a profile of a highly professional, optimally functioning news reporter with staying power who tells important stories, and who engages and enlightens his or her audience. Essential to this journalist’s performance is the capacity to cope with intense stress, since reporting assignments often lead him or her into emotionally charged and potentially traumatizing situations. This reporter can be contrasted with others covering similarly catastrophic events who burn out, drop out, or fail to inform and edify their audience.

Education

While scholarly attention has begun to focus on the psychological effects of a journalist’s work, no studies have attempted to investigate whether journalists coming out of school are even aware that their jobs can have psychological consequences. What follows is a review of the specific types of emotional and psychological effects that journalists can suffer as a result of their work. The scholarship investigating the specific
connection between journalism and trauma is also reviewed followed by a description of what trauma training is and how it can help. Finally, the results of a two-phase study of journalism students are discussed. The preceding body of research shows that much like a police officer, firefighter, or paramedic, a journalist can suffer traumatic reactions due to his or her experiences on the job. Whether it is a fatal car accident, murder, or natural or manmade disaster, psychological damage can be done. And while nothing can be done to completely shield someone from developing PTSD or its symptoms, training can help lessen the blow of a traumatic experience, thereby offering some protection against more severe psychological and emotional distress.

How do you prepare a young journalist for the potentially traumatizing events he or she may witness? A few larger U.S. journalism schools have implemented this type of training in different ways. For example, at the University of Washington, two weeks of its advanced reporting course focused on journalists’ reactions to trauma. Working journalists were brought in and asked to discuss their experiences and reactions. Psychologists also spoke to the class about the types of reactions journalists can experience and how to cope with them. At Indiana University, students in a news-gathering and ethics course were asked to write a literature review on journalism and trauma in order to familiarize themselves with effects of gathering news during crisis.

The journalism programs at Michigan State University and the University of Washington are perhaps the most intricate. For example, as part of the Victims and Media Program at Michigan State, students are introduced to the topic of trauma in their entry-level reporting courses. They read articles and view videos that discuss trauma and how it can affect both the journalists at the scene and the victims as well. In the upper-level
reporting courses, students are introduced to actual victims and survivors of trauma. Role-playing is also done using actors who portray victims at scenes of trauma. The Journalism and Trauma Program at the University of Washington also uses role-playing with actors. The sessions are closely monitored and the students engage in a number of discussions about how they could be affected in traumatic situations and also how the victims could be affected as well.

The goal in all of these examples is to introduce students to the potentially traumatizing nature of journalism. Therefore, they are not caught completely off-guard when they do encounter something traumatic in their first jobs. For example, students who graduated from the University of Washington program noted that the training was useful in helping them not only approach victims without harming them, but also in helping them cope with their own feelings.

Most reporters encounter death or violence within the first five years of their careers, and trauma symptoms can surface in a reporter or photographer as early as his or her first violent assignment. Additionally, a young journalist facing his or her first violent assignment can suffer a loss of conviction or feelings of depression. These reactions are due to the fact that the young journalist has very little professional or life experience.

Trauma training would help fill this gap, but it has not been widely implemented. One argument is that teaching trauma requires a different type of commitment from what is required of teaching traditional news and journalism courses. Most journalism professors learned their skills through experience in the field, and, unfortunately, even retired journalists are not very good at understanding and dealing with trauma.

Hastings, Musambira, and Hoover (2007) believe in the use of narratives to heal
and establish connections among bereaved persons and communities.

Trauma has often been described as a private, psychological experience, as a painful event that an individual goes through but others cannot feel or fully understand (Kaplan, 2005). And yet trauma is continually evoked in public and pedagogical discourses as that which demands collective response. Deemed otherwise unspeakable, the unrepresented trauma is translated into narratives and testimonials that are effective in communicating trauma as a painful experience (Berlant, 2001). Thus, it is argued that introducing students to trauma narratives and testimonies is an important way of approaching controversial issues such as war, cross-cultural conflict, genocide, racism and terrorism (Schweber, 2004; Zembylas, 2008).

**Research Questions**

Are photojournalists being compensated with health care benefits to cover the cost of therapy regardless if they are employed full-time, part-time or freelance (RQ1)? How are newspaper photo editors managing their photojournalism staff exposed to traumatic events through their work (RQ2)? As evident in this Literature Review, very little research has been published on the topic of leadership and trauma journalism. Much of the research completed in the past couple of years has focused on the definition of the problem, but not on the supervisors who manage traumatized staff. There will always be a need for mental health benefits for photojournalist as traumatic events happen every day. This is especially important now that many newspapers are cutting back staff to hire freelancers to do the job with no health care benefit.

With a survey asking specifically these types of questions, this research will explore how photo editors are managing trauma in their workplace.
Method

In the spring of 2012, an online survey was sent out via Survey Monkey to 185 members who identified themselves as editors or photography editors. This was a systematic sample from the national membership of the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) via Survey Monkey. To increase the response rate of returned online surveys, an additional email blast was requested from the Associated Press Media Editors (APME) as to those who also identified themselves as managing or photography editors.

The online survey contained 18 multiple choice, close-ended questions. Participants were only able to have one answer per question.

The first three questions addressed how many full and part-time photographers each editor has on staff. Questions four through six asked if mental health care benefits were provided to the full-time, part-time and/or freelance photographers. The next three questions (7-9) requested editors to state the level of education their staff has being full-time, part-time and freelance. Question ten began the inquiry specific to trauma, and if they felt that photographers on their staff asked for help in times of stress. Questions 11-12 requested information about the level of support photojournalist was given after experiencing trauma. Then, questions 13-15 examined if the photo editors offered trainings specifically about living with and processing trauma with their staffers. The last three questions (16-18) required demographic information as to what state or territory the participant provided the employment, circulation size, and the editors personal education level.

Also to increase response rate, a personalized letter accompanied the e-mail. This letter explained the reason for the survey, research topic, and how their answers could
help the journalism community.

The response for the survey, which was requested twice online, was relatively low with 23 respondents participating. Of the 23 respondents in the survey, there were several different states or areas (Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Mideast USA, New Hampshire, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Wisconsin) across the nation represented. The newspaper and online circulation numbers ranged from 18,000 readers to 2,000,000 in readership.

Out of all 23 respondents, only 13 stated their education level or years of experience (six Bachelor’s degrees, two Master’s degrees, one with 11 years of experience, two with 20+ years of experience, and two with 30+ years of experience). Ten editors did not respond to the question.

As many of the editors did complete the whole survey, it is interesting to see that the majority of them omitted answering the question about offering part-time and freelance photographers mental health benefits. These respondents finished the survey, but left out the answer to these two questions (Q8 & Q9).

RESULTS

RQ1: Are photojournalists being compensated with health care benefits to cover the cost of therapy regardless if they are employed full-time, part-time or freelance?

Out of 23 respondents in the survey, 13 said that they hired no freelancer photographers. Interestingly, of the remaining ten, four of these leaders said they had six or more freelance photographers on staff. Of these four, none of photo editors said that their company offered mental health benefits to freelancers, two said that they offered
trainings on trauma only on an as needed basis, and only one answered that they require freelancers to have a bachelor’s degree (the rest did not answer).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers of Photographers on Staff</th>
<th>Full time</th>
<th>Part-Time</th>
<th>Freelance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Six or more photographers</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three to five photographers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to two photographers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No photographers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1:** Number of full, part time and freelance photographers on staff as answered by the survey respondents.

Only one photo editor (with 20 years of experience) from Virginia said that they offered health care and have “a robust program” of trauma trainings for all of their photographers offered once a year. However, this same respondent did not have part-time nor freelance photographers on staff.

Respondent five is from Texas and a photo editor of a newspaper with a circulation of 17,000. He or she has a B.A. education level and manages three to five full-time (with full health care benefits) photographers, and one to two freelancers (with no health benefits). The education requirements for the part-time and freelance staff were omitted. The full-time photographers are required to have a B.A. When asked if the staff asks for help in times of crisis, the answer was no. The respondent wrote in, “This really hasn’t been discussed,” after being asked if the staff has a good support system in difficult times. He or she also wrote in “I don’t know,” when asked if PTSD was suspected with any of the current staff. This employer does not offer regular trainings on trauma, or use the free online trainings offered by DART or Poynter. This editor only offers trauma training on an as needed basis.
Respondent eight has a B.A. and works in the state of Washington with a circulation of 250,000. This editor has six or more full-time staff with B.A. degrees (with health benefits), six or more part-time staff with B.A. degrees (with no benefits) and no freelance photographers. If this employer did have freelancer photographers, they would hire them only with a bachelor's degree and offer no benefits. This editor said that the staff does ask for help in times of stress, and “We have off-site counseling our staff has taken advantage of.” When asked if this person suspects any of the staff suffer from PTSD, it was answered with a comment: “More than one staffer sought counseling, and I believe it helped.” This editor offers education on trauma through an internal HR training on an as needed basis.

Respondent 22 has 11 years of experience with a circulation of 80,000 in Oregon. This editor has six or more full-time photographers, three to five part-time photographers and one to two freelance photographers. This employer only offers health care benefits to full-time staff, yet requires all staff to have a bachelor’s degree. This editor reports that his or her staff asks for help in times of crisis, but doesn't feel they have a good support system at work, nor do they offer trainings on trauma or use free resources online. Education on trauma only happens on an as needed basis.

Respondents one, three, and 20 offer benefits to part-time staff but they do not have any part-time photographers hired at the time of the survey.

Respondent one is an editor from Illinois with a B.A., and has a circulation of 100,000. As stated above, this editor would give benefits to part-time staff but refused to answer the education requirement. This employer does not offer regular training on
trauma or use the free resources on the Internet, and does not suspect anyone on staff has PTSD.

Respondent three is a manager with 20 years of experience from Virginia, and works in the journalism industry via online. This person reports that all employees are offered mental health benefits if hired, but has no part-time or freelance staff members. The editor does have six or more full-time photographers that have a post high school education, who asks for help in times of crisis and has support system in the newsroom. Respondent three does suspect some of his or her staff have PTSD, yet says the company offers a “robust program” of trauma trainings only once a year. They also do not implement free online trainings.

Respondent 20 lives in mid-Eastern USA and does not list his or her experience or education level. This editor works for a publication with a circulation in the “billions.” He or she has six or more full-time photographers (with benefits), no part-time staff (would offer benefits), and six or more freelancers (no benefits). A bachelor’s degree is a requirement for full-time photographers at this publication, but the respondent skipped answering the question for part-time and freelance photographers. This editor feels that staff asks for help when stressed from the job and have a good support system in times of crisis. It is suspected that a staff member has PTSD, but this employer does not offer consistent trainings on trauma, and only uses the free resources on an as needed basis.

**RQ2:** How are newspaper photo editors managing their photojournalism staff exposed to traumatic events through?

Respondent 14 is a photo editor from Colorado with a B.A. and a 15,000 circulation. This person has one to two full-time photographers (with health care benefits)
and no part-time or freelancers on staff. Question eight and nine were omitted when asked of the educational requirements of part-time and freelance photographers. The survey was, however, completed. The editor stated that the staff have “the ability to talk to HR after covering traumatic events,” but stated that many do not ask for help in times of crisis. When asked if this editor suspects staff to have PTSD, he or she wrote in, “Yes. Myself after years of covering breaking news such as fires, accidents and police incidents.” Once a year trainings are offered by this employer, and it is recommended by this editor to “find a peaceful place to reflect” if an incident of trauma occurs.

Respondent nine has 38 years of experience (listed as having the most years in collection of respondents) and is from Illinois with a circulation of 34,000. This editor has three to five full-time (with health care benefits) photographers, and has with no part-time or freelance photographers. This respondent requires a bachelor’s degree for full-time staff and also skipped question eight and nine. This editor said he/she feels the staff asks for help in times of crisis and that they have a good support system at work. However, this editor does not offer trainings, but will use the free journalism trauma resources on the internet on an as needed basis.

Respondent 12 is an editor from Louisiana with a B.A. and a circulation of 80,000. This leader has a six or more full-time photographers (with benefits), one to two part-time photographers (with no benefits) and six or more freelancers (with no benefits). There was no answer on education requirement for part-time and freelance photographers. This editor said that the staff does not ask for help in times of crisis and does not have a good support system. The editor suspects someone on staff has PTSD, but does not offer trainings on trauma (only on an as needed basis).
Respondent 23 is from Georgia and has a B.S. in photojournalism (no circulation reported). This person manages six full-time photographers with bachelor’s degrees (offering benefits), no part-time staff (would not offer benefits), and three to five freelance photographers (with no benefits). The respondent did not answer the education requirements for part-time and freelance photographers. This manager feels that staff has a good support system, and asks for help in times of crisis. There is no suspicion of any staff having PTSD, yet not offer regular trainings or the free online resources to staff on trauma (only on an as needed basis).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Circulation Size</th>
<th>Education or Experience Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 1</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 2</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>22 years of experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 3</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>20 years of experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 4</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 5</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 6</td>
<td>2 Million</td>
<td>33 years of experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 7</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 8</td>
<td>250,000</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 9</td>
<td>34,000</td>
<td>38 years of experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 10</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 11</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 12</td>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 13</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 14</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 15</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Snapshot of respondent’s circulation size, education and/or experience level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Circulation Size</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>11 years of experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Research question one is supposed to answer the question of photojournalists being compensated with health care benefits to cover the cost of therapy regardless if they are employed full-time, part-time or freelance. It was found that there were very little responses to the part-time and freelance staff questions on the survey (specifically when asked what their education requirements were for those positions). In today’s economic landscape in journalism, many news outlets are hiring part-time and freelance photographers to decrease the cost to the company and not offer health care benefits. For some photographers, this may be the only option for employment. They will do the job, get a paycheck, but if something traumatic would happen, it would be on the photographer to deal with the aftermath of witnessing a tragedy. It was also found that many photo editors required their employees to have bachelor’s degrees, because news outlets want talented, educated photographers. However, to deny part-time and freelance photographer health care benefits (only offering very few hours or paid by the job) yet
will only hire those with four years of higher education seems to be a problem in the industry right now.

The majority of respondents only answered questions regarding full-time photographers on their staff. Full-time staff photographers, across the board, are being compensated with health care benefits (17 out of the 23 respondents said they offered this benefit to their full-time staff).

Journalism employers are hiring photographers for less wages and no health care benefits to do jobs that can be risky physically and emotionally. It is not surprising that employers want to get their news content at a lower cost as this is a for-profit industry. What is surprising is how the photo editors refused to answer the questions about what education level they require part-time and freelance staff to be. Many of the photo editors avoided question eight and nine but still finished the survey or the respondents completely stopped answering the questions. It is obvious that this business wants more for less. News outlets may be getting their news photography at a considerably cheaper rate, but only at the expense of their staff. The price is very high to pay for photographers without health insurance covering traumatic events.

Research question two distinguishes how newspaper photo editors manage their photojournalism staff exposed to traumatic events. Many of the respondents stated that their company only offered trainings on trauma on an as needed basis or once a year. They were not taking advantage of resources online (by reputable sources like Poynter or DART) even if they were free of charge. It was ironic that these photo editors felt like their staff had a good support system in times of crisis, but were only willing to train about recognizing trauma and how to deal with it once a year.
There is much work to be done in providing photographers (regardless of their seniority, pay grade, or employment status) with necessary resources that are crucial to a healthier work/life balance. Many photojournalists, who are in the trenches of war or covering catastrophic events, school shootings, earthquakes, car accidents, riots, protests, and the like are not doing it for the money or personal gain. These creative, passionate people take photographs for news value, art of storytelling and have a strong desire for telling the truth in the visual form. Photographers are generally the first reporters on the scene and right in the middle of the action. At times, they put their own lives at risk regardless of the danger or the accumulative stress in their lives. A training on stress and trauma possibly once a year or as needed for these people seems to be an unjustified failure on the part of the employer. It is also unfair to repeatedly send out the veteran staff, because they are full-time or the only photographers on staff to constantly cover crisis. This also has an accumulative effect on a person’s mental health, and no amount of therapy is going to “fix” a person who constantly feels they are being traumatized at work, and do not recognize it as a problem. There is a great deal of denial and avoidance when it comes to being tragically effected by the work in the photojournalism industry, because many people don’t want to lose their job, their life’s work, their dignity or their income.

Tragedy, crisis, death, war, and all the negatives in the world are never going to go away, and photojournalists are always going to be needed to objectively tell the story. There are never going to be less traumatic events in the lives of photographers. Many will take the risks involved with trauma to advance their careers regardless of the outcome. We need to be more proactive and aggressive in helping those affected by calamity.
**Recommendations**

Being a news photographer is not an easy job and requires great technical skill and creative storytelling capabilities. The first recommendation is to educate young photojournalist on trauma for an entire semester sometime during their four years earning a bachelor’s degree. A class in trauma should include not only talks on trauma journalism and how to recognize it, but to actively find it in the journalism industry. Students should interview veteran reporters and photojournalist about their careers and how the manage a work/life balance. Guest speakers should be brought in to talk to classes about covering major events with the emphasis on how to cover and manage stories like mass shootings, violent protests, or the aftermath of a terrorist attack. We can teach journalism how to build a story grammatically or take a photo with great light, but we need to be teaching more about what happens when we are exposed to very hard truths visually and emotionally.

The second recommendation is to require all news outlets to have quarterly mandatory trainings on trauma in the workplace. Many would argue that any training of any kind is a luxury in the news business, especially with the current economic landscape, low workplace morale from layoffs, value of the stocks in newspaper plummeting, circulations in decline, and the lack of staff and resources. Some could argue back that the price may be too high to pay those actually doing the work, especially the staffers who work 40-60 hours a week, repeatedly exposed to violence, death, and negativity in the news. This repetition exposure accumulates, and will have an effect on the employee no matter how “professional” or how experienced.
To make these trainings or mini-classes both valuable yet cost-effective, this researcher recommends using free trainings on the internet from a reputable provider like the DART Center for Journalism and Trauma or the Poynter Institute. These trainings could also focus on positive ways to reduce stress and to better cope with a highly stressful work life. The key to these trainings should be to get photographers talking about trauma with colleagues who have also experienced so much negativity on the job, and figure out better ways to prepare for it, and not feel so stigmatized by having their mental health impacted and needing help. Staffers could also take some of the responsibility of the workshop by taking turns preparing the training, researching ways to better handle stress, and examples of how not to deal with life when bad things happen. Guest speakers pertinent to the reporters could also be brought in for these workshops and discussions. Only two out of 23 said that their staff had used the free resources available on the internet. Out of the 23 respondents, 11 said that they do not provided trainings on trauma. It is concerning that the consensus of the majority of the editors in the survey believe trauma trainings are only necessary on an as needed basis.

The third and final recommendation is for there to be advocates for journalists who have faced and are living with trauma. We need more champions for journalists. Yes, the journalism industry is a for-profit business, but the product it produces is very important. These paid professionals telling the story of our history should not have to pay the highest price with their lives and/or mental health. They are making a difference in people’s lives every second of the day by objectively telling the story and showing up to witness tragedy even when their own lives may be at risk. There needs to be a change in the journalism ecosystem, as it is devouring itself from the inside out. Photojournalist are
being paid, but they are often paying too great of a price. Raising awareness of this problem of photojournalists facing trauma would greatly impact the survival of those it impacts.

**Limitations and Future Research**

The survey method used in this research project had a very low response rate and small survey size. This will not give a true random sample of the photo editors and managers in the United States. We cannot draw any major conclusions from this data, but for the information collected, there are still quality insights into the management side of photojournalism today and some interesting facts to discern from their answers. Only 23 out 185 surveys sent out via email were answered, and some did make additional comments. As there were no incentives provided to this particular group of photo editors, the response rate was very low.

To increase the response rate in the future, an incentive should be put into the budget. The researcher could offer the respondent if they finish the survey, a chance to be entered into an anonymous drawing to win a gift card. To increase the number of people surveyed and broaden the representation of a larger population, the next research project should ask not only photojournalist managers, but also ask managers of camera operators, broadcast reporters, online videographers and other visual storytellers in the industry that work on the front lines of crisis, terror, and war.

Journalism as a profession is becoming more dangerous and stressful with each passing year. In 2015, according to the Committee to Protect Journalist, 71 journalists were killed by murder, in the crossfire, in combat or on a dangerous assignment (covering war, but also business, corruption, crime, culture, human rights and politics). In 2014,
U.S. freelance journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff were beheaded very publically by ISIS militants in Syria. Not only are journalists facing terror abroad, they are also seeing and experiencing an increase in domestic terrorism with mass shootings and bombings all over the United States. In October of 2015, The Wall Street Journal reported that the United States leads the world in mass shootings (Palazzolo & Flynn, 2015). Journalists are covering these massacres of innocent people and living within those same communities and facing the aftermath (similar to the Oklahoma City bombing). Lastly, there are also the photojournalists covering the day-to-day stories of car accidents, house fires, violent protests within their cities and many other tragedies that make up the news of our lives. These photojournalists also need awareness raised for them as not all trauma has to be globally horrific to do substantial damage. There will always be a continual need for more research to be completed on leadership in journalism and how they are managing the people documenting the history of our lives.
References


Ricchiardi, S. (2001). After the adrenaline: Once the excitement of chasing the big story subsides, journalists struggle to cope with the horror of the tragic events they've witnessed. *American Journalism Review*, 23(9), 35.


Appendix

Letter to Managing Editors

Dear Managing Editor or Photo Editor,
Hello. My name is Shawna Pierson and I am a graduate student at Ball State University. I am conducting a research for my Master’s Degree Research Project on photojournalists and trauma. I am reaching out to all newspaper managing editors or photo editors with the intent of collecting data on how photojournalists are trained in covering traumatic events.
In 2012, I plan to publish results of this survey based on the data provided by respondents in my thesis. I ask for your help in providing data for this study. I hope that you will agree to participate.
Please take a few minutes to complete the eleven questions in the survey that will be sent to your e-mail address. The information you provide could help in decision making of professionals in the journalism academic community as well as in the professional realm.
Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, please e-mail me at srpierson@bsu.edu.
Shawna Pierson

Survey Questions

Q1 How many full-time photojournalists do you have on staff?
   o None
   o 1-2
   o 3-5
   o 6+
   _____ Other (please specify)

Q2 How many part-time photojournalists do you have on staff?
   o None
   o 1-2
   o 3-5
   o 6+
   _____ Other (please specify)

Q3 How many freelance photojournalists do you have on staff?
   o None
   o 1-2
   o 3-5
   o 6+
   _____ Other (please specify)

Q4 Do you offer mental health benefits and/or employee assistance to your full-time photography staff?
Q5 Do you offer mental health benefits and/or employee assistance to your part-time photography staff?
   o Yes
   o No

Q6 Do you offer mental health benefits and/or employee assistance to your freelance photography staff?
   o Yes
   o No

Q7 What is the education level of your full-time photography staff?
   o No post high school education
   o Bachelor’s degree
   o Master’s degree

Q8 What is the education level of your part-time photography staff?
   o No post high school education
   o Bachelor’s degree
   o Master’s degree

Q9 What is the education level of your freelance photography staff?
   o No post high school education
   o Bachelor’s degree
   o Master’s degree

Q10 As an editor, do you feel that photographers on your staff do not ask for help when help is needed in times of stress?
   o Yes
   o No
   Comments:

Q11 Do you feel that your workplace has a good support system in times of trauma or crisis?
   o Yes
   o No

Q12 Do you suspect one of your photographers on staff is suffering from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder)? Have you offered support services to this staff member?
   o Yes
   o No
   Services offered (please specify):

Q13 Do you offer trainings on how to deal with stress after photographers cover traumatic events?
   o Yes
   o No
Trainings offered (please specify):

Q14 Have you ever used an online training about covering trauma from the Dart Center for Trauma and Journalism or the Poynter Institute?
   o Yes
   o No

Q15 How often do you provide trainings on trauma to your photojournalism staff members?
   o Once a year
   o Four times a year
   o On an as needed basis

Q16 What state or territory do you work in the US?
   Lists will be provided for selection.

Q17 What is the circulation size of your publication?

Q18 What is your level of education? How many years of experience?
   o Education Level
     _____ (please specify)
   o Years of Experience
     _____ (please specify)