eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/

Guest Editor's Note

Introduction: Trauma Literacy in Global Journalism: Toward an Education Agenda

Olatunji Ogunyemi[1] [iD] and Lada Trifonova Price[2]

Abstract

Due to growing evidence of extensive trauma associated with high exposure to traumatizing events, including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and maladaptive coping strategies among practicing journalists, the drive to prepare journalism students to cope with the emotional and psychological stress of reporting trauma and human suffering has grown significantly among scholars in recent years. This special issue proposes a new pathway to an educational agenda in response to this persistent work-related problem in journalism practice.

Keywords

attitudes, curriculum, journalism, mixed methods, trauma

Introduction

Due to growing evidence of extensive trauma associated with high exposure to traumatizing events, including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and maladaptive coping strategies among practicing journalists (Flannery, 2022; Seely, 2020), the drive to prepare journalism students to cope with the emotional and psychological stress of reporting trauma and human suffering has grown significantly among scholars in recent years. This special issue proposes a new pathway to an educational agenda in response to this persistent work-related problem in journalism practice. With a shared interest in the well-being of current and future journalists, this collection of articles delves into the rich and diverse perspectives of journalism educators in different

[1]University of Lincoln, UK
[2]University of Sheffield, UK

Corresponding Author:
Olatunji Ogunyemi, Lincoln School of Film, Media and Journalism, University of Lincoln, Brayford Pool, Lincoln LN6 7TS, UK.
Email: oogunyemi@lincoln.ac.uk

regions of the world to argue for a global educational agenda designed to prepare journalism students to cope with the effects of exposure to traumatic events during their careers.

The core themes covered in this special issue include the awareness of trauma among journalism educators globally, experiences of teaching and/or barriers to teaching trauma, and the perspectives of practicing journalists on coping strategies and/or newsroom support that may have pedagogical relevance. These themes will enable journalism educators, trainers, and practicing journalists to learn from each other about work-related trauma, how journalists cope with its effects, and the level of institutional and social support. We hope that the evidence emerging from these studies will enable journalism educators to propose the inclusion of trauma-informed literacy in journalism curricula in higher institutions worldwide, and to challenge the normative assumptions around objectivity and detachment, considered core skills of journalism and storytelling. The collection of papers presents empirically grounded evidence using a range of methodological approaches to make timely recommendations on how to equip students with the skills to cope with the effects of trauma.

Studies have shown that journalism students are ill-prepared to cope with the challenges of reporting in the 21st century. Courses appear not to place emphasis upon fostering resilience in students who may be given high-risk assignments (Specht & Tsilman, 2018), and there is striking inattention to questions about the emotional impact of journalists' work (Jukes, 2016; Richards & Rees, 2011). This raises concern about a possible failure of duty of care by journalism educators in not offering enough opportunities for students to develop skills which may reduce risk to their personal and professional well-being.

The contributors to this special issue argue that it is important for journalism schools to prepare future journalists to be resilient in their future journalism practice. The starting point for discussion in this special issue is that journalism education has a duty to respond to the urgent need for journalism graduates to be aware of and be prepared to cope with the potential impact of work-related trauma. This special issue proposes, in particular, to connect the notion of trauma-informed literacy to the escalating incidents of work-related trauma in journalism practice. We argue that this dilemma can be resolved by acting on the recommendation by scholars from different countries and different social and cultural contexts for trauma-informed literacy, defined as an awareness of the potential effects of trauma and adaptive coping mechanisms (Seely, 2020) to be included in journalism curricula.

Some key themes in this diverse collection of papers with global contributors include the understanding of work-related trauma among journalism educators and their attitudes toward embedding trauma literacy into journalism curriculum (Ogunyemi and Price; Wake et al.); the viability of developing resilience training for increasing journalists' ability to manage everyday work-related stressors (Šimunjak); the ethics of care approach for trauma-informed journalism pedagogy (Arrey and Reynolds); what trauma-related topics are valued and taught (Newman et al.); a focus on college students' coverage of a traumatic event (Hill); how hostility reaches journalists and their reactions to these experiences (Ivask and Lon); the awareness of

journalism students about the challenges journalists face when reporting on traumatic events and the student's perception of representation of teaching content related to trauma literacy (Markovikj and Serafimovska); the lived experiences of Kenyan journalists who report terrorism (Muindi); and the impact of the pandemic on Indian journalists both from physical and emotional perspectives (Shilpa et al.).

Several papers make a contribution to our understanding of journalism educators' attitudes and barriers to embedding trauma-informed literacy in journalism curricula. For example, Ogunyemi and Price found that journalism educators have a good understanding of the risks that arise from exposure to critical and potentially traumatizing events and that they are favorably disposed to the inclusion of trauma course in journalism curricula. Journalism educators in Australia and New Zealand, for example, demand more training to effectively embed trauma-informed reporting into their curricula (Wake et al.). Arrey and Reynolds show that U.S. college newsrooms are traumatic spaces where emotional well-being is underemphasized and underappreciated. Newman et al.'s rating of the importance and extent of course coverage of self-care, interviewing, and community impact found that the commonly deemed highly valued topics by journalism educators include ethics of accuracy, sensitivity, respect for survivors, and privacy rights. Students struggle with feelings of detachment, uncertainty, and dread before, during, and after a coverage of an traumatic event such as an execution (Hill). Other papers focus on the lived experiences of journalists. Muindi examined a range of psychological and physical safety consequences for journalists who cover terrorism, including sleeplessness, nightmares, loss of memory, and alcohol abuse, and threats of death by fanatical religious groups. Shilpa et al. point to a direct correlation between worsening mental health and pandemic reporting among Indian journalists. These findings confirm that there is a wide gap between what is taught in the classroom and what is experienced on the field.

The collection of papers adopts a solution-based approach to make some timely recommendations for journalism educators, including the need to prioritize trauma courses and to develop institutional guidelines on how to identify students who experience difficulties attributable to exposure to potential traumatic events (Ogunyemi and Price). Arrey and Reynolds emphasize that university-led interventions could better prepare undergraduate students for their future careers, improving educational experiences and reducing attrition. Newman et al. propose the adoption of science-informed strategy by journalism educators in addition to inviting journalists to the classroom to de-stigmatize mental health issues and tell individual stories about occupational challenges and coping strategies. Hill recommends, based on students' preferences, an entire class focusing only on journalism and trauma, and learning about mindfulness exercises in advance rather than waiting for the traumatic event to occur. Ivask and Lon develop a helpful mapping strategy that can be used when preparing students for occupational hazards. Markovikj and Serafimovska urge journalism educators to embed the concept of trauma literacy, which encompasses an understanding of the experience of the trauma survivor, having basic knowledge of the impact of traumatic events on mental health (psychology of trauma experience), creating a comforting environment, showing empathy and compassion when asking about the story, and

taking care of your own mental health and well-being. Šimunjak suggested pedagogy in the form of a microintervention for increasing journalists' ability to manage everyday work-related stressors. Muindi in turn urges journalism schools to develop a curriculum on reporting terrorism, as a new specialization.

Journalism schools can no longer ignore the need to prepare students to deal with traumatic events in the face of increased hostility and deteriorating physical and psychological safety, and to cope with their emotional and psychological effects. As journalism educators, we argue that we have an urgent duty to strengthen resilience in both the reporter and the reported by equipping journalists with the skills and knowledge they need to live up to their vital public service obligations. Resilient democratic societies require resilient journalism to adapt to current and future challenges.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

ORCID iD

Olatunji Ogunyemi https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2469-0299

References

Flannery, R. B. Jr. (2022). News journalists and postruamatic stress disorder: A review of literature, 2011–2020. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, *93*, 151–159.

Jukes, S. (2016). Where's George Bush? University students weather the trauma storm of Hurricane Katrina. *Journalism Education*, *5*(2), 85–96.

Richards, B., & Rees, G. (2011). The management of emotion in British journalism. *Media, Culture, Society*, *33*(6), 851–867.

Seely, N. (2020). Fostering trauma literacy: From the classroom to the newsroom. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, *75*(1), 116–130.

Specht, D., & Tsilman, J. (2018). Teaching vicarious trauma in the journalism classroom: An examination of educational provision in UK universities. *Journal of Applied Journalism and Media Studies*, *7*(2), 407–427.

Author Biographies

Olatunji Ogunyemi, PhD, is the convener of an international multidisciplinary Journalism Education and Trauma Research Group (JETREG) and Media of Diaspora Research Group (MDRG) at the School of English and Journalism, University of Lincoln, UK. He is an adjunct professor in the Department of Communication Arts at Bowen University, Nigeria. Ogunyemi is a member of the AHRC Peer Review College (PRC), ensuring that the highest quality research proposals receive funding in accordance with robust and transparent decision-making processes.

He is a senior academic mentor in the College of Mentors at the Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA), working to strengthen capacity in teaching, research and mentoring in the social sciences and humanities in African universities. Ogunyemi regularly publishes articles in journals and chapters in edited books and is the founder/principal editor of an academic journal of Global Diaspora and Media.

Lada Trifonova Price is a senior lecturer in journalism at the Department of Journalism Studies, University of Sheffield, UK. Her current research focuses on challenges to media freedom and journalistic practice in Eastern and Southern European democracies, including physical and psychological risks to the safety of journalists. She has published several papers on journalism practice in fragile democracies, examining a range of threats to press freedom, censorship and self-censorship, ethical challenges, and media corruption. She is the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Journalism Ethics* published in 2021 and joint leader of the Journalism Education Trauma Research Group (JETREG).