



## Journalistic Community and Secondary Trauma Stress

### Disorder: A Perception Analysis of Mainstream Journalists of Pakistan

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#### Abstract

Journalists are frequently deployed in danger zones and exposed to hostile environments. They frequently investigate and report stories that are sensitive in nature like news stories of sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse, crimes, wars, and conflicts. Violence and hostility are burgeoned out of proportion in our society with every passing day. In Pakistan, journalists are rarely taught how to deal with a range of emotions that they are likely to encounter. This study aims to highlight the level of awareness in the journalistic community in Pakistan about the secondary trauma that they experience while investigating and reporting sensitive issues. The quantitative data was collected by conducting surveys in nine different electronic media houses in Islamabad, Pakistan. 110 journalists participated in the survey. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted of 10 journalists of various experience levels to further investigate the psychological state and the type of events that affected them. The results indicate that 43% of the journalists suffered from depression; out of which 53% of the journalists were reporters. 77.6% of journalists agreed that they do not consider themselves equipped with skills to meet psycho-social challenges that they encounter in the newsrooms or in the field. The research recommends the need of upgrading the mass communication curricula and the establishment of trauma centers for journalists across Pakistan.

**Keyword:** *Media Culture, Secondary Traumatic Stress, Burnout, Journalism, Pakistan*

#### Introduction

Reporters – whether print, television, radio, digital or photojournalist – witness and report to the general public the

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trauma(s) of the day. The researcher has observed after working in a local digital news channel from 2018 to 2019 that the Pakistani journalistic community, too often, does not comply with international standards of working in the field and in newsrooms. As per the first observation, majority of the young journalists are unaware of the risks of being exposed to distressing imagery and traumatic events like bomb blasts, accidents, etc. in spite being taught psychology as per the mass communication curriculum devised by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. There is no mandatory program designed for the training of the young journalists' psycho-social well-being at undergraduate and postgraduate degree levels. Hence, the lack of orientation at the educational level leads to the lack of basic psycho-social well-being skills to maintain their good mental health. As per the second observation, employees are unaware of their right to apply for a stress sabbatical in Pakistan. Since, the human resource (HR) teams do not work in those domains, they are generally insensitive towards such prevailing issues. The HR and managerial teams in offices need to sensitize themselves about the psycho-social well-being challenges faced by the journalistic community as an individual to bridge the communication gap. Lastly, as per the third observation, the constant flux of information at unprecedented speed and removal of the time filter due to living streaming on social media has increased the risk of secondary trauma. This led the researcher to observe that the introduction of the WhatsApp application in the news-gathering process has also increased the risk of getting exposed to the incalculable amount of traumatizing news. In the light of above

observations, we shall explore in our research the extent to which journalists working in-field and in newsrooms are affected by Secondary Trauma Stress Disorder.

Charles Figley is a renowned academician in the field of psychology, social work and traumatology. His work is the theories of empathy and exposure. Figley's Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder theory seeks to explain why people who are not directly victimized or directly affected by a traumatic event can nevertheless be traumatized. He defined Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder (STSD) as a syndrome of symptoms nearly identical to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), except that exposure to knowledge about a traumatizing event happening to another is associated with a set of STSD symptoms, while PTSD symptoms are directly connected to the sufferer, the person experiencing primary traumatic stress. He postulated that the depth of psychological harm depends on the proximity to harm (Figley 1995). In the context of journalists, they are often not the primary witnesses of the traumatic incidents but the exposure to the facts and details of the incidents required for reporting it vicariously traumatize the journalists which are termed as STSD. The signs and symptoms are similar to PTSD.

#### Social Constructs around The Journalism Profession

Psychological stress and emotional vulnerability are stigmatized and perceived as a weakness in the journalism culture, thus it prevents many journalists to seek professional help for psychosocial well-being (Maiorano et al., 2017). In some parts of the world, this perception and stigmatizing culture also pose career liability to the affected journalists (Ricchiardi, 1999). The

researcher assumes that the myth still exists that journalists do not need trauma programs because journalists are supposed to be “tough as nails”. Journalists feel pressured to suppress their emotions due to the stereotypes that revolve around the profession and the stoic culture in the industry.

### **Literature Review**

The concept of Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder (STSD) was first introduced in the field of traumatology in the 1980s by Charles Figley. It is also known as “secondary victimization” (Figley, 1982). According to the traumatologists, STSD is the same as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), except that the former type of trauma is experienced indirectly. Those who work with the suffering suffer themselves because of the work (Figley, 2002, pp. 5). The signs and symptoms of STSD are similar to PTSD and can be classified into five categories. First, the victim of STSD may persistently re-experience the traumatic event associated with the client. For example, experiencing recurrent or distressing recollection of the client’s state or the event, intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues symbolizing the traumatic event, and physiological reactivity on exposure to traumatic cues that are associated with the role of helper. Second, the victim of STSD may persistently avoid stimuli associated with the trauma or become emotionally unresponsive (numb). This change in the behavior is not present before experiencing the trauma. For example, lack of interest, sense of foreshortened future, errors in judgment, feelings of detachment from others, and avoiding places, feelings, thoughts, and conversation that may have trauma cues related to the client. Third, persistent

symptoms of arousal which were not present before the trauma. For example, irritability, outbursts of anger, insomnia, exaggerated startle response, and hyper-vigilance. Fourth, the continuous disturbance caused by STSD may lead to social, occupational, and functional impairment in important areas. It is evidenced by increased conflict at work, missed work, insensitivity towards clients, reduced social support, poor stress-coping methods etc.<sup>3</sup>

“STSD is experienced indirectly the primary traumatic stressor through helping those who had experienced these traumas: helping in such roles as a nurse, social worker, rape counselor, and other roles and activities” (Figley, 2002, pp. 4). In the light of this definition, we can say that the journalistic community is also prone to develop STSD. Technically journalism and social work are two different disciplines, but the definition of journalism has evolved with the advent of technology from the past two decades. “Concepts of community journalism, advocacy journalism, media-assisted prevention and social marketing, for example, all occupy places on a continuum of journalistic practices in the context of social responsibility” (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013, p. 48). The researcher has observed that in the course of fulfilling the social responsibility, journalists often get traumatized as their one of the primary works is data and information collection. Journalists are often at risk of getting traumatized while covering details of the events and the victims during the process of information collection. Such events are often

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<sup>3</sup> Note. Referenced from *Treating Compassion Fatigue* (p. 4-5), by C. Figley, 2002, Abingdon, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis. Copyright 2002 by Charles. R. Figley

deemed sensitive categorized as “hard news” such as wars, conflicts, rape cases and sexual assaults, natural or man-made disasters, domestic violence, bombings, and acid attacks etc.

There exists a knowledge gap in the journalistic community regarding STSD and burnout. The researcher identified three major causations: the lack of emphasis on skills required to deal with the trauma in educational institutes, the mindless use of social media in the news-gathering process, and the stereotypes existing in the journalism culture which later shape our behaviors.

Pakistan is lagging when it comes to providing quality journalism education. According to Mira. K. Desai on the Indian journalism education she states that “often curricula depend completely upon teachers’ decisions rather than on variables such as institutional needs, the relevance of content, and student expectations. There is no monitoring and assessment specifically for journalism programs: The National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) focuses only on the overall quality of education for institutions” (Desai, 2017). The situation in both India and Pakistan is alike. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) does provide a curriculum for mass communication devised for the undergraduates and graduates, but the HEC does not bind the teachers to follow it strictly. Furthermore, it is observed that for all the courses an objective, a clear course outline, and a list of recommended books is given except for psychology and political science (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 2013, pp. 25). Psychology is neither a mandatory course nor a standardized course outline is present in the

curricula for the universities who intend to teach the course. Universities' board of studies decide the course details whether or not they want to include the course. This leads to two problems: Firstly, since, it is not mandatory. Therefore, there is a chance that many universities may not include it. Secondly, since, the board of studies is responsible for the course details. Therefore, there is no guarantee whether or not the board involves members who are aware of the content relevance with the realities faced by the fresh graduates in the field. The HEC focuses only on the overall educational quality of the institutes which is not sufficient. The knowledge gap that exists within the HEC devised course contents can be explained by the following examples. If we look at the HEC devised course Fundamentals of News Reporting, it is clearly stated in the objectives section that the course is designed to learn news gathering techniques. In the contents section "Crime & Accidents/Disasters is included" (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 2013, pp. 28). However, there is a lack of such topics in the entire course outline that would give orientation to the journalists on ways to protect themselves psycho-socially in vulnerable circumstances while gathering the news. Another example is of the HEC devised course 'Introduction to Social Media' (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, 2013, pp. 40). In the entire course outline there is hardly any reference to any content that would equip students with skills on protecting themselves from the trauma of being exposed to sensitive content and news stories that are shared on social media within seconds.

The researcher has observed that journalists are facing multiple problems in the professional sector apart from the lack

of emphasis in the academic sector. First, usage of social media in the news gathering process increases the chances of the journalists getting traumatized as they are exposed to gruesome imagery and videos in real-time. "Social media allows the general population to view videos and pictures of devastation and destruction never seen before. The world has been bombarded with pictures of the aftermath. Stretchers of wounded and possibly dying victims were on display as well as grief-stricken relatives searching through the deceased for their loved ones. As a result of watching these events and feeling the anguish of those who are directly experiencing them does have an impact on our daily activities whilst they are being broadcast, it is believed that a proportion of the population may suffer long lasting effects such as negative stress reactions, anxiety and in some cases post-traumatic stress disorders-PTSD" (Ramsden, 2017). Journalists are hyper-aware these days of their audience needs since the advent of social media the content consumers have also become the content producers. Therefore, journalists are under twice the amount of pressure: they have to break the news in real-time and ensure it is accurate. "By using Facebook and Twitter accounts to interact with our audience and learn more about what they want to know..." (Brainard, 2010). The researcher has observed that the journalists are on duty around the clock. They are often expected to work in long shifts. They cannot even switch off their phone. They are constantly preoccupied with the thought that they might miss an important news update. This leads to burnout which puts journalists more at risk of developing STSD. At first, it may seem exciting but over the years they may end up terribly distorting



their work-life balance. "I dreaded the stress. I thrived on it. I loved it. I needed it. I miss it" (Furman, n.d.). Journalists often misinterpret this "adrenaline rush" which can also be the leading causation of STSD going unreported. Journalists often find it difficult to make time for discussing mental health constraints. As far as the researcher has observed the existing literature is not sufficient to explain these problems prevalent in the Pakistani journalism community.

One of the fundamental values of journalism is "objectivity." Journalists need to be objective which is often interpreted that they have to suppress their emotions. This increases the chances of trauma. "This is further evidence that journalists ought to believe that they are doing the best they can to avoid emotional distress and that being seen to 'do the right thing' according to ethical and moral constraints can be a protective element in terms of mental trauma." The researcher has observed that the existing literature does not highlight the cons of objectivity - suppressing one's emotions - when it comes to psycho-social trauma management (Browne, Evangeli, & Greenberg, 2012, p. 208). Journalists experience a mental conflict regarding objectivity, humanism, and ethical standards of reporting. This leads journalists to develop a trauma related guilt. This is particularly common for the journalists who cover war, civil uprisings, disasters, famine, terrorism, etc.

All the characteristics discussed above formulate our journalism culture. The researcher has interviewed several journalists and based on that identified the lack of "sense of the social security" amongst the Pakistani journalists. In certain

scenarios, the journalists do not suffer from STSD, but the comorbidity factor –such as depression which is highly common among the journalists - increases their risk of getting traumatized in future in comparison to those who do not suffer from any comorbidity as Backholm states, “This is due to the fact that comorbid disorders without an explicit external stressor criterion might have been present before the exposure occurred, and they may, in fact, compose a risk factor, enhancing the possibility for trauma exposure” (Backholm, 2012). This can be explained by understanding the relationship between the “wage board” and “sense of social security.” In the past, there were boards that used to regulate the social security of the journalists such as wage boards. With the advent of electronic media, journalists were hired on contract-basis and the additional incentives were no longer given. This may not be STSD but a factor contributing to comorbidity. In both India and Pakistan wage boards were established to ensure social security of the journalists. However, with the advent of electronic media, a media contract system was introduced. “The Indian government tries to protect journalists through “wage boards,” a mechanism that ascertains newspaper employee salaries. After the Working Journalists Act in 1955 was issued, six wage boards were created under the Ministry of Labor and Employment to protect print journalists’ salaries and working conditions (Ministry of Labor & Employment, n.d.). But by 1993, a media contract system was introduced. This system reduces journalists’ bargaining power and stops them from unionizing and negotiating their working conditions. Interestingly, wage boards do not apply to the electronic media (ABP Pvt. Ltd. & Anr.

V. Union of India & Ors., 2011). Currently, newspaper owners and the government are fighting a legal battle over this contract system. Journalists' unions argue that journalists, especially newcomers, are exploited by this system, treated like temporary, disposable employees (Tambat, 2012; Choudhary, 2014).” Similarly, in Pakistan, a “Wage Board Award” was established which ensured that journalists get incentives like timely payment of the salaries, insurance, health care facilities, gratuity fund, and benevolent fund etc. In 2001, 7th Wage Board Award was finalized but it was not implemented until 2011. According to the researcher, one of the main reasons behind the lack of implementation may be the advent of electronic media and establishment of PEMRA. Journalists were offered contract-based jobs which provided less sense of social security than in the past. The 8th Wage Board Award is announced and the government has ensured its implementation in 2019, yet it is still in the planning stage (Ali, 2019). According to the researcher, this lack of “sense of security” is further triggered by the prevalent stereotypes in the journalism industry. Journalists are expected to be “tough as the nails” as discussed above. There is a lack of support system and empathetic culture in Pakistani newsrooms. This is one of the reasons why the majority of the Pakistani journalists find themselves stuck in trauma to the extent that they start associating the “trauma as a part of their profession.” Overall, the researcher has identified that there is a lack of literature that provides an in-depth insight of the possible causations behind the trauma that journalists face. The researcher

has aimed at providing qualitative and quantitative data by exploring the above-mentioned problems through this research.

### Participants

This study was done in 2019 to highlight the awareness level about Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder among journalists working in electronic media houses in Islamabad city in Pakistan. The survey was conducted in 9 different electronic media houses which are Hum News, ARY, PTV, Public News, 24 News HD, Neo T.V, DBTV.Live, Mashriq T.V and Abaseen T.V. After explaining the goal of the research 110 journalists accepted participation in the research.

### **Methodology**

100 journalists from leading news channels in Pakistan were administered a questionnaire regarding their understanding of Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder. To conduct the survey, a questionnaire was designed in which the participants were asked various questions.

Following were the three major questions:

Q1: As a journalist have you ever been affected psychologically by investigating and reporting certain incidents?

Q2: Do you know what "Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder" is?

Q3: If yes, then what is your understanding about "Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder"?

Follow up questions were also asked in the survey to gather maximum information regarding the subject such as:

Q4: Did you seek help from your co-workers when you were physically and psychologically affected by reporting the incident?

Q5: Did you seek professional medical help to resolve the trauma you experienced?

Q6: Do you consider yourself equipped with skills to meet the psycho-social challenges that you encounter in the field/newsrooms?

These questions aimed to gather data for a better understanding of the journalism culture, psycho-social support systems and level of psychological resilience at an individual level in Pakistan.

The questionnaire also asked the participants questions about the possible psychological signs -both emotional and behavioral - that they may have encountered during reporting and investigating the news stories. According to Pines and Aronson, long-term engagement in emotionally demanding situations leads to the state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion which is known as burnout. (Pines & Aronson 1988). Kahill identified five symptom categories of burnout: physical, emotional, behavioural, work-related, and relational symptoms. (Kahill 1998). Question 7 and 8 were designed based on the above-mentioned research and the Burnout Measure (BM; Pines & Aronson, 1981) instrument which frequently used to assess burnout. The Burnout Measure instrument (Enzmann, Schaufeli, Jansenn, & Rozeman 1988) and Question 7 are listed in the Appendix (section 10.)

Q7: Which of the following psychological signs did you encounter during and post reporting the incident?

Also, the participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 regarding how strongly the psychological distress was experienced.

Q8: How strongly did you encounter the above stated psychological signs on a scale of 1 to 10?

On the other hand, 10 journalists shared their insights and experiences through in-depth interviews. Both survey and in-depth interviews are qualitative in nature.

**Results**

According to the statistical data collected from the survey, the participants included 53.1% of reporters, 15.3% news writers/editors, 13.3% news producers, 8.2% camera operators and the remaining percentage consisted of news anchors and technical staff.

60.2% of the participants admitted that they were psychologically affected by the incidents. While 16.3% of journalists were unsure and the remaining 23.5% said that they were not psychologically affected.

**Table 1: Percentage of the Journalists Affected Psychologically**

<b>Journalists affected psychologically</b>	<b>60.20%</b>
<b>Journalists not affected psychologically</b>	16.30%
<b>Journalists who may be affected psychologically</b>	23.50%

It is highly alarming that most of the participating journalists were neither familiar with the term STSD nor with the concept.

**Table 2: Journalists and Understanding about STSD**

<b>Journalists who understand STSD</b>	<b>80.60%</b>
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**Journalists who do not understand STSD** 19.40%

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Moving on to the second portion of the questionnaire; Only 52% of the participating journalists sought help from their co-workers in times of emotional distress while only a small percentage - 16.3% - sought professional medical help which includes counseling, psychotherapy, and medication. 83.7% of the journalists never approached a psychologist or psychiatrist to resolve their traumas. 77.6% of journalists said in the survey that they do not consider themselves equipped with skills to meet psycho-social challenges that they encounter in the newsrooms or in the field.

Moving on to the third portion of the questionnaire; Almost half of the journalists experienced depression, one-third experienced emotional exhaustion, anger at work, difficulty sleeping, and hopelessness. Other psychological signs were also encountered to various degrees. While 14.3% of the journalists were unsure what symptoms encountered or how they feel exactly.

**Table 3:** *Burnout Signs Experienced by the Journalists*

<b>Signs of Burnout</b>	<b>Percentage of Journalists</b>
Depression	43%
Emotional exhaustion	35%
Anger at work	31%
Increased anxiety	20%
Difficulty sleeping	30%
Hopelessness	23%
Negative self-image	9%
Impaired or binge eating	6%
Insensitivity/numbness	6%
Hypersensitivity	7%
Irrational fears	4%
Depersonalisation	5%
Dread of working with certain clients or on certain news stories	7%

<b>Guilt</b>	6%
<b>Suicidal thoughts</b>	3%
<b>Other</b>	14%

Results also show that the majority of journalists rated the intensity of the encountered symptoms between 5 and 7 on a scale of 1 to 10. This is more than what may be considered as normal.

**Table 4:** *Intensity Measure of the Encountered Burnout Symptoms on 1-10 Scale*

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Percentage of Journalists</b>
<b>1</b>	9.20%
<b>2</b>	9.20%
<b>3</b>	4.10%
<b>4</b>	7.10%
<b>5</b>	24.50%
<b>6</b>	15.30%
<b>7</b>	18.40%
<b>8</b>	8.20%
<b>9</b>	2.00%
<b>10</b>	2.00%

## Discussion

Types of journalists and the level of affectedness by the trauma Above-mentioned results show that most of the journalists who were psychologically affected comprised of reporters. In an in-depth interview, a camera operator highlighted that the camera operators - also more commonly referred to as video journalists in the West - are far more vulnerable and affected than the reporters. Also, they are the most unrecognized in Pakistan. One of the interviewees who is working as a camera operator for the past 14 years stated that:

“You can call video journalists as the "frontline soldiers" ...If a bullet is fired, pellets are thrown, or lathi-charge is done; they [video journalists] are the first ones to reach the scene.



They are the first ones to get affected by the situation. Later, the rest present on scene gets affected. A reporter can report the incident even if he/she is observing the situation from a distance, but a video journalist cannot stay at a distance from the conflicted scene because he/she to capture the best shot. Video journalists must stay on the front line. Even if they do not want to stay on the front line, the news agencies demand it from them and pressurize them.”

While on the other hand results show that the least affected by the trauma are the newscasters and the technical teams working in newsrooms. They are more likely prone to STSD. A newscaster who entered the journalism field 3 years back stated in the interview that:

“As a newscaster, I rarely get affected but I do remember that I had an emotional breakdown while presenting the news related to a blast. The thought was disturbing and deeply distressing that those who lost their lives were also humans just like me and I am sitting here presenting the news only. I could not do anything to prevent it from happening in the first place. I felt helpless.”

This leads us to draw the conclusion that both reporters and camera operators are prone not only to STSD but also to PTSD as they frequently witness trauma in fields such as in the war and conflict situations.

Journalists and The Ambiguity About Themselves Being Psychologically Distressed

Results also show that the majority of the journalists were psychologically affected and mostly reporters and camera

operators. While on the other hand, some of the journalists were ambiguous about being affected.

On the basis of this ambiguity, we can infer two things.

(a) Constant exposure to trauma and burnout has resulted in numbing and insensitivity towards emotionally charged stimuli. During the interview, an investigative journalist who is now working as a news producer for the last 18 years stated that:

“When I started my journalism career, the industry was flourishing in Pakistan. I took up investigative journalism as my passion because I was curious and liked to dig up the stories and facts. I was censored many times, put under surveillance, and received several death threats. At that time I was young and passionate so it did not matter. Over the years due to constant exposure to stressful circumstances and censorship I have become numb. My passion has now turned into insensitivity of a certain degree.”

(b) Little to no trauma was experienced that is less exposure and experience as a journalist.

### **Journalists and Understanding About STSD**

Most of the journalists did not have a basic understanding of STSD. While a small percentage of the journalists who claimed to have an understanding was mostly incorrect. Such as some of the respondents wrote:

“...It is the occurrence of some past incident.”

“...It means the disturbance of my mental balance and my inability to complete daily tasks.”

Two scenarios can be inferred based on the responses. (a) Respondents had partial understanding but were unable to articulate it correctly. (b) Respondents had wrong understanding.

**Journalism Culture in Pakistan**

According to the results, only half (approx.) of the journalists sought help from their coworkers during times of psychological distress. This gives us a clear picture of the stereotypical culture that prevails in the journalism industry; a profession that is too often considered as “macho”. One of the interviewees who is working as a senior reporter for the past 16 years stated that:

“...There is no concept of leave [in the journalism culture in Pakistan]. Even if your close relative dies like when my father passed away; I was not given more than 3 days leave. Even if you are on leave; you are not [on leave] because you must keep yourself constantly updated regarding the happenings and developments. If something big happens you have to report it even on a day when you have taken a leave...I think the news organizations should give their journalists some incentives keeping in view the tough working environments and stress they face.”

**Social Media and the Poor Journalism Culture In Pakistan**

An Interviewee Who Is A Young Journalist Highlighted That:

“Social media has made us a journalist 24/7. Social media particularly the WhatsApp application has facilitated journalists. Groups are made on WhatsApp and journalists of a news agency constantly communicate with each other through it. At the same time, it has exploited the journalist mentally. He/she is constantly triggered by news and information through social media.”

While social media is not to be blamed; it is the lack of orientation in Pakistani journalists about the regulation of the information flux and dealing with the stress triggers. This leads to mishandling of social media leading to a poor journalism culture.

Journalists and professional psychological help

### **Journalists Who Never Sought Therapy**

It is highly alarming to know that more than half of the journalists never sought help from a psychologist, psychiatrist, etc. A senior reporter who is working for the past 16 years stated during the interview:

“I have never seen anyone focusing on this issue in Pakistan. You [interviewer] are the first who is asking the question. While you are asking the questions, I am thinking that I have been passing through all this trauma and even I did not focus on these issues in spite I am a literate person who has foreign exposure as well. I did not have any kind of orientation to face such types of issues.”

### **Journalists who did seek therapy**

While on the other hand, small strata of the journalists did seek professional mental help to cope with their stress and resolve the trauma. This small stratum can further be divided into two categories of journalists. (a) Those who not only have the awareness but also the resources to bear the financial costs of the therapy. One of the interviewees - a young journalist - stated that: “Yes, I did seek help from a psychologist, and I am still in therapy. The main reason was the stress that came with my job as a reporter. Also, I believe that we should take counseling sessions on and off as it increases your self-awareness which is important.”

(b) Those who have the awareness but do not have the resources to bear the financial costs of the therapy. An interviewee who covered the Afghan War shared his experiences and stated:

“I was severely affected by the Afghan War. Later, I came back to Pakistan and covered militancy and terrorism in the region. The constant exposure to traumatic events damaged me severely but I neither sought help nor was offered any incentives by the organizations and agencies I was working for. After several years, I consulted a psychiatrist who recommended medication for better sleep. The medication worked only for a certain time. Now, it [medication and therapy] has become beyond my affordability due to increased prices. Consequently, I have stopped seeking help altogether because I have other expenses to bear which I prioritize over my health keeping in view my monthly budget.”

#### **Lack of Trauma Centers**

There are no trauma centers and social organizations in Pakistan which cater the psycho-social needs and help journalists in Pakistan. Journalists are not facilitated by the news agencies they are working for. Unlike in the West where the journalists are given orientation regarding their “work/life balance rights” and are provided incentives.

A female journalist who started debut career in local media but now working in the international media stated in the interview:

“...What nobody teaches you [in the local media] is that you have to take care of yourself as well which I learnt here [in the international media organization]. I had to unlearn a lot of things before joining the international media. Before that [in local

media] it was like if there was an assignment; I would just go but here [in international media] you have to fill out the 'Risk Assessment Form' first...you cannot just go to Baluchistan or any other conflicted or high risk area....Some higher authority looks at the filled form and assess whether the information falls under their "high-risk criteria" and they will guide you accordingly about what you are and [what you are] not supposed to do. There is a protocol...And if you feel that you have been covering a lot of conflict stories and you need to take a break; there are people who will speak to you about it..."

By the end of the day, our Pakistani journalists have to deal with the trauma themselves and by using their own resources. There is only one trauma center for journalists in Peshawar in Pakistan. It was established in 2014. It is not functioning according to the standards and only one trauma center is not sufficient to cater the needs of journalists across the country. Excessive censorship and downsizing in 2019 have further deteriorated the situation. One such interviewee who has been working for 26 years and covered the Afghan war extensively told that:

"Recently I lost my job due to downsizing and financial cuts. I had been working for that newspaper for 17 years, but no one took those 17 years of service into account. Journalism is a "thankless job"... I have three children and the two times meal per day has become beyond affordability these days. Let alone other finances. The expenses of medical treatments and medications have sky-rocketed these days. Amidst such a situation, will you

prioritize psychological counseling or a two times meal? Survival is becoming more difficult and uncertain.”

Journalists today are experiencing a different type of trauma as compared to what journalists. It was used in Pakistan 15 years back. The most common trigger of psychological distress in Pakistan is financial cuts, downsizing, and censorship leading to hyper-uncertainty.

### **Journalists and Psycho-Social Skills**

According to the results, most of the journalists do not consider themselves equipped with skills to meet the encountered psycho-social challenges in the field and in the newsrooms. This further explains the point - stated above in section 6.5.3 - that the lack of orientation about psycho-social challenges at academic and professional levels, the lack of training, workshops and trauma centers are the key causes. All the interviewees and respondents emphasized the need for training and workshops to improve journalism in the country.

### **Conclusion**

In the light of the above facts and discussion it is concluded that the situation of journalists in the psycho-social well-being context is the worst in Pakistan. Every other journalist is in a vicious cycle of vicarious trauma. In Pakistan, journalists do not have any orientation about the possible impact of constant exposure to traumatic incidents and stress triggers on their mental, emotional, and physical health. They lack understanding about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Secondary-Traumatic stress disorder.

Journalists having more than 25 years experiences - who are the pioneers in journalism in Pakistan - were extremely traumatized 15 years back as terror attacks were at peak in the country and the majority had covered the Afghan War. Yet they never had the orientation to resolve their issues. Also, they were never provided any incentives by the news agencies, welfare organizations or the state which further added to the misery. These senior journalists are there in the industry to mentor the fresh journalism and mass communication graduates. Due to lack of training and awareness there remains a knowledge-gap between the seniors and the young journalists. Senior journalists have failed to provide life-skills to their juniors, which would assist them to regulate the encountered traumas. This knowledge and communication gap is increasing day by day as the journalists today are experiencing a type of trauma in the form of financial cuts, downsizing, and unemployment which is different from what journalists experienced 15 to 20 years back. Furthermore, if the journalists do have awareness about psycho-social well-being and the importance of seeking professional medical help; the lack of trauma centers and inflation is contributing to the growing percentage of the traumatized journalists not seeking help. There is only one trauma center for journalists in Peshawar in Pakistan. It is not even sufficient to cater the needs of the entire province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, let alone the entire country. Due to inflation, the medication and therapy is out of reach.

There is an urgent need for generating awareness about PTSD and STSD in the journalism community and changing the stereotypical culture that is present in this community. There



should be mandatory courses related to psycho-social well-being in academic curriculums of journalism, media, and mass communication degrees. Training and workshops should be conducted by news agencies, press clubs, and NGOs. Initiatives should be taken at the governmental level for ensuring that the Pakistani journalists get their due “work/life balance right”. It is only then the Pakistani journalism culture and journalism itself shall flourish in the country.

### **Limitations**

The research was conducted only in the federal capital Islamabad in Pakistan. We can further expand this research by conducting surveys and in-depth interviews in other cities in Pakistan in the future. This research paper will provide the foundation for it.

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## **Appendix**

Question 7: Which of the following psychological signs did you encounter during and post reporting the incident?

- \* Negative self-image
- \*Emotional exhaustion
- \*Depression
- \*Increased anxiety
- \*Difficulty at sleeping
- \*Anger at work
- \*Impaired or binge eating
- \*Depersonalization
- \*Hypersensitivity to emotionally charged stimuli
- \*Numbing
- \*Feelings of hopelessness
- \*Guilt
- \*Dread of working with certain clients or on certain news stories
- \*Irrational fears
- \*Suicidal thoughts
- \*Other

### Burnout Measure Instrument

Item of the BM

How often did you have any of the following experiences during the last month?

1	PE	E	Being tired
2	EE	D	Feeling depressed
3	ME	L	Having a good day
4	PE	E	Being physically exhausted
5	EE	E	Being emotionally exhausted
6	ME	L	Being happy
7	PE	E	Being wiped out
8	EE	E	Feeling burned out [a]
9	ME	D	Being unhappy
10	PE	E	Feeling run down
11	ME	D	Feeling trapped
12	EE	D	Feeling worthless
13	PE		Being weary
14	EE	D	Being troubled
15	ME		Feeling disillusioned and resentful about people [b]
16	PE	D	Feeling weak [c]
17	EE	D	Feeling hopeless
18	ME	D	Feeling rejected
19	ME	L	Feeling optimistic
20	PE	L	Feeling energetic
21	EE	D	Feeling anxious

[a] Modified in Pines & Aronson (1988) to “Can’t take it anymore”

[b] Modified in Pines & Aronson (1988) to “Feeling disillusioned and resentful”

[c] Modified in Pines & Aronson (1988) to “Feeling weak and susceptible to illness”

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Note: PE = physical exhaustion, ME = mental exhaustion, EE = emotional exhaustion, E = exhaustion, D = demoralization, L = loss of motive