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Trauma Exposure, Post-Traumatic Stress, and Coping with Psychological Distress Among Local Journalists

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ABSTRACT

This study examined work-related exposure to trauma, prevalence, and severity of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms, and factors associated with PTSD among local journalists in Alabama. The study also investigated coping strategies used by journalists to deal with psychological distress. Data was collected from a sample of Alabama journalists (n=56) through a web-based questionnaire. All the journalists who participated in the study had covered at least one traumatic event during the last year. The prevalence of PTSD symptoms was high among the participants. The years of experience as a journalist was the only statistically significant factor associated with the prevalence of PTSD symptoms. Journalists who had more experience showed fewer symptoms of PTSD. The most common coping strategy used by the journalists was “acceptance” of reality. The results highlight the importance of providing resources to local journalists to deal with psychological distress.

Keywords: Local journalism; Trauma; Mental health, Trauma Exposure, PTSD

INTRODUCTION

Journalists are frequently subjected to situations involving bodily or mental harm (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2024; Seely, 2019; Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2024; Westlund et al., 2024). They are likely to see wars, crimes, accidents, and other potentially traumatic situations while performing their duties. Journalists who work in newsrooms and are not physically endangered are also exposed to traumatic news regularly (Feinstein, 2013; Miller, 2023a, 2023b; Shah, Murphy, et al., 2024).

According to previous studies, between 80% and 100% of journalists are exposed to potentially traumatic situations during their careers (Dworznic, 2011; Flannery, 2022; Lee et al., 2018; MacDonald et al., 2023; Newman et al., 2003; Pyevich et al., 2003; Shah et al., 2022). Some of these journalists develop clinically severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms that necessitate medical or psychiatric attention (Browne et al., 2012; Newman et al., 2003).

Researchers have observed a shortage of proper mental health support for these journalists (Bélair-Gagnon et al., 2023; Deuze, 2023). MacDonald et al. (2017) conducted a systematic literature review of studies examining journalists' exposure to trauma and PTSD. For instance, they noted that, whereas the prevalence and severity of psychological distress among journalists working in major cities are adequately documented, trauma exposure and PTSD prevalence among local journalists have been overlooked by researchers (MacDonald et al., 2017). To address this gap, this study examines the prevalence, severity, and underlying factors of work-related trauma among local journalists in Alabama.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is a unique pattern of different physical and psychological symptoms that emerge in a person after exposure to a traumatic event (McFarlane et al., 1993; Smith et al., 2018). The traumatic incident must include exposure to actual or threatened death, physical injury, or sexual violence (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). The symptoms of PTSD are divided into four categories: re-experiencing, avoidance, negative cognitions and mood, and arousal (APA, 2013). Re-experiencing involves spontaneously reliving traumatic memories and feeling intense psychological distress. Avoidance symptoms include efforts by individuals to avoid the thoughts and memories of the trauma. Negative cognitions and mood involve persistent negative emotions, distorted self-blame or blaming others, and difficulty recalling critical aspects of the trauma, and arousal symptoms are characterized by hypervigilance and sleep disturbance. All these symptoms are classified as PTSD when they last for more than a month (APA, 2013). If not treated, PTSD can lead to permanent disability, loss of productivity, and increased sick leave (Dworznic, 2011; Flannery, 2022).

Journalism and PTSD

Journalists encounter different types of traumatic experiences, such as covering wars, crimes, health emergencies, and natural disasters. Studies show that 80% to 100% of journalists

report exposure to at least one traumatic event in their professional careers (Dworznic, 2011; Flannery, 2022; Lee et al., 2018; MacDonald et al., 2023; Newman et al., 2003; Pyevich et al., 2003; Shah et al., 2022). Especially journalists who report from the frontlines during disasters, crises, and protests are at a higher risk of exposure to traumatic events and incidents (Hoak, 2021; Kotisova, 2020; Shah et al., 2021). For instance, Osmann, Selva, et al. (2021) noted that journalists assigned to health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, suffered the same level of PTSD, anxiety, and depression as first responders. In addition to covering traumatic events, journalists are increasingly threatened and harassed online for their professional work (Hussain et al., 2024). The online harassment of journalists also negatively impacts their well-being (Park & Lee, 2024; Shah, Cvetkovic, et al., 2024) and results in self-censorship (Waisbord, 2024).

Despite these challenges and a higher risk of exposure to potentially traumatic events, the mental well-being of journalists remains a taboo subject in newsrooms where the expression of personal emotions is discouraged, and no institutional support exists for their mental health (de Jong & Kotišová, 2024). As a result, mental-being literacy among journalists remains low, which impacts their ability to recognize, manage, and prevent mental health-related issues (Deuze, 2023). Exposure to potentially traumatic events influences how journalists think about their safety and professional roles when reporting from the field (Miller, 2023b; Miller & Kocan, 2022) and results in slowing down of their work or even self-censorship (Bélair-Gagnon et al., 2023; Belair-Gagnon et al., 2024; Waisbord, 2024). PTSD symptoms are also associated with the journalists' intention to leave their jobs (Lee & Park, 2023).

Amid a growing news desert crisis, the role of local journalists has become more crucial than ever for sustaining informed communities and democratic participation (Finneman, Matthews, & Ferruci, 2024). However, local journalists are increasingly confronted with challenges that endanger their mental health and threaten the profession's viability. Local journalists face unprecedented challenges such as increased workload, job layoffs, and lack of organizational support (Shah, Murphy, et al., 2024). Additionally, they regularly report on traumatic incidents involving their families, friends, and communities (Perreault & Perreault, 2021). Regular exposure to traumatic events, combined with financial strains and limited resources, increases the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms among this group. These mental health issues not only compromise individual mental well-being but also can accelerate the decline of the local journalism workforce, weakening the quality of community news (Shah, Murphy, et al., 2024). The scholarship on work-related Trauma and PTSD among journalists has predominantly focused on journalists covering wars and disasters in metropolitan cities (MacDonald et al., 2017; Osmann, Dvorkin et al., 2021). The mental well-being of local journalists remains an understudied area (MacDonald et al., 2017). This study adds to the literature on journalists' mental well-being by examining the prevalence and severity of PTSD among local journalists in Alabama and the work-related trauma exposure among this population.

The following research questions guide this study:

RQ1: What is the level of PTSD among regional journalists in Alabama?

RQ2: What is the level of exposure to traumatic events among the sample of Alabama journalists?

Factors Associated with PTSD

Several factors have been linked to the prevalence and severity of PTSD in journalists. Exposure to traumatic events, coverage frequency, and severity are among them (Feinstein et al., 2014; Hatanaka et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2018; Marais and Stuart, 2005; Newman et al., 2003; Seely, 2019). Recent research has also linked stressful events experienced by journalists that do not meet the APA's definition of "trauma" to traumatic symptoms. Slaughter and Newman (2022) found that exposure to online harassment predicted increased traumatic stress symptoms, depression, and anxiety. Shah, Cvetkovic, et al. (2024) found that online harassment was associated with depression, anxiety, and stress among journalists and negatively impacted journalists' ability to perform their jobs effectively. When compared to journalists covering other beats, the journalists covering conflict had a higher prevalence of PTSD symptoms (Dworznic, 2011; Feinstein, 2013; Feinstein et al., 2002). Journalists operating in Pakistan's combat zones, for example, have been found to have a higher prevalence of PTSD symptoms than journalists working in Western countries (Shah et al., 2022). Another study in Iran found that arrest, torture, and threats to family members were associated with greater levels of PTSD symptoms among journalists (Feinstein et al., 2002). Most studies have focused on the factors associated with PTSD among journalists covering war or those working in conflict zones. MacDonalds, Hodgins, and Saliba (2017) noted that there is a lack of literature on the factors associated with PTSD among regional journalists. This study responds to this call by examining factors associated with PTSD symptoms among regional journalists in Alabama. Therefore, the third research question proposed for this study is the following:

RQ3: What are the factors associated with PTSD among journalists in Alabama?

Journalists' Coping Strategies with PTSD

Individual's responses to stressful/traumatic experiences have an impact on their personal and professional lives (Sheerin et al., 2018; Deuze, 2023). Research suggests journalists around the world cope with PTSD in different ways out of their resilience and duty to serve the public interest (Calumbiran, 2021). For example, a study of 31 Canadian journalists found that journalists try to cope with trauma through avoidance strategies at their workplace, such as using black humor, trying to control their emotions and flashbacks of traumatic events, doing physical exercise, and using substances (Arcalas et al., 2022; Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2024). Other research (Osmann et al., 2021) suggests that journalists suffering from PTSD should seek psychological therapy as soon as possible after exposure to a traumatic event to help better alleviate symptoms of emotional distress. From this understanding, the strategies that journalists choose to deal with their PTSD significantly impact how they recover from traumatic events, which, therefore, impacts their work performance. With this said, this study proposes a fourth research question:

RQ4: What strategies do the regional journalists in Alabama use to cope with PTSD?

METHODS

Participants

For this study, we used a cross-section online survey design. All the local journalists working in Alabama over the age of 18 were eligible to participate in the study. This population included the following: news reporters, editors, commentators, news producers, photojournalists, columnists, news anchors, and producers who worked for print, broadcast, or digital media. The recruitment took place using a convenience sample. The sample was pulled from the Prowly database. Prowly contains a comprehensive listing of media contacts in the U.S. Other studies have used similar websites to draw lists of journalists in the past (Lewis, 2020a; Molyneux, 2019). For this study, 1120 participants who met our inclusion criteria of journalists with newsroom roles were selected. A total of 56 people completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 5%. This response rate is similar to other studies conducted with journalists in the U.S. and represents a decline in response rates among this population (Lewis, 2020b; Molyneux, 2019). Six surveys were excluded from the final data analysis as they had been filled by journalists who owned the media outlets they worked at (n=4) or were missing significant data (n=2).

The Journalist Trauma Exposure Scale

The Journalist Trauma Exposure Scale (JTES) was used to assess the participants' work-related trauma exposure (Pyeovich et al., 2003). The scale assesses three aspects of trauma exposure: (1) frequency, (2) range, and (3) intensity. The three subscales of the JTES have shown acceptable to good internal consistency: frequency of exposure ($\alpha = .77$), range of exposure ($\alpha = .84$), and intensity of exposure ($\alpha = .63$; Pyeovich et al. 2003). The scale includes a 14-item subscale that measures the frequency and range of traumatic incidents journalists experienced in the previous year. The previous year referred to the 12 months leading up to the participant's survey completion. This scale includes the following: (1) car accidents; (2) assaults; (3) murder; (4) death or injury of a child; (5) domestic violence; (6) sexual assault; (7) life-threatening disease; (8) occurrences involving many casualties; (9) fire; (10) torture/kidnapping; (11) natural disaster; (12) airplane accident; (13) war; and (14) others incidents involving casualties or injuries. This subscale's traumatic experiences are based on literature and have been adapted across cultures and nationalities (Browne et al., 2012; Idås et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2022). For frequency assessment, the response options were changed from open-ended to categorical, with 0 indicating never, 1 indicating once or twice, 2 indicating every few months, 3 indicating most months, 4 indicating monthly, and 5 indicating weekly. Respondents had the option of selecting either a '1' or a '0' for range measurement. If the respondents selected '1,' it implied that they were exposed to that event type in the previous 12 months. If the respondents selected '0,' they were not exposed to that event type at all. The sum of the participants' responses for all 14 items was utilized as the range value, with a maximum value of 14 and a minimum value of 0. The second subscale assessed the severity or characteristics of journalists' work-related traumatic experiences. The subscale has nine items, including "at the

site of a traumatic assignment" and "experienced personal injury on an assignment." For each item on the list, respondents were asked to answer yes (1) or no (0). The intensity subscale's sum value was calculated using the total value of each participant's replies to these questions. The standardized values for the three scales were computed. An overall work exposure (JTES) score was calculated by measuring the mean of the standardized means of the frequency, range, and intensity subscales. The Journalist Trauma Exposure Scale was selected for this study because the traumatic events included in the survey have been validated with the journalist population in different national and cultural contexts and have demonstrated acceptable to good internal consistency (Browne et al., 2012; Idås et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2022).

The Brief Cope

The Brief Cope, a 28-item self-reporting measure, was used to determine the types of coping used by journalists (Carver, 1997). Each item on the measure asks about a particular way of coping, using a 4-point Likert scale measuring the frequency of each item (1= I have not been doing this at all to 4= I have been doing this a lot). The scale contains 14 subscales, each measuring a coping strategy: (1) denial; (2) use of emotional support; (3) self-distraction; (4) substance abuse; (5) coping; (6) venting; (7) behavioral disengagement; (8) planning; (9) humor; (10) self-blame; (11) religion; (12) acceptance; (13) positive reframing; and (14) use of instrumental support. The sub-scales were created by calculating the mean scores for two items that formed that scale. For example, the self-distraction sub-scale was created by calculating the mean scores for two items: (1) "I have been turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things" and (2) "I have been doing something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching T.V., reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping." The Brief Cope was selected for this study because it has been validated in diverse cultural settings with different groups (Cramer et al., 2020; Fitzgibbon & Murphy, 2023; Hanfstingl et al., 2023), including journalists (Shah et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2018).

PCL-C

The PTSD Checklist, or PCL (Ruggiero et al., 2003), was used to measure PTSD symptoms. The PCL-C is a 17-item self-report questionnaire that assesses PTSD symptoms as defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders by the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994; Weathers et al., 1993). The scale includes questions such as "How much has feeling distant or shut off from other people troubled you in the recent month?" The participants were asked to reply on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very extremely). The PCL-C has shown excellent internal consistency ($\alpha=.94$) and moderate to high test-retest reliability ($r=.68-.92$; Ruggiero et al., 2003). The sum was calculated and used as the final PTSD score. A high score indicated high distress among the participants. Depending on the study's setting, demographic, and objective, multiple cutoff scores for PCL-C have been used in the past. For this study, 44 was utilized as the cutoff score for the probable prevalence of PTSD, as defined by the DSM-IV, among journalists, which other studies have used (Browne et al., 2012; Pyevich et al., 2003). The scale has been

extensively used in studies examining PTSD symptoms among journalists in the past (Lee et al., 2018; Pyevich et al., 2003; Shah et al., 2022).

Online Harassment

A 10-item Harassment Experience Questionnaire (Slaughter & Newman, 2022) was used to measure the participants' frequency of online harassment experiences. The questionnaire uses a six-point Likert scale to measure the frequency of harassment (0= “never” to 5= “multiple times a day”) personally experienced by journalists. These ten items were combined into an index. The instrument was selected because it has been validated with the journalist population in the past and has shown good internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$; Shah et al., 2024).

RESULTS

We used descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis to answer our research questions. Half of the participants were male ($n=25$, 50%), and slightly less than half were female ($n=23$, 46%). Only one participant identified as non-binary (2 %), and one identified as transgender (2%). The majority of participants were 26 to 45 years of age ($n=27$, 54%). A vast majority had received a bachelor’s degree ($n=35$, 70%). Ten participants had received a graduate degree (20%), and two had received an associate degree. The overwhelming majority of the participants had one full-time employer ($n= 41$, 82%), two (4%) were working full-time with multiple organizations, three (6%) worked part-time with one organization, two (4%) were associated part-time with multiple employers, and two (4%) worked full time. On average, the participants had worked for 13.91 years in the field ($SD= 10.623$).

Prevalence and Severity of PTSD

RQ1 sought to examine the prevalence of PTSD symptoms among the sample of journalists in Alabama. A threshold score of 44 was utilized to indicate the prevalence of PTSD symptoms among the participants based on prior studies' findings of a low base rate of PTSD among journalists (Pyeovich et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2018). Forty-four percent of the participants ($n=22$) had scores of 44 or higher, indicating they were experiencing PTSD symptoms. The mean score on PCL-C was 40.30 ($SD=13.46$). This result suggests both a high prevalence of PTSD among the journalists of Alabama as well as an average score not far below the PTSD cutoff among the participants.

Work-Related Exposure to Traumatic Events

RQ2 focused on the level of exposure among the sample of Alabama journalists to work-related traumatic events. The results showed that in the previous one-year time span, a majority of the participants had covered an assignment involving natural disasters ($n=38$, 76%) or life-threatening illnesses ($n=32$, 64%). Around half of the participants had covered assignments involving injured or dead children ($n =26$, 52%). Less than half of the participants had covered assignments involving assault outside the family ($n=23$, 46%), murder ($n=23$, 46%), and sexual assault ($n=22$, 44%) (see Table 1 for more details). More than one-third of the participants ($n= 18$, 36%) had been exposed to a life-threatening illness at least once a month. The least common traumatic events covered by journalists were war ($n=1$, 2%) and airplane accidents ($n=2$, 4%).

The journalists indicated that the most stressful event type was a traumatic assignment covered multiple times in a week (n= 38, 76%), followed by being verbally threatened (n=29, 58%), and being at the scene of a traumatic assignment (n=27, 54%). See Table 2 for more details.

Table 1
Alabama local journalists' exposure to work-related traumatic events over the past years

<i>Type of exposure</i>	<i>Exposed at least once n (%)</i>	<i>Once or twice n (%)</i>	<i>Few to most month n (%)</i>	<i>Monthly or more n (%)</i>
Motor vehicle incident	19 (38)	5 (10)	10 (20)	5 (10)
Assault outside family	23 (46)	7 (14)	14 (28)	3 (6)
Murder	23 (46)	7 (14)	11 (22)	6 (12)
Injured/Dead child	26 (52)	17 (34)	9 (18)	1 (2)
Assault within family	18 (36)	7 (14)	7 (14)	5 (10)
Sexual assault	22 (44%)	9 (18)	12 (24)	2 (4)
Life-threatening illnesses	32 (64)	9 (18)	6 (12)	18 (36)
Many casualties	18 (36)	8 (16)	2 (4)	9 (18)
Fire	22 (44)	9 (18)	10 (20)	4 (8)
Torture/ Kidnapping	10 (20%)	9 (18)	2 (4)	0 (0)
Natural disasters	38 (76)	21 (42)	14 (28)	4 (8)
Airplane accident	2 (4%)	2 (4)	0(0)	0(0)
War	1(2%)	1 (2)	0 (0)	0(0)
Other incident in which someone was hurt or injured	23 (46%)	8 (16)	10 (20)	5 (10)

Table 2.
Percent of Alabama journalists with exposure to JTES intensity events over the past year

<i>Work experience</i>	<i>Exposed at least once (%)</i>	<i>N</i>
At the scene of traumatic assignment	54	27
Verbally threatened on assignment	58	29
Assignment covered multiple times in a week	76	38
Gruesome scene covered	40	20
Announce news of death to family/friends of victims	20	10
Knew the victim/perpetrator of an assignment	30	15
Witnessed some get hurt/killed on an assignment	22	11
Received personal injury on an assignment	14	7
Physically attached on an assignment	10	5

Factors Associated with PTSD

RQ3 related to the factors associated with the prevalence and severity of PTSD symptoms among journalists of Alabama. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the factors associated with the prevalence and severity of PTSD among Alabama journalists. The PCL-C score was entered as a dependent variable. The scores for years of experience, online harassment, and JTES were entered as the predictor variables. The years of experience as a journalist was the only statistically significant variable and accounted for a 33.3% variance in the PTSD symptoms among journalists. Accounting for 33.3% of the variance, $F(1, 47) = 5.845, p < 0.05; R^2 = .111, \Delta R^2 = .111$. The results showed that journalists who had more experience had lower prevalence and severity of PTSD symptoms ($\beta = -.333, p < 0.05$).

Coping Strategies

RQ4 asked what coping strategies Alabama journalists used to deal with PTSD. The data showed the primary coping strategy used by the participants was acceptance ($M = 2.70, SD = 0.60$), followed by self-distraction ($M = 2.57, SD = 0.78$), then planning ($M = 2.38, SD = 0.86$), use of emotional support ($M = 2.36, SD = 0.93$), and humor ($M = 2.32, SD = 1.11$). The least used coping strategies included denial ($M = 1.57; SD = 0.49$), behavioral engagement ($M = 1.57; SD = 0.68$), and substance use ($M = 1.86; SD = 1.03$) (see Table 3 for details).

Table 3
Coping strategies used by the journalists to deal with PTSD

<i>Coping strategy</i>	<i>M (S.D.)</i>
Self-distraction	2.57 (0.78)
Active coping	2.21 (0.67)
Denial	1.27 (0.49)
Substance use	1.86 (1.03)
Use of emotional support	2.36 (0.93)
Use of instrumental support	2.20 (1.03)
Behavioral disengagement	1.57 (0.68)
Venting	2.18 (0.88)
Positive reframing	2.18 (0.82)
Planning	2.38 (0.86)
Humor	2.32 (1.11)
Acceptance	2.70 (0.60)
Religion	2.00 (1.17)
Self-blame	2.27 (0.94)

DISCUSSION

To the best of these researchers' knowledge, this study is the first that utilizes a survey to examine the exposure of Alabama journalists to work-related trauma, the prevalence of PTSD symptoms that they experience, the factors associated with PTSD, and the coping strategies used by these journalists to deal with PTSD. Consistent with past studies (Hoak, 2023; Miller, 2023a; Shah, Cvetkovic, et al., 2024), the findings show that the participants were regularly exposed to traumatic experiences and frequently suffered psychological distress. Every participant had been exposed to a potentially stressful experience at least once in the previous year. Unlike studies conducted in other countries, which reported on potentially traumatic events such as fires, car accidents, railroad accidents, war coverage, and natural disasters as the most frequently encountered traumatic events (Lee et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2003; Pyevich et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2018), the participants of this study reported exposure to a life-threatening illness as the most frequently encountered traumatic event. This difference may be explained by the fact that the data of this project was collected during a global pandemic.

The prevalence of PTSD among the sample of Alabama journalists was found to be high (44%), which is among the highest PTSD prevalence rates recorded among journalists in the literature. Two studies have found that photojournalists covering drug cartels and violence in Mexico had higher rates of PTSD (59 % and 54 %, respectively) (Flores Morales et al., 2014; Flores Morales et al., 2012). Another study found higher rates of PTSD (48.1%) among regional journalists in Pakistan reporting from a conflict zone (Shah et al., 2022). However, the sample size of this study was smaller than that used in the Mexican studies (100 and 140) and the Pakistani study (216). Other studies have discovered that their subjects had fewer PTSD symptoms. For example, a research study in South Korea found that 43.2 % of participants had PTSD (Lee et al., 2018), while another study found that 19.7 % of war correspondents had PTSD (Feinstein et al., 2002). Outside of a conflict zone or a sample that did not specifically focus on journalists covering war, this is the highest PTSD prevalence rate recorded in the U.S. The high prevalence of PTSD may be explained by the fact that the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the political situation in the country, and the financial situation faced by journalists in the region with job layoffs and lower salaries (Shah, Murphy, et al., 2024).

Interestingly, whereas past studies (Lee et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2022) have identified exposure to traumatic events and coping strategies as statistically significant predictors of PTSD among journalists, this study did not find any statistically significant association between these variables. Instead, it found a statistically significant association between years of experience as a journalist and the prevalence of PTSD symptoms. These findings show that journalists who had more work experience had fewer PTSD symptoms. This finding is consistent with other studies that found that journalists with less experience perceive high levels of stress while covering tragedies and disasters (Hoak, 2023; Shah, Cvetkovic, et al., 2024). This may be explained by the fact that journalists who spend more time in the field get used to the symptoms of PTSD and manage to live with it better than journalists who are new in the field. Alternatively, it is also possible that those who struggle with PTSD are those who most leave journalism, so they do not

end up having years and years of experience. Past studies show that PTSD symptoms were associated with leaving jobs (Lee & Park, 2023). As this study's results indicate, the most used coping strategy by the participants was "acceptance," which means that they accepted the reality of the fact that they had PTSD and that they needed to live with it. The second coping strategy used by most of the participants was self-distraction. They realized that they had PTSD, and they wanted to engage themselves in activities such as work or social activities, such as watching movies or reading books, to take their minds off the stress.

Practical Implications

This study contributes significantly to the understanding of the mental health of local journalists in the U.S., and the findings underscore the necessity for a health intervention to improve journalists' mental health. Based on the findings of this study, we suggest that local news organizations pay attention to the mental well-being of the younger generation of journalists. Journalism schools need to include modules in their curriculum to increase mental health literacy among young aspiring journalists and prepare them for the journalism field's unprecedented challenges. Additionally, organizations such as the Alabama Press Association should arrange programs and workshops to empower journalists to make informed decisions about their mental well-being. For example, they can arrange group narrative therapy sessions where journalists share their stories. The journalists could also benefit from social support.

Furthermore, employers must provide them free access to mental health services. These findings indicate that journalists frequently engage in self-blame as a coping mechanism. However, self-blame has long-term negative consequences for journalists' psychological and physical health. For this reason, these researchers suggest creating real-life and social media support groups for journalists to learn from each other and avoid indulging in self-blame.

Limitations

Even though this study contributes to the understanding of the mental health of local journalists in Alabama, it has limitations. For instance, the first limitation is the small sample size. Future studies can benefit from a larger sample size. Also, this sample size was homogenous by race since most participants identified as White. Therefore, the generalizability of this study is limited. Since a cross-sectional design was used, it prevented us from determining causal relationships between years of experience as a journalist and PTSD symptoms.

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