

Newsroom journalists at increased risk of PTSD and depression from images of extreme violence

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Journalists working with images of extreme violence submitted to newsrooms by the public are at increased risk of adverse psychological consequences, including post-traumatic stress disorder. New research, published today by *JRSM Open*, shows that frequent, repetitive viewing of traumatic images by journalists working with 'live' or User Generated Content material can be closely linked to anxiety, depression, PTSD and alcohol consumption. Frequency rather than duration of exposure to images of graphic violence is more emotionally distressing to journalists processing User Generated Content (UGC) material.

UGC is sought after by news organisations, some of which have created specific news units to edit and 'sanitise' these images for screening in news and documentary programmes.

The setting for the research was the newsrooms of three international news organisations and the participants were 116 English-speaking journalists working with UGC. Dr Anthony Feinstein, who led the team of researchers at the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Toronto, said: "Previous research among war journalists revealed elevated rates of PTSD and major depression compared to domestic journalists with little exposure to personal threat or violence. Our research shows that exposure to violence, albeit indirect, in a group of UGC journalists, is an important determinant of psychopathology."

The news organisations involved in the study do not attempt to funnel more experienced journalists in the direction of a news story where the chances of viewing [extreme violence](#) are high.

Dr Feinstein said: "Given that good journalism depends on healthy [journalists news](#) organisations will need to look anew at what can be done to offset the risks inherent in viewing UGC material. Reducing the frequency of exposure may be one way to go."

More information: Witnessing images of extreme violence: a psychological study of journalists in the newsroom ([DOI: 10.1177/2054270414533323](#)) by Anthony Feinstein, Blair Audet and Elizabeth Waknine will be published by *JRSM Open* on Thursday 7 August 2014.

Provided by SAGE Publications

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