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Preparing for Risks and Building Resilience

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ABSTRACT

Journalists confront terror and war to report and document what is happening. Covering traumatic events is dangerous for the reporters on the scene and may leave them with distress responses. The aim of this study is to investigate the coping strategies journalists use to deal with danger and traumatic stress and to build resilience. Through in-depth interviews with journalists covering crisis and violent events, the article looks at the physical, practical and trauma aspects of crisis journalism, and contributes to the complex understanding of risk and resilience for journalists. The study is based on interviews with nine reporters from five countries. Between them, they have covered several conflicts, terror attacks and wars. The study shows that they use a variety of strategies. Memories from unpredictable assignments stick with them. However, eight would cover traumatic events again, and the majority have experienced post-traumatic growth. My results show that informal peer support is crucial, but media organizations have a long way to go to ensure adequate support.

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Journalism; trauma; risk; safety; resilience; post-traumatic growth

Introduction

Reporting on trauma is central to news (Shapiro 2021) and is therefore central to the work of journalism. According to Smith, Drevo, and Newman (2017), between 86 and 100 percent of journalists are exposed to traumatic work-related events over their careers. Pyevich, Newman, and Daleiden (2003) found that, among 900 newspaper journalists, 96 percent had been exposed to, and reported on, death or severe injuries over the course of a year. This study focuses on the concept of resilience among journalists who were or are in the frontlines, reporting on violent events, and who are exposed to physical risks, safety challenges and trauma. This paper investigates how reporters attempt to stay safe while gathering and publishing stories from traumatic situations, and looks at their strategies to cope with traumatic stress and physical danger. The central research question is: Do journalists have strategies for understanding risk and building resilience? To answer this, there are five additional sub-questions (SQ): (1) How do journalists react to danger and stressors?; (2) How do they prepare for risky assignments and maintain some control?; (3) Do journalists have strategies to cope with their traumatic

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experiences?; (4) What is their perception of the level of support from their media organization?; and (5) Has their work with violent events given them something positive?

Background

The safety of journalists is a multilayered issue, and several factors play into it. Sarikakis (2017, 123) defines safety for journalists as the ability to perform their work "free from physical and psychological violence". The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ 2022) reports that 1449 journalists were killed between 1992 and 2022, where the killings were confirmed to have been connected to their work.

Safety for journalists is an important issue, as an attack against journalists and press freedom is "an attack on the public's right to free speech and right to be informed" (Horsley 2020, 31). The level of impunity remains high. Unesco (2022, 90) found that, "[i]n the past 15 years, 87 percent of cases of killed journalists remain unresolved or unreported." Attacks on journalists could lead to a chilling effect and hinder the free flow of information and news. States, international organizations, NGOs, and journalist unions work to improve safety for journalists through monitoring, understanding, and trying to stem the wide range of threats.

Sarikakis (2017) indicates that the majority of slain journalists are killed in war zones and conflict areas. In 2016, Unesco found that foreign correspondents and so-called parachute journalists (when reporters are briefly dropped into a location to cover an event) comprised eight percent of the killed journalists, and 92 percent were local journalists. Unesco's 2020 report on the safety of journalists affirmed that "local journalists remain the main targets" and found that, in 2019, 56 out of 57 killed journalists were locals. Despite the increasing use of freelancers in conflict zones (Cottle, Sambrook, and Mosdell 2016; Gonzales 2014), the majority of killed journalists are full-time employes (Committee to Protect Journalists 2022; Unesco 2022). Journalists deployed to conflict zones are also typically male, and more than 90 percent of journalists who lose their lives are men (Unesco 2020) leading them to be somewhat overrepresented in crisis journalism work (Idås and Backholm 2017). Female conflict journalists are said to be under a double burden, waging "a war to survive, and the war against the system" (Saady 2017, 7).

Theoretical Perspectives

Journalists are directly exposed to violence—they may be targeted, and they are first responders in the same way as emergency personnel (Hight and Smyth 2003; Simpson and Cote 2000). Being first responders means that journalists are at the traumatizing scene, afraid of being hurt or killed, taking in the sounds, smells and sights of the hazardous event. In addition, it could mean that journalists arrive after the event but at a time when all its horrors are on display. When experiencing direct threats, the survival brain takes over, adrenalin fills the body, and the person reacts with fight, flight, or freeze responses (Idås 2013; Newman and Nelson 2012). Journalists are also often second responders, which means they are indirectly exposed to traumatic events, for instance through contact with trauma survivors, or editing or anchoring news (McMahon and Lyall 2019; Simpson and Cote 2000). Research shows that 92 percent of journalists experience repeated and multiple exposure to work-related traumatic events (McMahon and

Lyall 2019), and that war reporters have a higher risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression than other journalists (Feinstein, Owen, and Blair 2002). To obtain the diagnosis of PTSD a person must have been exposed to a traumatic event, and "also endorse at least six of symptoms that span four different categories of trauma responses. These categories involve persistent re-experiencing of traumatic events, avoidance of trauma-related cues, problems with negative mood states and thought patterns, and arousal-related symptoms" (Smith, Drevo, and Newman 2017, 218). The symptoms affect the quality of the person's life and diminish their ability to function in social, private, and professional settings. Studies show a correlation between traumatic assignments and PTSD (Pyevich, Newman, and Daleiden 2003). There is, however, considerable variation (Smith, Drevo, and Newman 2017). Several factors may increase the risk of traumatic mental aftereffects, such as frequent exposure to covering traumatic events (Backholm 2012; Simpson and Boggs 1999), high intensity assignments (Anderson 2018; Pyevich, Newman, and Daleiden 2003; Feinstein 2013), and the duration of the assignment (McMahon 2016). Anderson (2018) shows that feelings of guilt evoked enduring, strong emotions in photographers. Browne, Evangeli, and Greenberg (2012) find a correlation between high levels of guilt and PTSD symptoms in journalists. Idås, Backholm, and Korhonen (2019) find that journalists who are uncertain about the ethical rules of conduct and act against their personal values feel moral dissonance and guilt for having done harm to others. Experiencing such ethical dilemmas is associated with more post-traumatic stress symptoms, but also relates to positive outcomes. Dealing with stressors and danger wears on journalists—especially over time (Idås 2013; Newman and Nelson 2012; Backholm 2012; Simpson and Boggs 1999). However, stress reactions such as sleep difficulties, flashbacks, irritability, nightmares, fear, shock, abuse, and social disconnection may occur after the first crisis assignment (Simpson and Cote 2000).

Despite the described risk of being traumatized, research indicates that news gatherers are resilient (Beam and Spratt 2009, 432; McMahon and Lyall 2019, 4). Resilience refers to how one acts during a traumatic event, and as well the ability in the aftermath to "bounce back" and adapt well (Frey 2018; Newman and Nelson 2012; Bananno 2004). Being resilient implies having the capacity for positive adaptation so that a person manages to live a good life after having experienced a trauma. Since resilience implies a process of facing a new normality and future challenges, Walsh (2003) prefers to use the phrase "bouncing forward". Another aspect of resilience is moving from personal suffering "to concern and action on behalf of others, to prevent similar suffering" (Walsh 2003, 57). A resilient approach during a traumatic situation is to seek information and closely monitor the stressors, regain control, and seek meaning (Newman and Nelson 2012; Tveito 2011). Journalists would benefit from being trauma-informed, which is to say that they understand "their own vulnerability to emotional distress" (Beam and Spratt 2009, 433), and how to deal with stress reactions through appropriate coping strategies. However, resilience entails more than adjusting or getting through something—it has an aspect of transformation (Walsh 2003, 70). There are maladaptive and adaptive coping strategies (Buchanan and Keats 2011). The first increases risk and reduces self-care, but the second tackles "stress in constructive ways that improve personal and professional functioning" (Hughes et al. 2021, 972). The latter could be problem-focused or emotion-focused (Hughes et al. 2021). Building less on an individualistic approach and more on an

interpersonal conceptualization of trauma, Novak and Davidson (2013) argue for fostering flexible coping strategies.

Journalists on dangerous assignments need to work, and at the same time be safe and stay alive. To do this they must have situational awareness, which I define as an awareness to address factors and actors, and accessible knowledge during crisis situations in order to understand what is happening, avoid potential attacks and gain a sense of control (Hornmoen and Backholm 2018; Saady 2017). Situational awareness is often used to refer to individuals, but it includes a collaborative dimension (Salmon et al. 2008), which is also true for resilience. In this article, the collaborative aspect applies primarily to the team and/or colleagues out in the field, the newsroom team, and journalist unions. I will argue that in reporting from high-risk assignments, awareness of—and preparations against—dangers are necessary and crucial. Needed work equipment, protective gear, and insurance may be pivotal for the journalists and fixers. However, in a study of 54 conflict journalists from five countries, Høiby and Ottosen (2016, 7) find that only five were insured and had taken a security course. To be prepared and better protected, safety assessments, security routines, and knowledge of first-aid, the location and its context factors are important. Still, research shows that a majority of journalists have no first-aid training, or conflict journalism training (Høiby and Ottosen 2016). There are calls for training and education regarding coping strategies, post-traumatic care and resilience building (Slaughter et al. 2020; Cook, Newman, and Simiola 2019; Høiby 2019; Buchanan and Keats 2011; Beam and Spratt 2009). Smith, Drevo, and Newman (2017, 224) state that "with better psychological preparations and a consistent and supportive organizational climate, journalists may be better supported to continue delivering high quality news and suffer fewer psychological consequences". However, research shows that news organizations "continue to be negligent" (Anderson 2018, 1628). To mitigate profound reactions to working on traumatic events, Buchanan and Keats (2011, 134) write there is "a need to improve the culture of journalism".

Social support is linked to reducing negative effects and is associated with more positive psychological effects (Weinberg 2017). As McMahon and Lyall (2019, 8) state, "support is well known to enhance psychological wellbeing." Even so, there are ambiguous studies on formal support and informal support. The first is support from health care professionals and government agencies, while informal support is given by family, friends, and coworkers (Weinberg 2017). Weinberg's (2017) study of trauma, social support, and well-being among terror survivors does not find a significant association between formal social support and positive and negative effects. Relevant for this study is his finding that high levels of informal social support reduce negative psychological affect and is "an important resource that is associated with increased positive psychological affect" (Weinberg 2017, 214). Idås, Backholm, and Korhonen (2019) see an association between positive outcomes and perceived social support and received recognition. However, they find an association between more received support and more post-traumatic stress symptoms. They explain the ostensibly puzzling results by saying that: " … journalists with more stress participated more in organized debriefing activities in the aftermath of the coverage" (2019,7). Several studies find that informal support is important (Idås and Backholm 2017; Idås 2013; Beam and Spratt 2009). Furthermore, media houses that have news leaders who have covered violent events and are trauma-informed (Idås 2013; Beam and Spratt 2009) tend to nurture a mutually caring culture with peer support and self-care (McMahon and Lyall

2019; Buchanan and Keats 2011; Beam and Spratt 2009), and are more equipped to support their journalists before, during and after traumatic assignments. This includes providing journalists with the necessary professional skills to do crisis reporting (Newman and Nelson 2012; Beam and Spratt 2009). Hughes et al. (2021) and Novak and Davidson (2013) point to the professional role and identity as important elements in coping processes. Coping through making sense of traumatic experiences helps journalists to continue this line of work (Hughes et al. 2021; Dworznik 2006). Sense-making could lead to a successful journalistic outcome such as a good story or mastering difficult interviews, as well as the ability to gain control of the violent environment. It could also mean making a difference for affected individuals, and/or preventing similar suffering (Novak and Davidson 2013; Dworznik 2006; Baumeister and Newman 1994).

Positive outcomes could be experiences through which lessons are learned about themselves, their lives, or "framed narratives to bolster their own self-worth" after trauma (Dworznik 2006, 548). Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) and Tedeschi, Calhoun, and Linley (2004) dub such positive changes "post-traumatic growth", which means existential, personal and/or professional growth after life-changing traumatic experiences. Post-traumatic growth is fostered by a learning process where reflection has a major role. For instance, debating and learning from ethical dilemmas may lead to positive outcomes (Idås, Backholm, and Korhonen 2019). According to Calhoun, Cann, and Tedeschi (2010) changes may lead to inner strength and a deeper sense of self. Secondly, transformation leads to closer relationships with loved ones and a willingness to ask for social support. Thirdly, there is a positive shift in existential priorities and clearer values, i.e., "no longer taking life for granted" (McMahon 2016, 60). From an awareness of vulnerability and distress lies the potential to grow during the process of rebuilding from trauma (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996; McMahon 2016). These are complex processes, and post-traumatic growth and negative aspects from trauma may coexist in people (Tedeschi, Calhoun, and Cann 2007). McMahon (2016, 254, 257–259) finds that post-traumatic growth in journalists covering trauma may lead to cohesive trauma narratives and a more explicit journalist role. One element of crucial importance to post-traumatic growth is informal social support, especially from peers (Idås, Backholm, and Korhonen 2019; Idås and Backholm 2017; McMahon 2016).

Methodology

The study is based on semi-structured interviews with nine reporters from five countries on three continents. Between them, they have covered several conflicts, terror attacks and wars, including in Gaza and the West Bank, Israel, Iraq, Ukraine, South Sudan and Libya, Yazidis fleeing Islamic State's (IS) territory, the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda, the Tunisian revolution, and terror attacks in Kenya, Northern Ireland, Norway and the Middle East. Some of the interviewees are news journalists who cover violent demonstrations, terror and revolution at home, or violent conflicts in their country's backyard. Others are foreign reporters or journalists used to covering violent zones home and abroad. My interviewees have in common that on hazardous assignments they were exposed to danger, emotional distress, and stress. Furthermore, their focus is being on the ground to report what is happening, and to tell the stories of the victims—who in some cases are perpetrators themselves.

When I traveled to teach journalism abroad or for international research projects, I went through personal contacts to find relevant interviewees. As such, the interviewees are not a representative sample. However, they all have experiences with perilous journalism practice. As a source selection, they brought variety with regard to which crisis they had covered and their background. At the time of their interview, they were from 25 to 62 years old. Between them, they had from six to 37 years of journalistic experience, and they worked for print, online, TV, radio, and news agencies. All of them were employed, although two of them did not work full-time. Four of them delivered stories internationally. There are four females and five males, and they are from Palestine, Israel, Norway, Uganda, and Tunisia. Though distant in geography, they experienced similar challenges. I would argue that they are important voices of journalists who contribute to the field by covering violent situations. As such**,** they may give rich material on how to prepare for risks and build resilience. In addition, qualitative interviews are a result of collaboration between the researcher and the interviewees. My experience from many years as a journalist, and from several years of teaching and research on crisis journalism, contributed—along with theory—to formulating the interview guide. Although the interviews were done in different countries and over several years (2014–2019), all interviewees were asked the same questions. This paper is an analysis of five background questions, and questions about preparing for the assignment, how the media house contributes, working in the field, the journalists' strategies, thoughts about violent assignments, mental and physical risks, as well as the aftermath of covering traumatic events. During the interviews, I allowed for elaborating and sidetracks in the narratives, as well as receiving affirmation that I understood all aspects of the interviewees' lives. As such, the analysis began as a collaborative interpretation. The interviews were done face-to-face, and most of them took around one-and-a-half hours. The interviewees were able to use their own words which provided a powerful basis for close reading, exploring and analysis. All interviews were taped, transcribed, and approved by the interviewees. They were given the opportunity to elaborate or change their statements and narratives.

Results and Analysis

Here, the findings are presented and discussed in five sections before conclusions are made.

Exposed to Frightening Experiences

All nine interviewees are first responders (Hight and Smyth 2003; Simpson and Cote 2000). They have all been verbally and physically attacked, either by the police, demonstrators, interviewed subjects, ordinary people, snipers, and soldiers, and all of them have been threatened. One had to flee their own country, while the reporter's family tried to manage without any help from the media house. All nine have been in dangerous situations. Some have been ambushed and several shot at. So they have not been able to do their work "free from physical and psychological violence" (Sarikakis 2017, 126). One interviewee describes working with a high prevalence of risk as like " … being in a thriller, and at the same time feeling exhaustion and sadness. You go through the complete index of emotions" (Interviewee 6).

In gender-based safety training, the topic of violence targeting women in general and violence against female journalists in particular is always brought up (Saady 2017, 24–25). Three of my four female interviewees have experienced sexualized harassment. One of these episodes was escalating into sexualized violence when a colleague came to the rescue. The other two interviewees were verbally attacked. However, these three women also emphasize the positive aspect of their gender, i.e., gaining access as women. Although, my interviewees never made that point, research states the need for gender-specific safety training (Slaughter et al. 2020; Høiby 2019; Orgeret 2016).

Being exposed to journalism-related traumatic events involves more than threats to one's own life and health. Such exposure also contains encounters with terrified and traumatized people. All nine interviewees have a long list of horrified or dangerous people whom they have met. Impressions from their observations of human actions and conversations with people like refugees, victims of violence, child soldiers, perpetrators, rape victims, abducted people, war lords and so on are not easily forgotten. This remark from one journalist could have been uttered by several: "You can't believe what you have seen, you can't believe that the human race can do these things to each other" (Interviewee 5). Also, the interviewees have come across wounded people. Some of them have seen body parts after terror, and dead people, even corpses piling up. That intense smell sticks with you, as do noises and visions. One recalls: "Some people were buried, others were not. Some corpses were just wrapped in paper because there were so many" (Interviewee 5).

After this section related to danger and stressors (SQ1), the next section is about how the journalists prepare for assignments and how they maintain some control (SQ2).

Preparing for and Controlling Dangerous Situations

As McMahon and Lyall (2019), Høiby (2019), Saady (2017), and Høiby and Ottosen (2016) point out, practicalities like protective equipment and insurance are crucial when planning potential dangerous assignments. Research reveals that journalists would benefit from training related to security, first-aid and trauma, and simultaneously states that such preparations are absent or insufficient. Seven of the nine interviewees had not been given any safety training, and only one was lucky to once follow a safety training course with the BBC. The ninth person had a check-up and training every year.

No matter what the level of help from their organizations, the journalists start problem-focused coping strategies when planning (Buchanan and Keats 2011). Preparing to avoid risks and/or reduce them is an adaptive strategy (Hughes et al. 2021). All nine say that as much knowledge as possible is crucial to making risk assessments. Such assessments are as diverse as they are significant. They include knowledge of cultural dimensions and health risk assessments. Documents need to be in order, the interviewees point out. They stress the need for emergency person and check-in routines (Saady 2017). When in a foreign area, journalists rely on a fixer, driver and/or interpreter. They know that finding the right one could be a life-defining decision. One interviewee puts it like this:

> When journalists disappear, it was because they sometimes were with a new fixer or a new driver, and then they went into a place that they had not been before. And then it is easier to arrange to kidnap them. (Interviewee 2)

Another option is to be embedded with the army. This could imply not being free to publish critically—or it could be dangerous to do so while being embedded. On the other hand, hanging out with soldiers gives safety and additional information. Two of the interviewees have been embedded**.**

Several mention that they travel and do violent assignments together with colleagues. Together, they are in a better position to address risks and have situational awareness (Hornmoen and Backholm 2018; Saady 2017). They agree with Saady (2017, 22, 57) that an exit route is a necessary part of planning. Knowing when to leave is mentioned repeatedly by several of the interviewees. They all accentuate the importance of colleagues. Bonding with peers is a positive strategy (Hughes et al. 2021), and here one explains why;

> … our companies are in competition, but we are friends, brothers. We go together, because it is safer, because you are stronger in front of the army, in front of the settlers, in front of demonstrations. When we are seven, that's better that two. So, we always go together and we decide to leave together. (Interviewee 1)

Removing yourself from a dangerous situation could be labeled an avoidance strategy, or a positive flight strategy to save your life. Resilient behavior in the field could also involve avoiding routines, never taking the same way from one place to another, and not posting your location on social media. In addition, when possible, they protect themselves by "limiting the dose of trauma exposure to only what was necessary" (McMahon 2016, 191). Out there, they need to have situational awareness, control their emotions, and focus on work. The adrenalin filling the body in acute traumatic situations contributes to a sharpened focus on specific tasks (Idås 2013, 54–57), and the will to survive. The majority say that the adrenalin kick helps them to continue working (McMahon 2016). Going into a journalistic mood, blocking emotions and concentrating on the work is one strategy to get the job done. As one says, "I am very preoccupied with the story. I see it as an advantage, some would maybe call it stunted, but I would not. I reflect afterwards, and I talk. However, in the situation, I am focusing on work" (Interviewee 7). Yet, going too deeply into a work mood might be dangerous. One recalls a story that happened two or three days before Muammar al-Gaddafi fell in 2011, when this interviewee was covering the civil war in Libya:

> At one point, I forgot about myself and my safety, because I was so into my work that I forgot to pay attention to what was happening around me. […] My colleague said that I was very brave up to the point where he feared for my life. (Interviewee 9)

To lose yourself in work like that is a negative effect of adrenalin pumping. Two of the interviewees talk about the camera as a sort of shield (Buchanan and Keats 2011, 132). However, using devices as buffers could be seen as a distancing strategy that may prevent journalists from being alert. The journalists need to make use of their senses while they work: read the situation carefully and pay attention to anything that happens. They emphasize the importance of situating themselves, and understand that the safest place changes from event to event. As one says, "Sometimes a roof of a building is good, or sometimes behind the Israeli army, sometimes behind the demonstrators. Everywhere, even at the same place, you make different plans" (Interviewee 1).

Another downside is that adrenalin veils the need to pause, eat and sleep. Some tell how they keep on working, they are overactive, and they do not sleep or feel hunger.

This unhealthy behavior could prevent them from monitoring stressors. Furthermore, it is not sustainable in the long run (McMahon 2016), and it could eventually lead to physical and/or mental breakdown. Working repeatedly on an adrenalin kick and refusing to address bodily signals wears on journalists, especially over a long period of time (Idås 2013; Newman and Nelson 2012; Backholm 2012; Simpson and Boggs 1999). The effects of the adrenaline pumping are contradictory, helping them stay alive and have focus on working, but at the same time making them behave in a way where they ignore bodily stressors, which could lead to losing situational awareness. Journalists need to learn about these bodily reactions and use them to their advantage.

In order to control dangerous situations, the majority give prominence to experience. They talk about how confidence grows from experience. Comments like this were made by several of the interviewees: "In the beginning, one is afraid. However, with experience I understood how to react, find safe spots, and then, I got experience through working" (Interviewee 9). They talk about being confident in their role, a factor that is important in coping processes (Hughes et al. 2021; Novak and Davidson 2013). Doing this line of work, it is important to do the job in a professional and respectful way, and "remind yourself *why* you are there" (Interviewee 5). They are there to tell the public what is going on. In addition, the interviewees are preoccupied with treating their sources with respect, being diplomatic, and not harming anyone. Following their moral gut feelings, to me they seem anything but naïve or credulous. Nor do they, in my opinion, embody the traditional cynical and emotional detached journalist (Beam and Spratt 2009, 424). Having gone through danger and seen atrocities, the interviewees have experienced human nature at its worst and best. With their own traumatic impressions and reactions, and in line with Beam and Spratt (2009, 431), my journalists may feel better prepared to interact with traumatized people. They meet victims who have an agenda. In addition, they see people being exploited for any number of reasons, from sexually abused children and women, child soldiers, people being pushed for political causes to tell a reframed story, and refugees brought in for pictures and interviews. One recalls:

> Someone brings them in, let us say it's the Red Cross or something. They think that they're supposed to have their picture taken. Actually, they have a right to say no. Actually, you should tell them, "You know, you don't have to let your children be in the picture" and actually, to be honest, the children probably should not be appearing in like international media because they could be exploited or something. And it's clear that they don't have a choice. So, you need to be careful with them. (Interviewee 2)

Interacting with and being around traumatized people, and at the same time delivering stories, all interviewees have several stories about ethical dilemmas. Acting against the code of ethics or one's own moral values may lead to an inner conflict and feelings of guilt. In its turn guilt leads to added stress and even severe post-traumatic stress symptoms (Idås, Backholm, and Korhonen 2019; Browne, Evangeli, and Greenberg 2012). The majority are firm in their endeavor to leave people with some dignity. Furthermore, most emphasize that they want to do a good job, but they refuse to do so at the expense of others. They take a step back, put down the camera, and some of them leave the scene or tell their employer "no", because "My self-consciousness is much more important than my editor" (Interviewee 3). As a consequence of their respect, the majority emphasize that they follow up their stories. One puts it like this, "It is essential

to cover what happens afterwards. Because otherwise, it turns journalism into a kind of zoo" (Interviewee 2). Ethical decisions also include decisions about publishing. They all say that they will not publish pictures and videos of dead people. However after weighing the pros and cons, one made a choice to put on display the gravity of the conflict in South Sudan; "I decided to show the mass graves. However, the way that I dealt with it was to avoid close-up shots" (Interviewee 5).

The News Organizations

This section deals with the interviewees' perception of the level of support from their media organization (SQ4).

Six out of nine interviewees feel that they are not safeguarded or looked after by their employer. Being well aware that my nine interviewees do not comprise a representative sample, I will still comment on the difference between media houses when it comes to protective equipment, from being given the best gear to getting nothing at all. My material indicates that this varies between continents, as the four journalists from Africa were the least informed about trauma issues and also got the least support. One of them was given a vest and a helmet when covering the war in Libya for an European news company, and states, "In Tunisia, we had nothing, in Libya, we had everything" (Interviewee 9). The other three also compare their situation to journalists in Europe and the Middle East. As one states; "I know that they are better remunerated, they have better insurance policies" (Interviewee 5). Four people's experiences on a vast continent are by no means representative. That being said, reporters in Europe and the Middle East also crave better training, help in preparation and a better support system. This has been repeated in research for decades, and still is true for my interviewees and the ones reported on by Hughes et al. (2021).

The majority have not received support concerning trauma reactions. Six of the nine got no or minimal support of this kind. Four received formal support as they were followed up by a therapist: two were offered help by the media house; one did it on their own account. The fourth had a mental breakdown, and a friend provided a counselor. Not having access to formal support in common with other emergency staff (Hight and Smyth 2003; Simpson and Cote 2000), makes one interviewee comment, "the difference is that soldiers and policemen have access to psychologists and stuff, and journalists almost never do. No one cares what we suffer" (Interviewee 2).

As for informal support, Beam and Spratt (2009, 432) conclude that, "management support may be critical in helping journalists cope effectively with trauma." The majority, however, are not impressed with the informal support from their news organization. Three interviewees out of nine assert that no one really cares. Three got no safety or trauma-related support, but they got journalistic backup. The last three express their content with the newsroom. Two of these are Norwegians working in newsrooms that Idås, Backholm, and Korhonen (2019, 7) described as having a functioning culture for social support after the terror of 22 July 2011.

McMahon and Lyall (2019, 11) suggest that good management keeps the conversation going, aims to satisfy practical needs, looks for negative emotional signs, offers support, and reassures that distress is a normal reaction in the aftermath. A supportive newsroom will play into and strengthen the relationship aspects of resilience. As Walsh (2003, 62)

states, pulling together and trying to understand and learn from covering crisis is what could foster resilience. Even so, the majority praised their nearest leader in the newsroom. They agree their closest editor supports them in their work—for instance keeping in contact during field work and acknowledging their stories. Some say that they could call them night or day. Others are critical. Several emphasize that leaders without field experience do not comprehend what they are going through. This correlates with results that the best editors have been on traumatic assignments themselves (Idås 2013). If the managers in the newsroom are trauma-illiterate, relevant support may be hard for them to give. But it helps having an empathetic editor, as some of my interviewees have. Beam & Spratt find that journalists' morale was higher when the leader "was thought to be empathetic on issues related to trauma" (2009, 431).

The interviewees above have expressed how important peers are in the field, and how social support by colleagues has been found to increase resilience (McMahon 2016). However, it is clear that my interviewees are not talking about just any colleagues, but the ones that they share traumatic experiences with. These peers are not necessarily employed in the same organization, so there will be more about peer support in the next section where strategies to cope with traumatic experiences are elaborated (SQ3).

Coping with Traumatic Experiences and Building Resilience

Adaptive strategies tackle stress in constructive ways, while maladaptive strategies "increase risky behaviors and reduce self-care" (Hughes et al. 2021, 972). In order to reduce stress reactions and live a functional life, the interviewees use different coping strategies. Lack of support makes journalists employ their own strategies (McMahon 2016), and the interviewees have many. Although one admits, "I have no recipe other than to dive into it and talk about it" (Interviewee 7).

The interviewees' work and their professional role are mentioned as positive factors for building resilience. All interviewees seek purpose and meaning (Hughes et al. 2021; Buchanan and Keats 2011; Dworznik 2006). The impact of their stories is pivotal, since bearing witness and trying to improve difficult situations makes journalism meaningful. They show respect by submitting follow-up stories, trying not to overstep ethical boundaries and reminding themselves that journalism makes a difference to communities. Endeavoring to avoid bad decisions during their work is a helpful strategy, because guilt for harming others is associated with post-traumatic stress (Idås, Backholm, and Korhonen 2019; Anderson 2018; Browne, Evangeli, and Greenberg 2012). Being able to make good, ethical decisions is connected to their professional role, knowledge of journalism's code of ethics, and being emphatic.

Balancing work and their personal lives is a goal for my interviewees. However, they are aware of the personal costs that come with their work. Two express that covering traumatic events is just part of being a journalist (Novak and Davidson 2013, 317), and thus lay it on themselves to handle it all. Some have learned by experience to recognize stressor signals and they take measures to mitigate them (Buchanan and Keats 2011). One interviewee recalls that after working around the clock for four days and nights, it was time to take a week off before returning to work, since: "I know the symptoms when my body is about to collapse, and I felt them" (Interviewee 6). Some steer clear of terrible

pictures or violent movies that would set off stress symptoms. Such avoiding strategies could be helpful, but also limit a person's range and space.

However, it is well known that people have maladaptive strategies, like self-medication and substance abuse to numb pain (Buchanan and Keats 2011, 133). None of the journalists confess to substance abuse. However, one took anxiety pills to be able to cover a violent event. Another admits to drinking when returning from a traumatic assignment. Novak and Davidson (2013, 319) stress that recreational alcohol should not be automatically assumed to be problematic. The adrenalin kick as well may be addictive, as three of the journalists agree. One of the interviewees says that a way of getting rid of trauma is to go back and have more of it. But McMahon and Lyall (2019, 7) emphasize exposure to several traumatic events as a risk factor for ongoing trauma reactions. One interviewee reflects on this issue; "I think, in a way, you become cynical, so you may lack a bit of empathy, but you may cure yourself of the trauma. And there are people, I think, that are just addicted to the adrenalin kick" (Interviewee 2).

When back from an assignment, it takes time to decompress and console oneself. Memories of what they have seen, heard and smelled stay with them, for some up to the point where "Sometimes you get paranoid" (Interviewee 5). Some are clear on the fact that for them, invading memories never go away; "I think it is still with me, inside" (interviewee 1). Such stressors and reminders often lead to nightmares. Paradoxically, dreaming about the traumatic experience and intrusive reactions "can be described as a learning process, resulting in experience and, sometimes, positive growth" (Idås and Backholm 2017, 237). This is but one of several paradoxes that journalists need to learn from safety training. To decompress they spend their time on hobbies and social activities. Some let off steam through physical activities, while others do relaxing exercises like yoga. Having animals is mentioned as a decompressing strategy. Two prefer writing, and one of them says, "I write my soul" (Interviewee 3). Buchanan and Keats (2011, 134) refer to these actions as "positive coping strategies".

Strong relationships foster resilience, Walsh (2003) writes. A self-care strategy mentioned by several interviewees is spending time with family and close ones. Two emphasize that after having children, family time is even more valued. However, being a parent also makes it harder, like when you come directly from a violent assignment and there is blood on your computer: "And I tell my wife to take my daughter away, I don't want her to see the computer" (Interviewee 1). Some are active in journalist unions. One helps to document attacks on journalists, which is a practical-focused strategy that includes solidarity among peers (Hughes et al. 2021). As seen above, colleagues with similar experiences are a resource. Talking to peers is a good strategy (Hughes et al. 2021, 980), as colleagues give pivotal peer support that buttresses journalists' well-being (Idås 2013). One interviewee recalls working with two colleagues on a crisis assignment: "We talked constantly, so when we came back home and we were forced to go to a psychologist, he found out that we had done the job ourselves" (Interviewee 7). The majority recognize a sense of shared understanding among colleagues (McMahon 2016). They learn from each other, help, and teach each other. Going through experiences together makes the journalists process and reflect on the trauma, which could lead to acceptance of changed aspects of the world (Calhoun, Cann, and Tedeschi 2010). This leads to the next section about possible positive outcomes (SQ5).

Post-traumatic Growth

In one of the first studies on post-traumatic growth in journalists, Idås and Backholm (2017) find that 40 percent of the 375 journalists who covered the July 2011 terror in Norway reported post-traumatic growth. Individuals who experience post-traumatic growth " … recognize the many negative aspects of what has happened. Both positive and negative outcomes remain clear … " (Tedeschi, Calhoun, and Cann 2007, 400). Research indicates that the struggle to process trauma, survive and adapt—i.e., reflections and re-examination of core values and the way to see the world—form a process over time that could lead to growth (McMahon 2016; Tedeschi, Calhoun, and Linley 2004; Tedeschi, Calhoun, and Cann 2007; Walsh 2003). Reflection is a key component, and even more so when it takes place in the company of peers (McMahon 2016; Buchanan and Keats 2011).

Except for one who after decades has stopped covering violence, all my interviewees would cover crisis again if asked to do so. Having tested their boundaries, most feel stronger. Several of them use words like privilege, growth, expanding the horizon, and an enhanced journalist role to describe the change. According to Calhoun, Cann, and Tedeschi (2010) and Tedeschi, Calhoun, and Cann (2007), a deeper sense of self, a shift in existential priorities and clearer values characterize the transformation that leads to post-traumatic growth. Some of the interviewees call their experiences life-changing, as in this statement;

> It is life-changing because you see the reality … When you see it, when you hear the voices, when you smell it, it is shaking. You understand that something needs to change. You need to do something in order to show people that there is a life beyond the terror. (Interviewee 3)

Other interviewees mention as well that being close to death "makes you appreciate life more" (Interviewee 2), and that making the most out of your professional and personal resources changes you forever. Two of them phrase it like this; "I have matured as a human being, and I am strengthened" (Interviewee 8) and "I do think that you get wiser both as a human being and as a journalist" (Interviewee 7). Such statements should be seen in the light of a process of delving deep into resources, that may lead to "a complex set of changing conditions with a past history and uncertain future course" (Walsh 2003, 56). Seven of the nine have experienced professional and/or personal growth. Another has bad memories and got no support, but still states, "Positively, some of the victims were relocated, and I felt I had served my role" (Interviewee 4). This is in line with findings about seeking meaning and having or gaining more empathy (McMahon 2016; Dworznik 2006). Such is also true for this statement:

> This is what I have chosen as a career, and if it is going to bring positive impact to communities, then I ought to do it. I am going to report about bad things, even if it comes at a cost. We face a risk, but there are others that face a greater risk. (Interviewee 5)

This interviewee, as most of the others do, acknowledges the pain of their own suffering, even more so the pain of the directly targeted, but affirms that covering atrocities gave opportunities and promoted their journalistic career. This point is emphasized by the majority. One says, "I don't have bad memories, I have learned a lot from these experiences, and they have helped me build a good career" (Interviewee 9).

Conclusions

This study set out to investigate if journalists who cover violent crisis have strategies for understanding risk and building resilience. The study shows that the nine interviewees have a variety of strategies. They use problem-focused coping strategies when planning and continue to do so in the field. After traumatic assignments, the journalists' strategies are mainly emotion-focused in order to decompress. After that, strategies to process and reflect on their work and stress reactions foster resilience. Here as well they use multiple adaptive strategies, mostly emotion-focused ones. Some interviewees also refer to maladaptive strategies; they disappear into work, use alcohol and pills, and become addicted to the adrenalin kick. Also, strategies that imply seeking meaning and purpose in their work and their professional role are used to build resilience (Hughes et al. 2021). Knowing their profession well and respecting traumatized people contributes to solving ethical dilemmas in a manner that does not come back to torment them, as shown in studies (Idås, Backholm, and Korhonen 2019; Anderson 2018; Browne, Evangeli, and Greenberg 2012). My results show that the nine interviewees have—through experience—learned a lot. Instead of urgently publishing the most spectacular story, they prioritize their interviewees. This means for instance that they do not approach people who show signs of acute distress, but out of fear of further traumatizing them, wait for a day to contact them or leave them alone, as several interviewees state. The majority have extensive experience in covering violence. However, the youngest journalist also solved dilemmas in a good way. This journalist tells about meeting people who needed to talk, but at the same time were clearly traumatized. So, the journalist talked to them, but did not interview them. As remarked above my interviewees show great respect for people whom they interview, and in my opinion respect stands out as an important attribute. My study adds to earlier research and suggests an implication for journalists to internalize a coherence between own moral compass and their profession's code of ethics.

All of them need more support from the news organization. There are however huge differences stemming from which media organization they work for. I argue that being better prepared will increase journalists' chances to be resilient. Also, seven out of the nine have no safety training. Only three are content with the social support given, which is mostly down to their nearest leader in the newsroom. The reported huge potential for improved social support from employers is remarkable, although in line with previous research (Slaughter et al. 2020; Høiby and Ottosen 2016; Beam and Spratt 2009). This leads me to believe that media houses may need more incentives than research in order to provide efficient support to their reporters covering violence. Maybe an international campaign launched by journalists' unions and international NGOs could encourage better support? As resilience is linked to both self-esteem and to relationships, an active and continuous contact between the newsroom and the reporter may provide a boost before, during and after crisis work. The journalists praise colleagues who have experience in trauma reporting and find that they contribute to building resilience. Everyone stresses that since no one else really understands what they go through, peers mean everything. As one says, "We go together, and together, we decide to live" (Interviewee 1). Also, in the aftermath, strong relationships with close ones and peers promote resilience (Hughes et al. 2021; Idås and Backholm 2017; Weinberg 2017; McMahon 2016; Walsh 2003). The

importance of colleagues implies that better, more systematized, informal support should build upon peer support, in the newsroom and across media organizations.

Although lack of support from the media house impedes more positive outcomes, I find that eight out of the nine interviewees would cover dangerous assignments again. Being close to death and on the edge of their boundaries, changes them. Having gone through a reflecting and recognizing process, seven of them have experienced personal or professional growth. In this respect, peers in the field are again of utmost importance. As Walsh (2003, 62) writes, pulling together and trying to understand and learn from traumatic and risky work is what fosters resilience. My study illustrates how the journalists pay a high price for doing important, but dangerous reporting, and that their traumatic experiences may go hand in hand with strengthened resilience and professional and/or personal positive outcomes. As such, my results help clarify the complicated coexisting of traumatic experiences, resilience and growth as described in literature. For me, the central points which should be further studied are problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies, the importance of peers, respect for others, and reflect and process impressions and experiences.

However, this study is but a small sampling which means that I only claim to find indications. There are other limitations too. Gender was not mentioned in the interview guide. Although it was touched upon by females both positively and negatively, the study does not elaborate on it. Other factors like time pressure and handling different media beats were left out and should be explored in future research. Some may feel that the fact that the interviewees come from different countries diminishes the results. Certainly the study cannot be considered representative for journalists covering traumatic events. But despite the geographical distance and differences in social support, the interviewees have a lot in common: They are professional journalists covering traumatic events, which**,** without regard to the place were such events occur, are demanding and risky for the reporters' mental and physical health. Furthermore, such work requires that the journalists balance staying alive and doing their work. Also, there are a lot of similarities in the way they describe their work, the strategies they apply and what they are left with in respect to mental aftereffects as well as positive outcomes. As such, they are nine important voices contributing to the scarce literature on journalists and post-traumatic growth. As research shows, the majority of my interviewees have gone through a process from exposure to and awareness of traumatic experiences to a deeper understanding of their role (McMahon 2016), gained inner strength (Calhoun, Cann, and Tedeschi 2010; Tedeschi, Calhoun, and Cann 2007) and clearer values (McMahon 2016). In addition, my study highlights the importance of peer support (Idås, Backholm, and Korhonen 2019; Idås and Backholm 2017; McMahon 2016). Even so, these issues need further research to ensure a safer way to bring the public vital information. As long as atrocities happen, there will be journalists reporting. It is pivotal that more journalists get trauma and safety training and support in order to be able to state, as one interviewee puts it, "What remains is positive, not negative" (Interviewee 9).

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