TRAUMA JOURNALISM AND THE MENTAL HEALTH OF JOURNALISTS IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

[1]Akinrosoye, A. Idowu, [2]Abdullahi, I. Salaudeen and [3]Adegbite, I. Olawale
[1]Department of Mass Communication, Osun State Polytechnic, Iree, Nigeria
[2]Department of Mass Communication, the Polytechnic, Iresi, Nigeria
[3]Department of Statistics, Osun State Polytechnic, Iree, Nigeria

Abstract: Journalists in Nigeria frequently encounter traumatic events and experiences while fulfilling their professional duties, particularly when reporting on sensitive and violent incidents. As a result, this paper set to investigate the impact of trauma journalism on the mental health and well-being of Nigerian journalists with focus on the Southwestern region of the country. Through a comprehensive literature review and analysis, it explores the types and frequency of traumatic experiences faced by these professionals, the perceived impact on their mental health, the coping strategies employed, and the effectiveness of existing support systems in the context of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). The study adopts mixed research methods; quantitative and qualitative with focus on survey (questionnaire) and in-depth interview respectively to extract necessary information. The researchers espouse the stratified random sampling technique to select 360 journalists across the Southwestern states in Nigeria. The study found that substantial proportion of journalists in Southwest Nigeria frequently experience traumatic issues in their reporting, and this experience is instrumental to the mental challenges such as stress, anxiety and depression. The study also found that, even in the face of traumatic condition, journalists in Southwest Nigeria still strictly adhere to the ethics of the profession. It is therefore recommended that, media organizations, policymakers, and stakeholders to prioritize the mental health and well-being of journalists reporting on sensitive or traumatic events.

Keywords: Journalism, Trauma, Trauma Journalism, Mental Health Challenges, Southwest Nigeria

Introduction
Journalism is a noble profession that plays a crucial role in informing the public, holding power accountable and shaping narratives (Canella, 2023). However, journalists, particularly those operating in conflict zones, areas of civil unrest, or covering sensitive topics, often encounter traumatic events and experiences that can have profound psychological impacts. In Nigeria, a country with a rich journalistic tradition but also a complex socio-political landscape, journalists frequently find themselves at the frontlines of traumatic incidents, from terrorist attacks and civil conflicts to natural disasters and human rights violations (Danaan, 2017). Research has shown that this process of repeated exposure to trauma amongst journalists can result in adverse and varied psychological reactions. According to Newman, Simpson and Handschuh (2003), almost every journalist will cover stories considered to be traumatic, including murder, assault, and deadly accidents during their careers. More recent research has moved beyond a focus on reporters and photographers to other news workers such as video editors and producers (Feinstein Audet & Waknine, 2014).

Omigbodun, Bakare and Yusuf (2008), opine that Southwest Nigeria has experienced its share of traumatic events, including communal conflicts, political unrest, and environmental disasters. Journalists operating in this region are often at the forefront of reporting on these events, facing the dual challenge of delivering accurate and

timely news while coping with the emotional toll of witnessing and documenting traumatic incidents.

Trauma journalism, also known as crisis reporting or conflict journalism, encompasses the coverage of events and situations characterized by violence, tragedy, and human suffering. Wahl-Jorgensen (2020), postulates that trauma journalism is a specialized field within media and communication studies that focuses on the reporting of traumatic events, including but not limited to natural disasters, conflicts, acts of violence, and human tragedies. It involves journalists documenting and disseminating information about these events to the public, often under challenging and emotionally demanding circumstances.

Trauma Exposure and Psychological Impact in Journalism

Trauma exposure in journalism according to Calumbiran (2021) is a complex and multifaceted issue that has garnered increased attention in recent years. Journalists who cover traumatic events such as violence, natural disasters, human rights abuses, and war zones are often exposed to emotionally challenging and distressing content that can have profound psychological impacts, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and burnout.

Effects and Professional Implications of Trauma Journalism

Impact on Mental Health Outcomes: Backholm (2012) posits that the constant exposure to traumatic content, coupled with the emotional demands and ethical dilemmas of reporting on sensitive issues, contributes to heightened levels of stress, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress among journalists.

Professional Longevity and Job Satisfaction: Newman, Simpson and Handschuh (2003) postulate that the effects of trauma journalism extend to professional longevity and job satisfaction among journalists. Chronic exposure to traumatic content and high levels of stress can lead to burnout, compassion fatigue, and reduced job satisfaction among journalists.

*Ethical Considerations and Moral Distress***:** Engaging in trauma journalism raises ethical considerations and moral dilemmas for journalists (Simpson & Coté, 2006. Journalists may experience moral distress when faced with ethical conflicts, witnessing human suffering, or making difficult decisions about what to report and how to report it.

Implications for Media Organizations: Failure to address the effects of trauma journalism can lead to increased turnover rates, decreased job satisfaction, and compromised mental health outcomes among journalists, impacting the quality and credibility of journalism produced (Rentschler, 2010).

Industry Trends and Challenges: Backholm (2012) suggest that industry stakeholders must collaborate, innovate, and adapt to changing trends and challenges while prioritizing journalists' well-being and mental health in the context of trauma journalism.

*Impact on Physical Health and Well-being***:** Kotisova (2019), postulates that chronic stress, long working hours, and exposure to traumatic content can contribute to physical health issues such as insomnia, fatigue, headaches, digestive problems among others.

Job Demands and Work-Related Stress: Journalists may experience role overload, job ambiguity, and conflicting demands that can lead to job strain and burnout.

Impact on Reporting Quality and Public Trust: The effects of trauma journalism can influence the quality of reporting and public trust in the media. Journalists' well-being, mental health, and ethical decision-making directly impact the accuracy, sensitivity, and credibility of trauma reporting. Burnout, compassion fatigue, and moral distress can compromise journalists' ability to maintain professional standards, uphold ethical principles, and engage in responsible reporting practices (Dubinski, 2022).

Addressing the Challenges of Trauma Journalism and Mental Health

Training and Education: Massé (2011) notes that training and education of journalists are indeed fundamental components of addressing the challenges of trauma journalism and promoting mental health among journalists. Journalists need training in trauma-informed reporting practices that prioritize sensitivity, accuracy, ethical considerations, and minimizing harm to survivors and victims.

Organizational Support Systems: Media organizations should develop and implement mental health policies that prioritize journalists' well-being, destigmatize mental health issues, and provide guidelines for accessing support services. Policies should address confidentiality, privacy, non-discrimination, and accessibility of mental health resources (Calumbiran, 2021).

Collaborative Partnerships. Stuart (2016) opines that partnerships can collaborate on awareness campaigns, workshops, and events that raise awareness about mental health issues, reduce stigma, and promote open discussions about mental health in the journalism industry.

Peer Support Networks. Peer support groups offer emotional validation, understanding, and solidarity among journalists who share the same view.

Community Engagement and Advocacy: Scherer and Leshner (2021) suggest that media organizations can collaborate with advocacy groups, mental health organizations, and stakeholders to launch media campaigns that destigmatize mental health, educate the public about trauma journalism, and promote responsible reporting practices.

Continuing Education and Support: According to Cowie and Wallace (2000), peer mentoring programs, supervision sessions, and feedback mechanisms help journalists learn from experienced peers, receive guidance, and enhance their skills in trauma reporting and mental health management.

Theoretical Consideration

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Bandura introduced the Social Cognitive Theory in the 1960s and continued to develop and refine it over several decades. According to Bussey and Bandura (1999), the major Ideologies of SCT emphasizes the role of cognitive processes, observational learning, self-efficacy beliefs, and social influences in shaping human behavior. Bandura posits that individuals learn through observation, modeling, and cognitive processes, where they acquire new knowledge, skills, and behaviors by observing others and the consequences of their actions (Usher and Schunk, 2017). Social Cognitive Theory is highly relevant to this research as it explores how journalists' mental health and well-being are influenced by cognitive processes, observational learning, and social factors.

The lack of comprehensive research on the mental health status, coping mechanisms, and support systems available to journalists in Southwest Nigeria involved in trauma journalism creates a gap in understanding the challenges and opportunities for promoting mental health resilience among media professionals. This gap is further compounded by the unique socio-cultural and environmental factors present in Southwest Nigeria, which may influence the psychological well-being of journalists reporting on traumatic events. By addressing this problem, the study aims to contribute valuable insights and recommendations for enhancing mental health support and resilience among journalists engaged in trauma reporting, with a focus on understanding their experiences, coping strategies, and the adequacy of existing support systems in Southwest Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The aim of this paper is to investigate the impact of trauma journalism on the mental health of journalists in Southwest Nigeria, while the objectives are to:

1. Investigate the experiences of journalists in Southwest Nigeria regarding exposure to traumatic events in their reporting.
2. Explore the coping mechanisms utilized by journalists to manage the emotional impact of trauma journalism in Southwest Nigeria.

3. Examine the existing support systems and resources available to journalists in Southwest Nigeria for addressing mental health challenges related to trauma journalism.
4. Investigate how journalists balance reporting on sensitive or traumatic events with ethical considerations and sensitivity towards affected individuals.

Hypothesis

H_0: Trauma journalism has no significant impact on the mental health of journalists in Southwest Nigeria,

H_1: Trauma journalism has significant impact on the mental health of journalists in Southwest Nigeria,

Methodology

This research adopts the mixed method, quantitative and qualitative methodologies. For the quantitative method, survey (questionnaire) was used as the instrument for data collection while in-depth interview was espoused for the qualitative method. Using questionnaires allows the researcher to collect quantitative data on a wide range of variables related to trauma journalism and mental health. Surveys covers demographic information, trauma exposure, coping mechanisms, perceived organizational support, mental health outcomes (e.g., stress, anxiety, depression), and attitudes towards mental health resources. While in-depth interviews complement surveys by providing qualitative insights into journalists' experiences, perceptions, emotions, and in-depth narratives about their challenges, coping strategies, ethical dilemmas, and the impact of trauma exposure on their mental well-being. Interviews allow for a deeper exploration of themes, nuances, and personal perspectives that may not be captured in surveys alone. However, in choosing the respondents of this study and to ensure a substantial sample for representation, the researcher adopted a probability sampling technique, with focus on the stratified random sampling technique. This sampling technique was adopted for this study because it employs, stratification, using each state of Southwestern Nigeria and randomization. Research conducted on this sample always has good internal and external validity (Lauren, 2020).

Data Presentation and Analysis

Realization of objectives

Objective 1

To investigate the experiences of journalists in Southwest Nigeria regarding exposure to traumatic events in their reporting.

Table 1: Experience of journalists' mental health challenges (e.g., stress, anxiety, and depression) related to their work in journalism.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	194	53.89
Agree	118	32.78
Undecided	7	1.94
Strongly Disagree	12	3.33
Disagree	29	8.06
Total	**360**	**100**

Source: Authors' compilation, April, 2024.

Table 1 reflects the concerning trend regarding journalists' mental health challenges related to their work in journalism. A significant majority, comprising 86.67% of respondents (combining "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" categories), agreed with the statement about experiencing stress, anxiety, or depression related to their work. This high percentage indicates a prevalent issue within the journalism industry, highlighting the need for comprehensive mental health support and resources for journalists.

Objective 2

To explore the coping mechanisms utilized by journalists to manage the emotional impact of trauma journalism in Southwest Nigeria.

Table 2: Coping mechanisms journalists use to manage stress and maintain mental well-being in their work

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Talking to colleagues	250	69.4
Seeking professional counseling	90	25
Engaging in physical exercise	120	33.3
Practicing mindfulness or meditation	150	50
Taking breaks from work	200	55.6
Other	30	8.3
Total	**360**	**100**

Source: Authors' compilation, April, 2024.

Table 2 shows majority of journalists employ interpersonal strategies to cope with stress and maintain their mental well-being, with 69.4% indicating that they talk to colleagues. Seeking professional counseling is also a significant coping mechanism, with 25% of journalists utilizing this resource. Engaging in physical exercise is another popular strategy, with 33.3% of journalists incorporating it into their routine. Additionally, practicing mindfulness or meditation, taking breaks from work, and other unspecified methods are employed by 55.6%, 8.3%, and 50% of journalists, respectively.

Objective 3

To examine the existing support systems and resources available to journalists in Southwest Nigeria for addressing mental health challenges related to trauma journalism.

Table 3: Organizational support for journalists' mental health in media organizations

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (100)
Excellent	46	12.78
Good	127	35.28
Fair	139	38.61
Poor	48	13.33
Total	**360**	**100**

Source: Authors' compilation, April, 2024.

The data gathered on organizational support for journalists' mental health in media organizations as shown in Table 3 reveals a mixed picture. While a notable portion of respondents rated the support as either "Good" (35.28%) or "Fair" (38.61%), indicating some level of support being provided, there is also a significant percentage of respondents who rated the support as "Poor" (13.33%). This suggests that there are areas within media organizations where improvements can be made to better support journalists' mental health. Enhancing mental health resources, providing training on stress management and resilience, fostering open communication channels, and implementing policies that prioritize well-being could contribute to creating a more supportive environment for journalists facing mental health challenges.

Objective 4

To investigate how journalists balance reporting on sensitive or traumatic events with ethical considerations and sensitivity towards affected individuals.

Table 4: Balancing reporting on sensitive or traumatic events with ethical considerations and sensitivity towards affected individuals.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Ensuring anonymity and privacy of victims/survivors	290	80.6
Avoiding graphic or sensationalized content	250	69.6
Providing trigger warnings for sensitive content	120	33.3
Seeking consent before using personal stories or images	200	55.6
Other	40	11.1
Total	**360**	**100**

Source: Authors' compilation, April, 2024.

Table 4 reveals data analysis regarding journalists' practices in balancing reporting on sensitive or traumatic events with ethical considerations reveals a strong adherence to ethical principles among respondents. The majority prioritize ensuring the anonymity and privacy of victims/survivors (80.6%) and avoiding graphic or sensationalized content (69.6%), reflecting a commitment to responsible and sensitive reporting. Additionally, significant percentages acknowledge the importance of providing trigger warnings for sensitive content (33.3%) and seeking consent before using personal stories or images (55.6%), highlighting a proactive approach to minimizing harm and respecting individuals' rights. The mention of other strategies by a smaller percentage (11.1%) indicates a diversity of ethical approaches tailored to specific situations. Overall, these findings underscore the ethical awareness and sensitivity of journalists in navigating the complexities of reporting on sensitive topics, contributing to a more responsible and empathetic media landscape.

Test of hypothesis

Hypothesis

H_0: Trauma journalism has no significant impact on the mental health of journalists in Southwest Nigeria,

H_1: Trauma journalism has significant impact on the mental health of journalists in Southwest Nigeria,

Table 5. Chi-Square analysis

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Chi-Square	df	P-value
Strongly Agree	131	36.4	195.889	4	0.0
Agree	139	38.6			
Undecided	50	13.9			
Disagree	31	8.6			
Strongly disagreed	9	2.5			
Total	**360**	**100**			

From Table 5, the P-value is 0.000 which mean alternative hypothesis is accepted and conclude that trauma journalism has significant impact on the mental health of journalists in Southwest Nigeria

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study as shown in Table 1 reveals that, majority of the journalists in southwest Nigeria have experienced mental challenges such as stress, anxiety and depression related to their work in journalism. The findings in the Table 1 reveal the trend regarding journalists' mental

health challenges related to their work is also in concord with findings of Calumbiran (2021). This scholar found that, journalists who cover traumatic events such as violence, natural disasters, human rights abuses, and war zones are often exposed to emotionally challenging and distressing content that can have profound psychological impacts. Calumbiran (2021), further postulates that and highlight the various types of traumatic experiences encountered by journalists and explores the psychological consequences of trauma exposure, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and burnout. Subsequently, this is also buttressed in the study of Simalchik (2021), where he opines that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a common psychological disorder that may develop in journalists exposed to traumatic events. PTSD is characterized by symptoms such as re-experiencing the traumatic event through intrusive memories or nightmares, avoidance of trauma-related stimuli, negative alterations in mood and cognition, and heightened arousal and reactivity.

On the objectives to explore the coping mechanisms utilized by journalists to manage the emotional impact of trauma journalism in Southwest Nigeria, it was discovered that, talking to colleagues, seeking professional counseling, engaging in physical exercise, practicing mindfulness or meditation and taking breaks from work among others are the various ways adopted by the journalists as coping mechanism in managing their emotion from traumatic encounter. These agrees with Mancini and Mancini's (2021) view that journalists with traumatic experience always operated under certain coping mechanisms which include adaptive strategies, problem-solving skills and emotional regulation techniques. Likewise, Walsh (2011) notes that social support is another critical factor in journalists' resilience and coping mechanisms. He opines that social support networks, including colleagues, mentors, friends, and family members, play a crucial role in providing emotional validation, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging. Walsh (2011) further notes that journalists who have strong social support systems are better able to cope with stress, process traumatic experiences, and maintain overall well-being.

The third objective of this study which is examine the existing support systems and resources available to journalists in Southwest Nigeria for addressing mental health challenges related to trauma journalism was addressed in the Table 3. From the findings, while a notable portion of respondents rated the support as either "Good" (35.28%) or "Fair" (38.61%), indicating some level of support being provided, there is also a significant percentage of respondents who rated the support as "Poor" (13.33%). Meanwhile, very few respondents with the lowest percentage (12.78%) are of the view that the support is "Excellent". This suggests that there are areas within media organizations where improvements can be made to better support journalists' mental health. Enhancing mental health resources, providing training on stress management and resilience, fostering open communication channels, and implementing policies that prioritize well-being could contribute to creating a more supportive environment for journalists facing mental health challenges. These findings agree with Akintayo and Abati (2022) where they note that while there are some support systems and resources available, there are gaps and challenges that need to be addressed to better support journalists in Southwest Nigeria facing mental health challenges related to trauma journalism. They suggest that this requires a multifaceted approach involving stakeholders at various levels to improve accessibility, reduce stigma, enhance training, and promote a culture of well-being within the media industry. Finally, on how journalists balance reporting on sensitive or traumatic events with ethical considerations and sensitivity towards affected individuals, table 4 revealed that there is strong adherence to ethical principles among respondents even when faced traumatic challenges. These

findings emphasize the ethical awareness and sensitivity of journalists in navigating the complexities of reporting on sensitive issues, contributing to a more responsible and empathetic media landscape in the Southwest Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A critical analysis on the findings from the study provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by journalists in Southwest Nigeria when reporting on sensitive or traumatic events, as well as the coping mechanisms and support systems available to them. There is considerable proportion of journalists frequently encounter traumatic content in their reporting assignments, leading to mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety, and depression. This necessitates a comprehensive approach to support journalists' well-being, including access to counseling services, stress management training, and fostering a supportive work environment. Meanwhile, journalists employ various coping mechanisms, including talking to colleagues, seeking professional counseling, engaging in physical exercise, and practicing mindfulness or meditation. These coping strategies are crucial in helping journalists manage the emotional impact of their work and should be encouraged and supported by media organizations.

Interestingly, while there are existing support systems and resources for journalists' mental health, the study also highlights areas for improvement, particularly in enhancing the quality and accessibility of mental health support within media organizations. This includes providing more robust training on stress management and resilience, fostering open communication channels, and implementing policies that prioritize the well-being of journalists. It is noteworthy that the strong adherence to ethical principles among journalists, even in the face of traumatic challenges, is commendable. It reflects a commitment to responsible and empathetic reporting, contributing to a more ethical and sensitive media landscape in Southwest Nigeria.

However, as a way of recommendation, the study underscores the need for media organizations, policymakers, and stakeholders to prioritize the mental health and well-being of journalists reporting on sensitive or traumatic events. This can be achieved through implementing comprehensive support programs, improving access to mental health resources, and fostering a culture of open communication and support within media workplaces. By addressing these challenges and supporting journalists' resilience, we can ensure a healthier and more effective journalism industry in Southwest Nigeria.

References

Akintayo, J., & Abati, M. O. (2022). Epistemological issues in the reportage of suicide and mental health in Nigeria. *African Scholar Journal of African Innovation & Advanced Studies*, *24*, 291-305.

Backholm, K. (2012). Work-related crisis exposure: psychological trauma and PTSD in news journalists.

Bussey, K., & Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation. *Psychological review*, *106*(4), 676.

Calumbiran, A. J. (2021). Trauma vs. Duty: Confronting the Moral Obligation of Newsrooms to Protect Journalists from Psychological Harm. *Global Media Journal*, *19*, 37.

Canella, G. (2023). Journalistic power: constructing the "truth" and the economics of objectivity. *Journalism Practice*, *17*(2), 209-225.

Cowie, H., & Wallace, P. (2000). *Peer support in action: From bystanding to standing by*. Sage.

Danaan, G. N. (2017). *Journalistic strategies in conflict reporting and the representations of ethnic and religious identities in Jos, Nigeria: towards solutions-review journalism*. University of Salford (United Kingdom).

Dubinski, K. (2022). *Not first responders, but often first to respond: Canadian journalists' use of trauma-informed approaches in reporting* (Doctoral dissertation, Mount Saint Vincent University).

Feinstein, A., Audet, B., & Waknine, E. (2014). Witnessing images of extreme violence: A psychological study of journalists in the newsroom. JRSM Open, 5(8). https://www.ncbi. nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4100239/.

Kotisova, J. (2019). The elephant in the newsroom: Current research on journalism and emotion. *Sociology Compass*, *13*(5), e12677.

Lauren T. (August 28th, 2020). Simple Random Sampling: Definition, Steps & Examples. https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/simple-random-sampling/. Retrieved on March 11th, 2021

Massé, M. H. (2011). *Trauma journalism: on deadline in harm's way*. A&C Black.

Newman, E., Simpson, R., & Handschuh, D. (2003). Trauma exposure and post-traumatic stress disorder among photojournalists. *Visual Communication Quarterly*, *10*(1), 4-13.

Omigbodun, O., Bakare, K., & Yusuf, B. (2008). Traumatic events and depressive symptoms among youth in Southwest Nigeria: a qualitative analysis. *International journal of adolescent medicine and health*, *20*(3), 243-254.

Rentschler, C. A. (2010). Trauma training and the reparative work of journalism. *Cultural Studies*, *24*(4), 447-477.

Scherer, L. A., & Leshner, A. I. (Eds.). (2021). *Mental health, substance use, and wellbeing in higher education: Supporting the whole student*. National Academies Press.

Simalchik, J. (2021). Disrupting legacies of trauma: Interdisciplinary interventions for health and human rights. *Health and Human Rights*, *23*(1), 11.

Simpson, R., & Coté, W. (2006). *Covering violence: a guide to ethical reporting about victims & trauma*. Columbia University Press.

Stuart, H. (2016). Reducing the stigma of mental illness. *Global Mental Health*, *3*, e17.

Usher, E. L., & Schunk, D. H. (2017). Social cognitive theoretical perspective of self-regulation. In *Handbook of self-regulation of learning and performance* (pp. 19-35). Routledge.

Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2020). An emotional turn in journalism studies?. *Digital journalism*, *8*(2), 175-194.

Walsh, F. (2011). Facilitating family resilience: Relational resources for positive youth development in conditions of adversity. In *The social ecology of resilience: A handbook of theory and practice* (pp. 173-185). New York, NY: Springer New York.