

***Protecting Our Journalists:  
Issues of Safety and Traumatic Stress in the Media***

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## ***Protecting Our Journalists: Issues of Safety and Traumatic Stress in the Media***

Events such as September 11 and the Boxing Day tsunami, and the increasing number of media personnel being taken hostage in war zones for political leverage have highlighted the increasing dangers journalists now face both physically and psychologically in the field. More than 1000 news media personnel have died in the last ten years - an average of two a week (Sambrook & Pinder [online] 2007:7). Here in New Zealand we are increasingly sending our own, often young, journalists into war and disaster zones. It is now more critical than ever to ensure that these journalists are properly equipped to deal with the challenges of covering conflict. Unprepared and ill-supported journalists can experience long-term psychological effects once they return to the newsroom – if they return at all.

Domestically, journalists experience physical danger and emotional trauma in their daily work when covering accidents, violent crimes, family tragedies and other traumatic local events. Journalists are often first responders at these kinds of events. However, while police officers, firefighters and other first responders have been receiving training and support to deal with the traumatic stresses of their jobs for years, the media industry has been slow to recognise the impacts of this kind of work on its staff.

This paper will examine the issues of physical safety and emotional trauma affecting the media industry today and assess the effects of traumatic stress on journalists. It will provide an overview of attitudes to physical and emotional trauma amongst New Zealand media and how some local organisations are working to address these issues. Examining how international media organisations are working to improve awareness of trauma and support for their staff through training programmes and in-house policies, this paper will outline key strategies for approaching trauma and improving staff support within newsrooms on a daily basis and for major international assignments. It will also highlight the implicit benefits of making safety and trauma issues an integral part of newsroom operations.

### ***Physical Safety***

**“The price of truth has gone up grievously. We pay every week with the life of a reporter, a cameraman, a support worker” – Sir Harold Evans ([online] 2007:2).**

Every year since 1996 between 70 and 90 media workers have died at work and this number has been increasing in the last few years (INSI [online] 2007:15). A record 172 journalists and other news professionals died at work in 2007 – at least 100 by gunfire and 20 by bombings (INSI [online] 2008). The worst killing ground in 2007 was Iraq where 65 news personnel died and where a total of 236 members of the media have died since the US-led invasion in 2003 (INSI [online] 2008).

International News Safety Institute (INSI) director Rodney Pinder says the critical issue behind the increasing number of casualties is that journalists are now targets in conflict zones: “The journalist is

no longer seen as the neutral observer in war” (23 September 2007). In Iraq in particular, journalists are reporting from the very frontline of trauma and the press pass which once afforded a measure of protection has now become an invitation to be kidnapped – or worse (Brayne 2006).

The Iraq War has taken place alongside the advent of multi-media and 24-hour news and this has compounded the dangerous situations in which journalists must operate. More journalists than ever are now in the field and there is greater demand for fresh pictures and angles around the clock. Jim Tucker, former head of the New Zealand Journalism Training Organisation (NZJTO), says the 24-hour news cycle leaves no time for reflection and more and more risks are being taken in hostile environments to get the material (21 May 2007).

For photographers and photojournalists, the pressure to get closer to the action is even greater. Chicago-based photojournalist Erik Unger, who has covered several major international conflicts during his 15-year career, including the 2004 coup in Haiti, says that for the photographers, working in a conflict zone is not just about staying alive – it is about getting a better picture than the others (17 August 2007). “In the end an editor doesn’t care what you did to get the picture. They don’t mind if you dodged bullets for five minutes to get the picture - if the picture’s not good, the picture’s not good and it’s not gonna run,” Unger says (17 August 2007). “If you come back with safe pictures they’ll send somebody who won’t just come back with safe pictures.”

Despite the increasing threats faced by media staff in the field, many news organisations still send their staff on assignment ill-equipped to work in a conflict zone. “The record of the press, the international press, is frankly scandalous. I think that it is very difficult to imagine any other industry where people are expected to move into dangerous areas in the interest of their company or their enterprise, and where they are not even given basic training before they go” (White 2002 cited in INSI [online] 2007: 51).

Former Managing Director of CNN International and INSI President Chris Cramer, who was instrumental in raising awareness of health and safety issues at the BBC and CNN, calls it "criminal" and "a disgrace to the profession" when editors send staff into harm's way without proper training, protective gear or clear guidelines on how far to push into danger zones in pursuit of a photograph or story (quoted in Ricchiardi [online] 2002).

The danger journalists face in the field is often compounded by their own lack of understanding of their surroundings and their inability to recognise risks and operate safely in a hostile environment. This is because, despite being trained in the professional aspects of journalism such as interviewing and structuring a story, they have not been trained in how to safely carry out these tasks within a conflict zone.

It is up to the news organisations to create clear policies on preparing their staff for the challenges of reporting on conflict and traumatic events. All news personnel including cameramen and support staff should be given hostile environment training to make them aware of the dangers they will face, how they can minimise these risks, and the effects that these situations may have on them.

## ***Emotional Trauma***

**“If you protect yourself too much by screening out the unpleasantness, you cheat the reader by failing to convey the horror, which is, after all, your job, On the other hand, if you allow yourself to absorb the reality of what you see and hear, you run the risk of destroying yourself emotionally. When you can no longer walk that fine line you should be able to leave the beat” - Pinsky 1993 (cited in Gutkowska 2005)**

Most media organisations have been aware for more than a decade of the increasing physical dangers journalists face in the field, but awareness of the emotional impacts of journalism has been slower to be recognised.

There is often much concern over the effect coverage of traumatic events may have on readers and viewers but no such consideration is given to the cameramen, journalists and media staff witnessing, gathering, processing and editing that news. Potentially harmful or disturbing images can be edited out of a story, but they cannot be erased from the journalists or cameramen who experienced them firsthand.

In many respects, journalists are like first responders - often first on the scene as accidents and major tragedies unfold. The psychological effects of witnessing trauma first-hand on emergency workers have been well-documented and accepted for decades and these professions work hard to protect and support their staff. In the media industry however, these effects have been largely ignored.

“Reporters and editors are so busy meeting daily deadlines that they have never taken time to recognise that they, too, can suffer from the cumulative emotional strain that comes with tragic stories. Too many come to believe that feeling distant and numb and groaning about their job is a normal state of affairs. In reality, it may be the result of a psychological reaction to the pressures of dealing with death and destruction” (Lachowicz 1995 cited in Cote & Simpson 2000: 55).

WNYC senior reporter Beth Fertig was three blocks from the World Trade Centre site when the south tower collapsed on September 11, 2001 ([email] 2007). She spent several hours interviewing survivors and witnesses, covered two of the mayor’s briefings and worked until 5am. She spent several days after the events covering the scene outside hospitals where family members were searching for missing people, the rescue operation downtown and the volunteers who had descended on NYC to help with the cleanup.

Fertig says she experienced total insomnia in the first few days following the events and struggled to sleep for several weeks: “I became very emotional and depressed a week later, once I had two days off from work. Almost one year later I began to suffer from extremely bad insomnia again and panic attacks. I was put on an anti-anxiety medication and sleeping medication. They helped me tremendously,” (Fertig [email] 2007). To get through it, Fertig saw a therapist and talked to friends with similar experiences. “I still occasionally have nightmares about the experience but I feel very balanced now. I don't think about it on a regular basis,” (Fertig [email] 2007).

According to the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS) people who have traumatic experiences cope in the best way they can with the memories and effects and for many, these will gradually go away (ISTSS [online] 2007). However for some people, the symptoms and disturbing reactions will persist or worsen and this can lead people to try and cope in unhelpful ways such as withdrawing from friends and family or using drugs or alcohol (ISTSS [online] 2007). These kinds of behaviours have been common in newsrooms for decades and need to be recognised and appropriately addressed in order to minimise the effects of covering trauma on journalists.

### ***What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?***

**“I’ve been beaten in my dreams. I’ve been shot in my dreams. I’ve been left for dead in my dreams. They say that if you die in your dreams you die in real life but that’s not true because I’ve died in my dreams and then awakened,” – Erik Unger, Photojournalist (17 August 2007)**

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can be one of the major psychological effects of exposure to traumatic events. The Dart Centre defines trauma as “any event to which a person is connected, that is unexpected, outside that person’s usual range of human experience, and that involves some form of loss, injury or threat of injury, whether actual or perceived” (Brayne 2007: 2). Traumatic events can be one-time events such as natural disasters, accidents or violent crimes, or repeated events such as war, child abuse or domestic violence (ISTSS [online] 2007). According to the ISTSS, more than 20% of people exposed to traumatic events typically develop clinically significant psychological problems (ISTSS [online] 2007 (ii)).

PTSD was first formally identified by American psychiatrists after the Vietnam War to describe the experience of army veterans (Dart Centre Europe [online] 2002). Not everyone exposed to trauma will develop PTSD. Most people’s symptoms of distress following a traumatic incident will get better after a few weeks but in some cases stress can produce long-lasting damage manifested as PTSD (Dart Centre Europe [online] 2002).

There are three main categories of symptoms of PTSD which can cause significant suffering or dysfunction (Dart Centre Europe [online] 2002):

- Re-experiencing: The event is constantly relived through nightmares, flashbacks or recurring intrusive thoughts of the traumatic experience
- Avoidance and emotional numbing: Avoidance of reminders of or situations reminiscent of the trauma. A feeling of detachment and estrangement from life
- Hyperarousal: Being on constant alert, in an agitated state or experiencing a heightened sense of anxiety

Other problems or symptoms include sleeping difficulties, exhaustion, irritability, aggressive behaviour, anger, depression, social withdrawal, substance abuse, tearfulness, physical health problems, or loss of hope or sense of meaning (Dart Centre Europe [online] 2002). Symptoms must last at least a month before PTSD can be diagnosed (Dart Centre [online] 2008).

### ***How does traumatic stress relate to journalism?***

PTSD and other forms of traumatisation are a very real threat to the safety of journalists both personally and professionally.

“Professionals can become ineffective, have trouble with boundaries in helping relationships, withdraw from friends, family, and colleagues, and make bad judgments in their work. They may experience burnout and become a burden to colleagues or leave the field prematurely, disheartened and cynical” (ISTSS [online] 2007 (iii)).

A groundbreaking survey by Anthony Feinstein, John Owen & Nancy Blair in 2002 found that PTSD may affect more than a quarter of war journalists (Feinstein, Owen & Blair [online] 2002). “War journalists have significantly more psychiatric difficulties than journalists who do not report on war. In particular, the lifetime prevalence of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is similar to rates reported for combat veterans, while the rate of major depression exceeds that of the general population” (Feinstein, Owen & Blair [online] 2002).

The authors used self-report questionnaires to assess 140 war journalists who had spent on average 15 years reporting on wars and major conflicts and 107 demographically matched domestic journalists who had never covered war. Results found that the war journalists had significantly higher scores for PTSD, major depression and substance abuse (Feinstein, Owen & Blair [online] 2002). “The interviews with 20% of the group revealed that war journalists are profoundly affected by their symptoms of PTSD. While we had no clear way of judging the effects of the syndrome on the quality of their work, every war journalist with PTSD spoke of considerable social difficulties, such as an inability to adjust to life back in a civil society, a reluctance to mix with friends, troubled relationships, the use of alcohol as a hypnotic, and embarrassing startled responses that led to social avoidance” (Feinstein, Owen, & Blair [online] 2002).

Journalists are also at risk of experiencing secondary traumatic stress or vicarious traumatisation – which can develop from being witness to another person’s trauma or a traumatic event, rather than experiencing it first hand. Psychologist Monika Gutkowska, who did a doctoral dissertation on the effects of covering traumatic events on journalists and photojournalists, says secondary traumatisation has similar symptoms to PTSD but may not be picked up as people are not necessarily looking for it (18 August 2007). Vicarious traumatisation involves symptoms such as guilt, self-doubt, loss of compassion or beliefs, difficulty trusting and can also ultimately impact on a reporter’s experience at work (Gutkowska 2005).

Dart Centre Europe’s former director Mark Brayne suggests that photographers and camera operators are particularly vulnerable to accumulated trauma, possibly because unlike writing journalists they do not construct a narrative of what they witness with a beginning, middle and end, which helps the brain make sense of what happened (2007: 11).

Photojournalist Erik Unger says he never experienced nightmares as a child but ever since covering the police beat in Chicago as a junior reporter he has suffered serious nightmares and sleeplessness throughout his career, particularly when covering the coup in Haiti where he witnessed and covered several horrific incidents including the scene of a man who had been partially skinned alive (17 August 2007). "You keep seeing some of the same images over and over again in your head and all the horror movies and stuff don't prepare you for when you actually see a human being that has been treated so badly," Unger says (17 August 2007). "In my early 20s I'm having these nightmares where I am being brutally beaten and I've been stabbed multiple times in my dreams where I can actually feel the knife going in. I've been beaten in my dreams. I've been shot in my dreams. I've been left for dead in my dreams." His nightmares never became so crippling that Unger couldn't work, but he is aware that his personality has changed over the years to become more uptight and quick to anger (17 August 2007).

It is crucial to remember that it is not just war zones and international disasters that can psychologically damage journalists. Ninety-five percent of journalists not in a war zone witness at least one event including death or violence in their careers (Pyeovich 2001 cited in Gutkowska 2005). On a daily basis, media staff deal with car crashes, crime, devastated witnesses, families of victims, gruesome court cases, and other potentially traumatising stories. It is important that journalists and managers recognise that traumatic stress can accumulate over time through this kind of work (Dart Centre Europe [online] 2002).

Experienced Kiwi foreign correspondent Mike McRoberts, who has covered several major international conflicts, says it is the local events, particularly those involving children, which affect him the most (22 May 2007). "Often being the first on a scene at a car accident or seeing a child who's been beaten to death, those have had a huge impact on me as a reporter," McRoberts says (22 May 2007). "I mean when you go to a war zone it's not your neighbour and I know that's a terrible thing to say but you're in a different country and completely different reality. You see the devastation for instance that an air raid will cause on a suburban apartment block and as soon as you see that you know there are going to be dead people and I guess you're more prepared for it and maybe that's why it hasn't had such a big impact."

The risk of developing traumatic stress disorders for media staff is compounded by the additional stressors journalists face in their jobs such as deadlines, competition, and being overextended and overtired (Ricchiardi 1999 cited in Gutkowska 2005).

Emotional trauma is a very real threat to journalists both on major one-off assignments and in the ongoing stresses of reporting the news daily. Unlike other professions which have recognised this threat and addressed it, the media industry has been slow in acknowledging that journalists face serious risks simply through doing their jobs. Traumatic stress impacts not only on the personal, psychological wellbeing of media staff, but also on their ability to do their job properly and sustain long careers in the industry. News organisations must take steps to acknowledge and address the impacts of traumatic events on their staff.

### ***The Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma***

The Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma is a global network of journalists, journalism educators and health professionals dedicated to improving media coverage of trauma and tragedy and addressing the consequences of such coverage on journalists (The Dart Centre [online] 2007). It operates in the US, Europe and Australia.

The Dart Centre was founded at the University of Washington's Department of Communications in 1999 to continue work begun by the journalism faculty at Michigan State University in collaboration with the Michigan Victim Alliance and traumatic stress expert Frank Ochberg to assist journalism students in reporting on victims of violence (The Dart Centre [online] 2007 (iii)).

The Centre has been instrumental in implementing duty of care training at ABC news, the BBC, Al Jazeera, NBC news, Reuters, the Financial Times, Washington Post, West German Television and many other organisations. It also responds to events such as Sept 11, after which a six-month education and support programme for New York journalists called the Dart Centre Ground Zero was set up (The Dart Centre [online] 2007 (iii)).

Dart Centre US executive director Bruce Shapiro says attitudes towards issues of trauma and journalism really began to change in the early 2000s following events such as the Oklahoma bombings, Columbine High School and September 11 when many journalists were either traumatised themselves, or were haunted by the behaviour of the press and the pressures they were under to deliver certain kinds of stories (17 July 2007).

Shapiro says those in the media industry "tend to assume that the more horror you cover the better you're going to be at covering it and the research shows, in fact, that as with all other parts of the population repeated exposure is a risk factor rather than a resilience factor and that's very important to recognise" (17 July 2007).

### ***The New Zealand Situation***

New Zealand media organisations are increasingly sending their own journalists to international conflicts and disasters in search of the "Kiwi connection" in every story. Ten years ago there were only a handful of familiar Kiwi faces reporting from the frontline. Now we have two fiercely competing television channels, radio broadcasters and dozens of newspapers all sending staff to major international events. We are now competing not just with ourselves, but with huge global media organisations in our coverage of foreign affairs. We no longer rely on international media like the BBC and CNN to feed back news to our public and this can only be positive for the development of quality New Zealand news journalism. However, in the drive to compete, we need ensure that our journalists are prepared for the challenges they will face both physically and emotionally in bringing the news back home.

*Dominion Post* reporter Keri Welham's first conflict assignment was in Sudan in 2004 for *The Press* (22 May 2007). She was sent on assignment with very short notice and no training or preparation. Once in Sudan, Welham discovered her cellphone did not work and she had no means of communication except for an expensive and unreliable satellite phone. Despite travelling with the Red Cross, Welham sometimes went without food. She had no security, filed copy from shoot-on-sight zones after curfew and was eventually deported. She says she felt scared, alone and isolated (22 May 2007). "I was just on the edge of my seat the whole time," she says. "There was a real sort of struggle between your human desire to keep yourself safe and your journalistic desire to just get on and get the story because it has been paid for and this is your job" (22 May 2007).

Welham arrived home at Christmas to feel irritable, tearful and distant. She did not want to talk about the assignment and says she had a real sense of anxiety that has since returned with unrelated things such as a health scare. She took up counselling about five weeks later at her employer's suggestion and says it really helped put her experiences in perspective (Welham 22 May 2007).

Welham suggests that pre-assignment programmes should be in place for reporters who want to go abroad so they are prepared, trained, and ready-to-go when the time comes - not rushed like she was (22 May 2007). "It really is up to the big companies APN and Fairfax to lead the way with really well-resourced and well-thought-out programmes and career development programmes for people who want to be considered for overseas assignments," Welham says (22 May 2007). "Just to be prepared would be fantastic."

Kiwi journalist Jon Stephenson has been to Iraq nine times, often travelling and freelancing alone (2 July 2007). He is frequently hired to take New Zealand journalists into Iraq and the Middle East, and does security and logistics contract work in Iraq, Gaza, and Lebanon for TV3. Stephenson says most of the New Zealand journalists he encounters in the field are poorly prepared and "substandard" (2 July 2007).

"They don't really have the tools, the analysis tools to understand how to report things like that. Most journalists have very little if any first aid training and certainly none that would prepare them for a hostile environment," Stephenson says (2 July 2007). "The problem is we don't really have any serious investment in foreign correspondence in New Zealand. There's no tradition in it here and for people to go overseas to report from hostile environments without any training - in America that would be outrageous."

Jim Tucker says the growing interest and competition in overseas coverage such as the Boxing Day Tsunami have helped bring issues of trauma to prominence in New Zealand (21 May 2007). However, anecdotal information is that those being sent overseas "haven't got a clue what they're doing," (Tucker 21 May 2007).

"I think our employers are sending people offshore on that kind of job ill-prepared and ill-equipped to deal with the kind of hostile environments they're going to," Tucker says (21 May 2007). "There's never been any recognition of the possible impacts. You're regarded as some sort of sissy if you

show any of that. That's why I think a lot of people, sensitive people, get out of journalism. We've gotta get past that kind of macho crap."

Attitudes towards the emotional impacts of journalism have been improving in New Zealand over the last decade. Fairfax New Zealand Group Editor John Crowley says journalists entering hostile environments is a growing area of concern and there is more need than ever for organisations to better train and equip their staff (22 May 2007).

"We haven't all of a sudden turned into a bunch of softies but we're sure you agree there are some issues there and we think we can provide some level of training and resources to help address it going forward" (Crowley 22 May 2007).

TV3 Editor in Chief and Director of News and Current Affairs Mark Jennings says discussions of trauma in the workplace have become more common in recent years. Jennings covered the 1990 Aramoana massacre – after which two staff needed trauma counselling. "When it was brought up I sort of thought - they're sissies and they should just harden up - but I now probably understand a bit more about it" Jennings says (22 May 2007). "If somebody said now they needed counselling you wouldn't think much about it really, you'd just organise it."

This shift in attitude is critical considering the growing number of New Zealand journalists being sent on dangerous assignments overseas and the ongoing impacts of domestic reporting. In order to better protect and support our journalists from the effects of these assignments, this attitude needs to be backed by significant organisational policies and programmes.

### ***Local Efforts***

New Zealand media in many cases lack the resources of large international media organisations to support major company-wide programmes and policies around safety and emotional trauma. However, most New Zealand media organisations are aware of the issues on some level and several are making important commitments to addressing them.

Television New Zealand has had compulsory hostile environment training for several years for all staff members going on international assignments. Business support manager for news and current affairs Eric Searancke says that at all times there is a pool of trained staff ready to go on assignment at a moment's notice (23 May 2007). The company has a relationship with International SOS which provides pre-travel advisories and security reports during assignments. Staff members are always given escorts, bullet proof vests, medical kits, emergency numbers and extraction plans for wherever they go (Searancke 23 May 2007).

TVNZ's hostile environment training is a five-day course for journalists, cameramen, editors and other staff and is run by ex-navy personnel (Searancke 23 May 2007). It covers confidence, survival, leadership and teamwork. Staff must undergo a refresher course before particularly dangerous assignments.

Searancke says that when staff return from assignment, the organisation makes a call on whether counselling is required and if so, it is compulsory (23 May 2007). "It's more a question of raising the awareness within the whole organisation that these things are natural. You're not a weakling or you're not a woose if you admit to these things" (Searancke 23 May 2007).

TV3's policies on dangerous international assignments are that only experienced staff members who have proven themselves through domestic assignments can go (Jennings 22 May 2007). Jennings says he must be satisfied that the chosen staff members are fully aware of the dangers they may face and are prepared to cope with them. There must be level of trust that staff will not endanger themselves and while on assignment staff are in constant contact with management to discuss situations and weigh up the risks of every daily assignment (Jennings 22 May 2007).

Crowley says Fairfax is beginning to acknowledge the issues and is aware that newsroom staff can be exposed to trauma at any time – not just in a war zone (22 May 2007). "I think the tale of that hard-bitten old crusty police reporter who's not affected by anything - that's not reality and I don't think it ever really was."

Crowley says the issues are being handled informally at this stage – mostly by individual newspapers – and more formal insight is needed. "I think where we need to do some work is how we sort of discuss and develop this conversation across middle management, across chief reporters, and new editors" Crowley says (22 May 2007). "I think one of the worst things that can happen is a person comes back, no-body acknowledges that they've even been away or appreciates what sort of situation they've been in."

Awareness of safety issues is growing in the New Zealand media industry and some organisations are making concerted efforts to better protect their staff both physically and emotionally. Compulsory hostile environment training and open discussions on the potential dangers and effects of assignments will go a long way to improving the support New Zealand journalists receive, but there is still much more work that could be done and a great deal that we could learn from international media organisations.

### ***Where does the responsibility lie in keeping journalists safe?***

**"Unlike soldiers or even emergency workers, journalists are civilians whose work demands they put themselves in harm's way. As such they deserve recognition of the legitimacy of their role with support, training – and accountability when things go wrong"**

**- Sambrook & Pinder ([online] 2007: 6)**

Most journalists with long careers in conflict reporting have developed their own personal coping strategies to deal with their traumatic experiences. For some, this means distancing themselves from the reality of what they experience. "You have to kind of make light of what you're doing. Not laugh about the fact of what you're seeing but find if there's something humorous in it 'coz if you

personalise every assignment, if you personalise every dead body, every body you see that's charred, every mass grave – you couldn't function as a journalist," Erik Unger says (17 August 2007).

However, not all journalists manage to channel their experiences in a healthy way and so both colleagues and organisations need to take responsibility for the well-being of their staff and peers and be vigilant in supporting them before, during, and after major assignments as well as in their day-to-day work.

"It has to happen at two levels," John Crowley says (22 May 2007). "The people in the field need to have the confidence and the training to know how to look after themselves. They need to be able to know when they can say no and the extension of that is the people who put them in those situations need to be able to manage them, to recognise when stress is starting to have an impact.

"At the end of the day it will be the responsibility of the middle manager who has a direct responsibility for the welfare of that staff member to know what should and shouldn't be done, and to monitor, and to know that when somebody comes back from a particular assignment there can be some downsides and they should be looked for and handled" (Crowley 22 May 2007).

Jon Stephenson suggests that journalism schools have a responsibility to teach students about the realities of foreign correspondence and PTSD, and that this must then be supported by mentoring in the news organisations they which work (2 July 2007).

"It's pretty bad to send a young journalist out to cover something and not have someone in the newsroom overseeing their work and keeping an eye on them and having systems in place that they can go to someone and say, look I feel really upset about this or I just don't feel I've got the experience to deal with this kind of assignment" Stephenson says (2 July 2007).

News organisations can lose good staff if they fail to provide the necessary support. New Zealand-born former British TV journalist Peter Newport moved news organisations following an incident in which he was arrested and nearly jailed for 20 years whilst covering demonstrations in Shanghai, China in 1989 (25 June 2007). Newport was working for Independent Television News when he spent four months in China during the Tiananmen Square demonstrations. He spent a week working with a fixer in Shanghai recording exclusive footage and getting tourists at the airport to take the tapes out. After covering a train accident in which 80 students were killed while protesting on a railway line he was found by the Chinese government and jailed, although later released. He has never heard of his fixer's fate. (Newport 25 June 2007).

Newport describes the support he received from his employer during the ordeal as "zero" (25 June 2007). After his return home, he received no acknowledgement of what he had been through. When he was offered a job away from the frontline at the BBC, he took it. "I was disgusted by the lack of support I had from my own organisation," Newport says (25 June 2007). "Had the situation been handled better my whole career might have been different. I think it's a good example of how organisations can lose a good resource if they don't look after it."

Many trauma experts say a major law suit may be what it takes for some news organisations to take issues of physical safety and emotional trauma seriously. “Employers who neglect to provide adequate training and logistical support for staff deploying to hostile environments do so at the risk of legal action from their staff or relatives” (INSI [online] 2007: 51).

Bruce Shapiro agrees and says media organisations have the same responsibilities for people being physically injured on the job as being emotionally injured on the job and if organisations continue to ignore the support needed for journalists to safely carry out their jobs, a neglect lawsuit is only a matter of time (17 July 2007).

The increasing dangers faced by media personnel means that both journalists and those who manage them must be vigilant in watching for the signs of traumatic stress and burnout in their colleagues. For managers though, this need to be vigilant extends to their responsibilities as employers in ensuring the safety of their staff – including emotional safety – through appropriate policies and safety programmes.

### ***International Training Programmes***

Most major news organisations around the world have policies in place which require staff members undergo hostile environment safety training before they are sent on potentially dangerous assignments. This researcher visited BBC and European Broadcasting Union (EBU) hostile environment training courses to observe how these organisations prepare their journalists for covering hazardous stories.

#### ***BBC***

Hostile environment training for any BBC staff member going into armed conflict or a major natural disaster was introduced in 1995 following the death of a BBC reporter in Croatia. The BBC’s High Risk Team security advisor Colin Pereira says that the purpose of the training is to give journalists a “flavour” of the kind of environments they may find themselves in (12 September 2007). Courses are usually six days, with a shorter refresher course if it has been more than three years since a staff member went on the training.

*September 13-15 2007, Wokingham, England:* The six-day Hostile Environment Awareness Training (HEAT) course was run by security, logistics and training specialists TOR International and trainers were ex-soldiers who specialised in security. The aims of the course outlined in course material were: to enable journalists to identify risks and avoid problems; to encourage a culture of risk assessment in balancing stories against risks; to provide guidelines for managing difficult or dangerous situations; to provide security awareness and hands-on first aid.

This researcher observed the final three days of the training. The first three days of training included sessions on first aid, navigation, vehicle security, convoys, hostile crowds, pre-deployment preparation and ballistics awareness with time spent at a shooting range. The three days observed were a combination of indoor classroom and outdoor scenario learning on topics such as mines and booby trap awareness, checkpoints and abduction scenarios.

The mines and booby trap awareness session began with a discussion on types of mines, how to identify them and high risk areas. This was supported by diagrams, graphic photos of bodies and injuries, and a video featuring a journalist who was the victim of a mine incident. Participants were then taken outdoors for exercises in searching, identifying and dealing with mines which included real explosions and a vehicle scenario. Checkpoint training had the same format with classroom discussion and videos, followed by an outdoor role play with vehicles and guns.

First aid training covered a wide range of topics potentially faced by media personnel in the field including road accidents, triage, burns, shock, hypothermia, and tropical illnesses, as well as basic self-care advice. Classroom training was hands on and to the point. Theory was accompanied by exercises with dummies and graphic photos and videos. Outdoor exercises placed participants at the scene of accidents complete with actors covered in fake blood and spurting wounds.

The fifth day of the course was a full day of exercises set in a simulated conflict zone in rural areas surrounding the conference centre and including several actors, a burning helicopter, fake bodies and an UN headquarters. Participants set out in the morning in search of mass graves and throughout the day encountered aggressive checkpoints with armed militants in masks, ambushes, a helicopter accident, minefields and boobytraps. They were forced to put their newly learned skills into use in dealing with very realistic incoming fire, large numbers of casualties, incompetent drivers, explosions, angry militia men, interrogation and anything else that was thrown at them.

The final section of the day involved an elaborate mock kidnapping in which participants were ambushed, hooded, taken to an old shed, interrogated and manhandled for an hour before being mock executed.

The final day of training was a summary of the week and included a short discussion on PTSD with a video and information on symptoms and coping strategies.

The course covered all of the major scenarios that media staff may encounter in conflict zones and the trainers were realistic and matter-of-fact about the dangers media personnel face when on these assignments. The format of the course allowed those taking part to first get an overview of the issues and theory before using that knowledge in challenging, realistic scenarios. The full day of exercises was invaluable and highlighted just how critical the need is for staff to be fully physically and mentally prepared for the challenges of reporting in hostile environments. The reality of the scenarios – particularly the abduction – served as a big wake-up call to most participants and left many white-faced and shaken. Participants were given a real insight into how lack of confidence, knowledge, and awareness of their surroundings can be deadly in certain situations.

BBC journalist Sara Shepherd who has been a journalist for 10 years, said the course was really worthwhile: “I’ve got colleagues who’ve been to these places but they don’t tell you about the time they were stopped at an illegal checkpoint and where robbed or had to bribe people and my awareness of situations like that was really kind of fuzzy and really quite naive actually” (15 September 2007).

“I’ve definitely got a much, much better awareness of the type of negative situations you can find yourself in... to the extent that if I know that a country’s known for its illegal checkpoints or mines or something like that I’m probably not going to want to go unless it’s a really compelling story.”

### ***European Broadcasting Union (EBU)***

The EBU has had an international training programme since 1999 and safety training since 2003. Head of the EBU’s international training Nathalie Labourdette says the tailored safety training was introduced because staff were unhappy with the very military and medically-orientated training available in the UK (18 September 2007). That training was done mostly by ex-military people who knew the safety issues, but had not considered why journalists operate in dangerous zones. The EBU course was put together with input from staff, colleagues and experts. About three courses are run per year and so far about 120 staff have been trained (Labourdette 18 September 2007).

*September 17-21, Schloss Hexenagger, Germany:* The intensive four day course was run by hostile environment and travel safety specialists Objective. The trainers were a group of former senior officers, trainers and operators from the British Special Forces, an experienced frontline journalist/cameraman and a first aid expert. The aims of the course as outlined in course materials were to allow journalists and cameramen reporting in hostile environments to: identify their strengths and weaknesses and be able to better assess risks; to provide tools to handle stress, safety and avoid danger; and to exchange experiences.

Like the TOR BBC course, the EBU Objective course was a mix of lectures, practical exercises, and real-life role-plays, but participants were also required to prepare and feed stories under simulated hostile environments. This researcher participated in the full week of training.

Training modules covered pre-deployment checklists, security and travel tips, mine awareness, fixers and drivers, kidnap avoidance, riots, checkpoints, reacting to fire, finding cover, navigation, guns and ballistics awareness. Classroom training included lectures, open discussion, videos, graphic photos, exercises and role plays, which were supported by short outdoor exercises. A discussion on abduction included likely timelines, what to expect and how negotiations work.

As with the BBC course, first aid training was very realistic and practical. It covered basic life support, CPR, gunshot wounds, shock, heart attacks, burns, health and hygiene, tropical illnesses and what to find in a medical kit.

PTSD was brought up by trainers one evening around the dinner table. Trainers led an informal discussion on people who had experienced it, symptoms, self-care and general awareness.

There were two major outdoor exercises in the course which required participants to film and report from hostile situations. The first afternoon exercise involved a village set up in nearby farmland. Participants were split up into media teams and briefed that the village had been bombed recently and had not received food or medical supplies for days. We were to join a politician at the scene for a press conference.

We arrived at the village (after getting through an unofficial checkpoint) to find a burning bombsite and dozens of wailing and angry villagers. After a few moments interviewing locals and filming, the politician and his entourage arrived and things quickly turned volatile. We continued to film, record and report as the villagers began rioting. They soon turned their aggression towards us, and we were forced to make a getaway amongst gunfire, explosions and angry locals swarming our vehicles.

After the exercise, media teams were given a couple of hours to edit and produce a news item on the events for presentation later that evening and everyone produced a high quality news item.

The second major exercise involved media teams heading in convoy through hostile territory towards the “frontline”. Throughout the afternoon we encountered a number of situations including: getting through an aggressive checkpoint in which one of the group had to bribe the guard to get everyone through; a car accident with injured and hysterical victims; getting stuck in a minefield; getting ambushed and running from incoming fire only to be captured, hooded and robbed; and finally making it to the frontline for interviews amongst gunfire and explosions.

Like the BBC course, the EBU Objective programme gave participants a realistic overview of the challenges and threats they will face in reporting from dangerous zones. The exercises highlighted the importance of preparation and awareness and gave participants an invaluable insight into both the situations they may encounter, and their reactions in these situations.

The media focus of the course – having an experienced journalist as a trainer and being required to actually report and produce news from the simulated environments – put the training into context for the participants. This dimension was not just an extra challenge but an essential reminder that the purpose of the training is not just to learn how to survive these situations, but to work successfully in them at the same time.

### ***The International News Safety Institute (INSI)***

Another key organisation involved in training media for hostile environments is INSI. INSI was launched in 2003 in response to increasing recognition of the gap in protecting the safety of journalists. The organisation raises money from international donors to provide free safety training through providers such as AKE and TOR for those journalists most at risk who cannot afford the training themselves. INSI director Rodney Pinder says the courses teach journalists how to look after themselves and be safe (23 September 2007). Courses are adapted to meet different needs in each area. More than 800 journalists from areas such as Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Rwanda and Latin America have been trained through INSI in the last three years (Pinder 23 September 2007). Pinder says INSI is now embarking on a programme to train local trainers to be sustainable safety resources and do training in local languages where needed (23 September 2007). “We have to learn the issues just like we learn to write stories or shoot film or edit film. It should be part of the skill set that any concerned journalist takes on board because we have got to look after each other better,” Pinder says (17 September 2007).

### **Summary**

Compulsory safety training is fundamental to preparing media staff for potentially dangerous assignments. Any training must account for the fact that journalism is a unique profession and media staff cannot behave the same way an average citizen would in extreme situations – we run towards explosions, not away. Because of this, training courses for media staff must educate participants on both how to survive, and how to work successfully in hostile environments. The EBU's Objective course is an excellent example of how this goal can be achieved.

It is important that training extends beyond the classroom to put participants in realistic scenarios. Not only do role plays and exercises give trainees the chance to practise the theory behind hostile environment safety, but they allow participants to gain insight into their own real reactions to intense, dangerous situations. It is far better that a journalist finds out whether they can handle an aggressive checkpoint in a role play than discover they can't in a real one. It is also important to adapt training to address the changing threats that journalists face. Therefore abduction is an increasingly popular and increasingly necessary topic.

### ***In-House Efforts***

To be successful, policies on hostile environment training must be supported by in-house programmes to raise awareness of trauma and support staff working in dangerous environments. These programmes must apply to both international and domestic assignments.

#### **BBC**

In recent years, several prominent BBC journalists including Fergal Keane and Jeremy Bowen have spoken out about their experiences with PTSD and subsequently awareness of emotional trauma has increased within the organisation. BBC managing editor of news gathering Sarah Ward-Lilley says trauma awareness is very high on the company's agenda and although traditionally seen as a foreign news issue, there is now a push to get people to recognise its effect on people in all sorts of different roles (12 September 2007). Ward-Lilley says the BBC is very aware that its younger journalists get frequent exposure to trauma at a point when they are inexperienced (12 September 2007).

The Dart Centre's Mark Brayne pioneered the introduction of routine trauma training and support at the BBC. In 2003, before the Iraq War, Brayne ran a small programme at the BBC including general briefings on emotional trauma and specific training based on the British Marine's peer-run trauma risk management (TRiM) programme (Brayne 12 September 2007). A proper training course was launched in 2005 for managers, editors and bureau chiefs. The one-day basic introduction, run by Brayne, includes what trauma is, why it is relevant to journalism, discussions of experiences and role plays. About 170 BBC staff have been trained so far (Brayne 12 September 2007).

The BBC's TRiM programme monitors and encourages staff returning from assignments to recognise and seek help before their psychological condition deteriorates, rather than giving them compulsory "psychological debriefings" (Rees [online] 2007). About three days after a traumatic experience,

TRiM practitioners talk to the affected group to gauge how they are coping through “structured conversations” that subtly encourage people to volunteer information (Rees [online] 2007). If staff are still having difficulty after 28 days, they are encouraged to talk to a professional.

Ward-Lilley says TRiM training is ongoing at the BBC and several staff have undergone advanced training to learn about assessment and management of trauma (12 September 2007). Managers who run a team or who are responsible for deployment also have trauma awareness training.

### ***EBU***

To compliment its safety training courses, the EBU also has a two-day safety roadshow which travels around the company’s newsrooms. Labourdette says the roadshows were developed after staff returning from training programmes started complaining that their managers had no idea about the issues (18 September 2007). The roadshows train management, human resources and staff handling assignments on the main safety issues, PTSD and crisis management. Labourdette says the roadshows help build a consistent level of safety awareness across the whole organisation and ensure those who have been HEST trained get the right support once they return to the newsroom (18 September 2007).

### ***Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)***

The ABC launched a major trauma awareness programme in May 2007 with the help of the Dart Centre Australia. ABC staff development manager Heather Forbes says the programme was initiated by ABC International News, which felt the organisation should do more to support foreign correspondents regularly reporting on traumatic events ([email] 2007). The ABC then became aware of the need to support domestic staff including camera crews and tape editors covering events such as road crashes, bush fires and cyclones (Forbes [email] 2007).

The programme has a first-year budget of AU\$100,000 and a three-tiered delivery approach:

- Peer Support Training (1 day): Peer support training is delivered by the Dart Centre and a senior ABC News manager. It enables ABC to have a pool of support people in each state.
- Staff Awareness (1 hour)
- Manager Awareness (2 hours): Manager and staff awareness sessions focus on informing staff of available trauma resources, signs to watch out for etc.

The strategy of the programme is to:

- Develop skills and resources within the ABC to complement its external counselling services
- Make trauma awareness a practical, routine and accepted part of the workplace
- Tailor trauma support to fit the specific needs of the ABC
- Focus on peer support rather than a solely manager-led system

More than 380 staff and managers so far have attended sessions and 15 peer support people have been trained, as well as five former foreign correspondents to specifically provide support for staff in overseas bureaux (Forbes [email] 2007).

### **Reuters**

Training Director Martin Langfield says Reuters began routinely sending journalists on hostile environment courses in the mid 1990s following a growing awareness of the increasing dangers journalists were facing in the field and the loss of several colleagues in violent situations ([email] 2007). Since 1997 more than 1800 staff have undergone hostile environment training. Reuters' staff are not sent on dangerous assignments unless they have undergone the training, but this in itself does not entitle a journalists to cover a dangerous story – other factors are also considered. “The key policy simply states that no story is worth a journalist's life,” Langfield says ([email] 2007). In some cases, safety advisors will travel on assignment with reporters and all staff have the discretion not to enter a location or situation if they believe it is too dangerous.

Issues of post-traumatic stress have been dealt with on a case-by-case basis for decades, but more formal programmes have been put in place at Reuters in the last five years including trauma training courses for managers and the internal distribution of information about trauma and PTSD to staff through websites and leaflets (Langfield [email] 2007). For journalists who cover emotionally traumatic stories, Reuters has a dedicated global support service and trauma counselling available through employee assistance provider CiC. Langfield says Reuters' current and future work will focus on raising awareness and reducing the perceived stigma around trauma issues ([email] 2007). Reuters is working with CiC to develop a PTSD and stress e-learning and resource website.

CiC provides 24-hour global trauma support for international companies including emotional support, counselling and information services. CiC chief executive Kate Nowlan says the global support programme ensures journalists can get in contact with good clinicians whilst working in hostile environments and in their home town if they need to talk to someone outside of their media organisation (11 September 2007). The programme is preventative by trying to encourage people to use the service before PTSD develops and it includes a 24-hour confidential support phone line in any language (Nowlan 11 September 2007). Nowlan says journalism can be very lonely and just having someone to talk to about practical stuff as well as emotional stuff can be a huge help (11 September 2007).

### **The Guardian**

Increasing awareness of PTSD and issues of emotional trauma has been very “organic” at the Guardian newspaper and managing editor Chris Elliot says that works best (10 September 2007): “If I hired someone with a clipboard to go round and tell our 20-year foreign correspondents what to do it would be the worst possible thing. What you try to get people to do is to come to an appreciation of this themselves, so they're willing partners in it.”

The kidnapping of Guardian correspondent Rory Carroll in Baghdad in 2005 had an extraordinary effect on the organisation, Elliot says (10 September 2007). After the kidnapping, the organisation started bringing together its foreign correspondents once a year to spend an evening talking about their experiences and learning from each other. “These are terribly important – their ability to give each other confidence and encouragement and support, old fashioned support,” (Elliot 10 September 2007). The Guardian does not hold formal training on PTSD but all managers and foreign

editors are aware of the issues and people can go to sessions if they feel they might need it. Staff are monitored when they return from difficult assignments and organisations such as the Dart Centre are used for counselling where needed (Elliot 10 September 2007).

### ***The Dart Centre***

The Dart Centre's work includes the Ochberg Fellowship programme, through which mid-career journalists attend a week-long training on trauma science, approaches to therapy and the significance for journalism which they then take back to their newsrooms (Shapiro 17 July 2007). Shapiro calls the programme "a grass roots attempt to change the culture of the newsroom". So far 60 fellows have been trained from the US, Europe and Australia and Shapiro says that in some cases these fellows have changed the whole culture of their newsroom (17 July 2007).

The fellows have also been instrumental in providing support when major events hit. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the Florida Coast was hit by three smaller hurricanes and two fellows in the area got together with Shapiro to hold a day-long seminar for 50 journalists who had been covering the hurricanes for weeks which addressed how to cover victims and deal with the stress of the events (Shapiro 17 July 2007).

As awareness of the physical and emotional effects of the journalism profession on its participants increases around the world, many major media organisations are setting the bar for policies to protect and support their staff from these effects. New Zealand media, although already informally taking note of the issues, could learn from these approaches and look to implement similar policies and programmes to minimise the traumatic effects of journalism on our staff.

### ***In the Journalism Schools***

There is general agreement in the industry that some kind of education on safety and trauma should be included in journalism programmes to give students an insight into the realities of the profession. How in-depth this training should be is debatable.

Trauma education is mostly absent from journalism schools in New Zealand. In 2000, former NZJTO head Jim Tucker introduced "Death Week" to New Plymouth's Western Institute of Technology journalism school. The week includes visits to funeral homes, the morgue, the crematorium and sessions with police, trauma counsellors, the coroner and people who have been involved in prominent media cases (Tucker 21 May 2007). Tucker says surveys of former students showed that while they still felt uncomfortable about covering tragedy, they felt more prepared for what they were going to face. However, these students must be supported by continued training once they reach the newsroom, because the best way young journalists learn is from experienced reporters. "All employers assume that the journalism schools turn out fully-formed and perfect journalists when all they do really is prepare you to be able to begin," (Tucker 21 May 2007).

In the US the difficulty is that there are no standardised journalism programmes and not all journalists study the profession formally before entering the workforce. The Dart Centre's Roger Simpson, who is head of the Journalism and Trauma Program at the University of Washington in

Seattle, started teaching about PTSD in 1994 when the industry did not want to recognise the issues (18 July 2007). Simpson says that since then there have been radical changes and about 60 journalism professors in the US are now actively teaching about journalism and trauma (18 July 2007). Simpson's two-day programme, which is part of a compulsory course, involves lectures, discussions and role-plays with actors. Students are first taught about the issues of PTSD, how it affects them and what may happen in their jobs, and then they are required to interview victims and witnesses in an unfolding "disaster" scenario. Issues of PTSD and trauma are also dealt with in other courses throughout the programme (Simpson 18 July 2007).

Psychologist Monika Gutkowska (2005) says changes in media culture need to start in the academic curriculum and end in the media organisations. "Without proper awareness and preparation, journalists might believe that the emotional reactions they experience reflect their lack of competency as journalists - further putting in jeopardy their emotional and physical health" (Gutkowska 2005). If young journalists are aware of the issues of emotional trauma and journalism, they can have an impact on the culture of the newsrooms they go to work in, but it is important that they have ongoing training and support once on the job (Gutkowska 18 August 2007).

Gutkowska has designed a four-day seminar for educating journalism students on how to recognise the effects of covering distressing events and improve their coping strategies. The seminar aims to give students a realistic perspective on their chosen profession and better prepare them for entering the workplace (Gutkowska 18 August 2007). This is done through exercises, photographs, visuals, open discussion, stories from other journalists and role plays.

A key focus of the training is to teach students how to interact with and interview survivors and understand the signs of trauma. They examine how witnessing and participating in traumatic events can affect them in terms of chronic stress, traumatic stress, PTSD and vicarious traumatisation as well as prevention strategies, coping strategies and self-care (Gutkowska 2005).

It is essential that new journalists are trained in all aspects of the profession they have chosen – including the potential impacts it could have on their physical and mental wellbeing. As well as being equipped with newsgathering, writing and interviewing skills, they also need to know how to handle the intense and challenging situations that are part of everyday journalism. How detailed this training is, is currently up to the journalism schools themselves, but in order to be successful it must be followed by support in the organisations the students go to work in.

### ***Everyday Support***

**"Create a culture in your organisation where safety is as much a part of an assignment as choosing the right reporter or camera or lens"**

**– Chris Cramer, former CNN International managing director (2002 cited in INSI [online] 2007:50)**

A unique aspect of the media profession is that staff members must to be ready for anything, anytime, anywhere. Major news stories – both locally and internationally – happen without warning and journalists can find themselves quite suddenly in unexpected and potentially traumatic

situations. Media organisations need to create a culture of ongoing support and preparedness for their staff on both the major assignments and a day-to-day basis so that no-one is caught unprepared when news happens. A number of organisations around the world are working hard to achieve this through peer support, ongoing training and policies around how trauma is dealt with in the newsroom.

### ***Reshaping the Culture of the Newsroom***

Training and education on safety and trauma in journalism will not have an impact on the condition of our journalists unless the entire culture of our newsrooms shifts. The media industry has always favoured the image of the hard-nosed, objective reporter who is unaffected by their work. This need to be tough means that those who are suffering do not seek help and those who work with them do not recognise or acknowledge they are struggling.

“Most journalists seem to be more at ease dealing with other people’s difficulties than their own and they place such a high value on resilience and self-sufficiency that being overcome by an adverse reaction to traumatic stress is often seen as a sign of weakness” (Rees [online] 2007).

The majority of media organisations already offer counselling services for their staff, but research shows that journalists are reluctant to use these services and it is journalists in that situation who are most likely to start self-medicating with alcohol to reduce PTSD symptoms (Rees [online] 2007).

“For those in the newsgathering business, seeking professional help can be perilous. Some journalists who have covered gruesome stories say they fear that admitting to any mental distress may be viewed as weakness. It may even spark editors to pull them off important projects or move them to “softer” assignments” (Ricchiardi [online] 1999).

A 2005 BBC study of staff attitudes to trauma-related problems showed 38% thought that an admission would result in them being given less responsibility, and 41% thought that their peers would cease to trust them in stressful situations (Rees [online] 2007).

If media organisations want to better protect their journalists at work, this stigma of trauma-related problems must be broken down. Psychologist Monika Gutkowska says that one of the key parts of addressing journalism and traumatisation is “understanding that this is a normal reaction to an abnormal event” (18 August 2007).

Dart Centre founding director Roger Simpson says it is difficult to prevent the effects of engaging in journalism because of the nature of the job but the effects will be minimised if people have the chance to talk about these effects and understand them (18 July 2007). Training needs to give staff and managers the “vocabulary” to talk about trauma and when staff return from assignment they need to be tracked over an extended period of time so that if problems emerge, support can be given (Simpson 18 July 2007).

Organisations such as the BBC, The Guardian and CNN are trying to achieve this by encouraging open communication about trauma between editors and staff in the newsroom.

Mark Brayne says media culture must recognise that trauma is part of the job and in order for the culture to change, there must be “buy in right from the top” (12 September 2007). Considering issues of trauma before, during and after major assignments should be part of normal management procedure (Brayne 17 September 2007).

Bruce Shapiro agrees and says senior management must provide leadership in acknowledging and destigmatising trauma. Middle management needs to make the effort to educate editors and producers in trauma to help identify when people are doing well or doing badly (Shapiro 17 July 2007).

### ***Peer support***

Peer support and awareness of the effects of journalism amongst journalists themselves goes a long way to improving both attitudes to trauma and the day-to-day support media staff receive within the industry.

“The best duty-of-care laws and standards and rules in the world aren’t going to matter if we don’t start with the presumption that we are a community of journalists who face a number of distinct threats to the work that we do” Shapiro says (17 July 2007). “The culture change has to begin with us as journalists looking after ourselves, looking out for each other, and that means becoming knowledgeable and informed.”

Kiwi journalist Jon Stephenson says institutional and peer support is key to coping with traumatic experiences, particularly if you’ve been working alone (2 July 2007). “When I’ve been on my own sometimes I could just disappear and no-one would be any the wiser and that’s a big stress – that you’re responsible for everything,” Stephenson says (2 July 2007). “You hope that you’ll see the end of the day but you just don’t know and when you’re on your own that’s extremely stressful. Having a beer and just talking about things is very important. It’s probably the cheapest and most effective tool for avoiding post traumatic stress.”

### ***Ongoing training***

Journalists need to receive organisation-wide support in their work, not just from each other. Newsrooms should provide ongoing training at all levels of their organisations – particularly those directly involved in managing journalists and assignments.

The ABC’s three-tiered trauma awareness programme and the EBU’s safety roadshows are excellent examples of how media organisations can create company-wide awareness of safety and trauma issues.

For New Zealand media who may not have the resources for major training programmes, simple workshops and open discussions in the newsroom every few months can go a long way in raising awareness and ensuring staff are watching out for each other and that they feel comfortable in raising any concerns. It is essential that information on signs to watch for, self-care strategies and help services are readily available to all staff.

### **Major assignments**

Because news is unpredictable, media organisations must have firm procedures in place so that when major news events do happen, they are fully prepared to address issues of safety and trauma before, during and after sending staff to cover these stories. In 2005, Mark Brayne and Neil Greenberg made recommendations to the BBC on how media organisations can provide complete support for their staff for potentially dangerous or traumatising assignments. Although not totally implemented at the BBC yet, they can provide a valuable framework for organisations to work through:

*Before assignment:* When a major story breaks, pre-deployment briefings need to be held to prepare those involved for the reality of what they may face. All managers and employees should be familiar with formal policies around trauma support and those going on assignment must have already received hostile environment training. Organisational support should be organised for loved ones during deployment (Brayne & Greenberg 2005).

*During assignment:* While staff are on assignment there needs to be ongoing communication with the desk back at home. Staff need to receive both peer and immediate managerial support and their reported news needs to be handled sensitively (Brayne & Greenberg 2005).

*After assignment:* Research published in July 2007 found journalists should not receive mandatory counselling or debriefing after violent or traumatic events (Dart Centre [online] 2007 (ii)). "People cope with stress in differing ways and no formal intervention should be mandated for everyone" (Bisson & Everly cited in Dart Centre [online] 2007 (ii)). Instead, those affected should be provided with empathic, practical and pragmatic psychological support with information about possible reactions, what they can do to help themselves and how they can access support from family and community (Bisson & Everly cited in Dart Centre [online] 2007 (ii)).

Brayne and Greenberg say it is essential that those involved in traumatic assignments receive thanks and appreciation from the organisation (2005). Rather than compulsory counselling, Brayne suggests "watchful waiting" – checking up with individuals in the weeks and months after they have been through trauma to see how they are doing, help them to understand the impacts of their experiences, keep an eye out for symptoms of traumatic stress and provide further help if needed (2007: 17).

Journalists need to be supported in all aspects of their job and it is essential that media companies make an organisation-wide commitment to providing this support. Key to this is shifting the culture of newsroom to accept trauma as a fundamental part of journalism, and then working to address this fact through peer support, ongoing training and thorough policies on how potentially harmful assignments are dealt with.

## ***The Benefits***

**“People can be destroyed emotionally and it’s bad for the business, it’s bad for the journalism, it’s bad for the people we cover and it’s just lose, lose, lose.”**

**– Mark Brayne (12 September 2007).**

Once the stigma and myths around the effects of exposure to trauma are broken down, it becomes clear that better awareness and understanding of trauma leads to better journalism – for the journalist, the news organisation and the public. Rather than weakening our staff by opening up emotional awareness we can strengthen their journalism and make them more resilient.

Massey University journalism lecturer James Hollings, who has researched the effects of reporting on the Boxing Day Tsunami, says improving support around covering traumatic events will help journalists stay in the profession longer, avoid burn-out and build stronger relationships with their communities (22 May 2007).

“There’s all sorts of reasons why a little bit of money spent and a little bit of care taken could pay off hugely,” Hollings says (22 May 2007). “If journalists have their own feelings valued then they’re going to be more sensitive. And being more sensitive isn’t being weak or wet, it just means they’ve got a broader range of emotions they can draw on when they’re covering stories and that’s only gonna be good for the reporting. It means they’re going to connect with the community much better and not treat potential readers and interviewees like fodder.”

Peter Newport observes that it is not just the journalist that gets damaged by a traumatised journalist, but the audience as well (25 June 2007): “If you’re too insensitive you can file a report that the viewing audience might find offensive because you didn’t connect enough,” Newport says (25 June 2007). “It’s not enough just to be confident and let it wash over you - you actually should have a degree of sensitivity because you’re reporting for people of all ages.”

Mark Brayne says “emotional intelligence” is key to good journalism. “It’s about being adults and about being responsible and the journalism that will come out of this organically, osmotically, will be better journalism,” says Brayne (12 September 2007). “You can’t collapse in the middle of an emotional story... but it’s about resilience and being tough and strong and all the good things about journalism alongside a recognition that we all belong to the human race and we’ll be better journalists if we acknowledge our vulnerability and work with it.”

Allowing journalists and media organisations to acknowledge the emotional impacts of their work will not be detrimental to the profession or the work they produce. On the contrary, media audiences will benefit from more sensitive and intelligent journalism and our staff will receive the support they need to produce quality news and avoid burnout or psychological harm.

## ***Conclusions and Recommendations***

As the physical and psychological challenges facing journalists today continue to increase, awareness of safety and traumatic stress must become a fundamental part of every newsroom and assignment. The media industry must acknowledge that journalists can be deeply affected by the nature of their work through various forms of traumatic stress and make a serious commitment to addressing these risks.

In New Zealand, most media organisations address safety and traumatic stress on a case-by-case basis. While the majority of senior personnel in the industry do have some awareness of the issues, current approaches to the dangers our journalists face are reactive, rather than proactive or preventative. The New Zealand media industry can learn from the experiences and programmes of international media and make significant policy and practice changes to minimise the impacts of trauma on Kiwi journalists. This will require both financial investment and organisational commitment. This researcher recommends the following strategies be implemented to better equip our media staff for the challenges of covering trauma:

- Compulsory hostile environment training for any staff member going on, or who wishes to be considered for, a potentially dangerous assignment. Create a pool of staff ready and fully-prepared to successfully and safely operate in war and disasters zones when these stories break.
  - Safety training programmes must be tailored to meet the unique needs of media workers and educate participants not only on what to expect in hostile environments but also on how to do their job successfully and safely in them. Training must include PTSD education. Course material must adapt to meet changes in the types of threats faced in field.
  - Refresher courses must be provided every few years.
- Hostile environment training programmes must be buttressed by organisation-wide policies on dealing with trauma so that all levels of staff and management can both receive and provide the necessary support. Policies and programmes around safety and trauma must extend to the day-to-day challenges of journalism, not just the major international assignments.
  - Protocols must be put in place to address how potentially traumatic assignments are handled before, during and afterwards for all staff members involved or potentially affected.
- Create a culture of organisation-wide awareness and support wherein trauma becomes part of the language of the newsroom through:
  - Open discussion and newsroom education on the effects of trauma, how to recognise it and how to address it. Staff should have information on trauma readily available to them.

- Peer support and managerial trauma training so that staff at all levels have the knowledge to assess and monitor colleagues who may be affected by their work.
  - Mentoring and monitoring of junior journalists by more experienced staff members.
- Basic trauma and safety awareness education should be introduced into journalism training courses.

By acknowledging and addressing the physical and psychological threats inherent in covering traumatic events, New Zealand media organisations, their staff, and the audiences they work for will benefit from stronger and more effective journalists and journalism.

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