



International Center
for Journalists
Advancing Quality Journalism Worldwide

Disaster and Crisis Coverage

By Deborah Potter and Sherry Ricciardi





Authors' note

We divided the Disaster Guide into two sections. Section I provides guidelines for delivering news in a professional manner and maintaining personal safety. Crises often render severe mental and emotional stresses on victims and survivors, the individuals who are often vital sources. Thus, Section II addresses trauma and offers suggestions helping journalists work with grieving victims and survivors in an ethical, sensitive, and effective manner. This section defines traumatic stress and offers tips to media professionals for their own self-care.



About the Authors

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About the International Center for Journalists

The International Center for Journalists, a non-profit, professional organization, promotes quality journalism worldwide in the belief that independent, vigorous media are crucial in improving the human condition.

Since 1984, the International Center for Journalists has worked directly with more than 55,000 journalists from 176 countries. Aiming to raise the standards of journalism, ICFJ offers hands-on training, workshops, seminars, fellowships and international exchanges to reporters and media managers around the globe.

ICFJ has a variety of training materials for journalists, from those who are new to the profession to veterans who want to expand or refresh their skills. Our collection of digital training manuals ranges from basic skills like reporting, writing and cultivating sources to new-media training, such as our guide for citizen journalists. Find them all at www.icfj.org/publications.

This manual is made possible thanks to generous support from The McCormick Foundation

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Introduction

A disaster, by one definition, is “a critical event that alters the regular order of things.” For journalists, a disaster is the kind of breaking news story that merits extensive coverage. Most disasters can’t be accurately predicted but they can be anticipated. By planning ahead, news organizations and individual journalists can provide their communities with better, more thorough coverage.

Veteran journalist and consultant Michael Marcotte says a news organization plays four key roles during a crisis. It’s a vital information resource, telling what is happening where, who is affected, how things are changing, and why. It’s a communication lifeline, saving lives by relaying critical information to and from affected parties. It’s an early warning beacon, transmitting timely, reliable information that prevents harm. And it’s a community forum, giving citizens a way to come together, share concerns and support one another during difficult times.

Recognizing the news organization's responsibilities in all of these areas can help journalists and managers prepare to meet them head on.

The International Center for Journalists has provided journalists with intensive training on how to prepare for disasters. One Venezuelan participant in a 2008 workshop said it made all the difference for his newsroom during severe flooding in Caracas the following year. While the city was paralyzed, his newspaper had a plan for dealing with the lack of power and transportation, and had anticipated equipment needs, staffing issues and so forth.

This online guidebook, written for ICFJ by Deborah Potter of NewsLab (<http://newslab.org>) and Sherry Ricciardi on behalf of the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma (<http://dartcenter.org>) is designed to help journalists everywhere prepare for future disaster coverage. It may not be possible to project exactly what might happen, much less when or where, but there is no doubt that every newsroom will have to cover a crisis of some description. Taking time in advance to prepare for the inevitable will be well worth the investment.

The guidebook was produced thanks to the McCormick Foundation and as a result of a week-long training program for Latin American and U.S. Hispanic journalists.



Newsroom preparation

Every newsroom should have a disaster plan and every staffer should have a copy. While each news organization should develop its own plan, managers whose newsrooms have covered major disasters suggest that all plans should include these elements:

- ◆ Contact information for all staff, including a map of home addresses. If a disaster strikes, the people who are closest can be called first and sent to the scene.
- ◆ A specific plan for when and how to notify staff and in what order. Be sure the plan includes personnel outside the newsroom, including advertising, circulation, production and top executives. Some plans give everyone an assignment and a place to report in the event of a disaster.

Also, be sure everyone knows what happens to days off, vacations, and so on, if the plan is implemented.

- ◆ A “start-up guide” that anyone in the newsroom can follow to launch immediate coverage.
- ◆ Responsibilities and specific assignments for newsroom personnel. Which reporters are most likely to be dispatched to the scene? Who will stay in the office for rewrite and reporting by phone? The plan should also assign duties to people from outside the newsroom to support the news effort, such as answering phones or providing food.
- ◆ A blank schedule to assign personnel to shifts (8 or 12 hours) for longer-term coverage.
- ◆ Contact information for emergency response officials, major public institutions and independent experts on disaster-related topics.
- ◆ Contact information for support personnel (freelancers, other news organizations outside the disaster area) who might be needed to supplement the newsroom’s staff.
- ◆ Contacts for renting equipment on short notice (generators, communications, transportation etc.)
- ◆ Background information on disasters the newsroom might have to cover. The Belgium-based Centre for Research on the Epidemiologies of Disasters (<http://www.cred.be/>) maintains a comprehensive, searchable database of emergency events that can help journalists evaluate the likelihood of specific types of disasters in their country or region (<http://www.emdat.be/Database/terms.html>).

Examples of disaster situations

- ◆ Natural disaster (hurricane, flood, tornado, blizzard, wildfire, earthquake, volcano)
- ◆ Accidents (plane crash, train derailment, bus crash, explosion, fire, building collapse)
- ◆ Hazardous material (chemical leak or spill, nuclear power plant accident)
- ◆ Terrorism (biological, chemical, nuclear, conventional explosive)
- ◆ Public safety (hostage taking, sniper attack, riot, disease pandemic)



How to develop a disaster plan

If the newsroom doesn't already have a disaster plan, here is a step-by-step guide to creating one. Even if a plan exists, this how-to guide may suggest the need to revise it.

Put a group to work

The group should include people from across the news organization, not just from the newsroom but also from production/engineering and facilities. The goal is to develop a comprehensive plan for the entire news organization. The Newspaper Association Managers has an online disaster checklist for newspapers that can serve as a useful guide. (<http://www.nammanagers.com/NAMERS%20Sharing%20Information/Disaster%20Checklist/Disaster%20Checklist.pdf>)

Organize contact information

Make sure the staff list is complete and current, both on computer and hard-copy. The list should note exactly where people live (a map can be helpful). Also include other critical information (has a 4-wheel-drive vehicle, is trained in first aid, is an amateur radio operator, etc.) Collect contact information for emergency response officials, major public institutions (including schools) and independent experts on disaster-related topics. Be sure to include both land lines and cell phones. Consider creating a laminated card with key names and numbers for all staff members to keep with them at all times. This blank list may provide a useful template: <http://www.rtnda.org/media/pdfs/education/fellowships/rias/crisis.pdf>.

Build relationships

Connect with sources who can provide essential information during a disaster: emergency preparedness and law enforcement officials, military leaders, hospital workers, subject experts and relief organizations. (For a searchable list of international relief groups, see: <http://www.alertnet.org/thepeople/whowhatwhere.htm>.) Showing interest now, well in advance of any incident, will build relationships that can pay off when disaster strikes. Officials are more likely to grant access to disaster areas and return phone calls if they already know the journalists they are dealing with.

Map the community

Get up-to-date local maps to keep in the newsroom. In a crisis, having a few extra pocket maps can save a lot of time and effort. Don't depend exclusively on GPS technology to help staffers get around; it could fail in a major emergency. Know the exact locations of potential terrorist targets, including government and military buildings and places where large groups gather. Map all hospitals and emergency clinics. Obtain maps and schematics of government buildings, transportation hubs, and any locations where hazardous materials are used.

Survey likely scenarios

Look back at disasters that have happened in the past to see what sort of damage was caused and how authorities and the newsroom responded. Collect background information and links to online databases and make it easily accessible to everyone in the newsroom. Ask experts to help assess the likelihood of future disasters. [link to "Preview of Destruction"] Meet with local disaster response officials to learn more about their plans for dealing with emergencies. If possible, participate in mock exercises.

Educate the staff

Consider sending reporters and editors to seminars to help them understand potential threats and scenarios, or bring experts into the newsroom to conduct lunch-time discussions on topics such as:

- ◆ how a nuclear power plant works
- ◆ why a particular area is subject to flooding
- ◆ mining operations
- ◆ manufacturing or chemical plant operations
- ◆ prisons
- ◆ municipal agencies responsible for infrastructure, etc.

Consider providing safety training to the staff who might be sent to cover a disaster. The BBC, for example, has mandatory “hostile environment training” for journalists going into dangerous areas. The Committee to Protect Journalists has a free, useful guide to reporting on dangerous situations. (<http://cpj.org/reports/2003/02/journalist-safety-guide.php>)

Train at least some staffers in first aid, CPR and AED (use of a portable defibrillator). The Reuters Foundation has a First Aid Handbook online (<http://www.newssafety.org/images/stories/pdf/safetyresource/guides/firstaidhandbook.pdf>).

Review routines

How much cash is kept on hand? If power fails, bank cash machines will not work and credit cards will not be accepted. When and where are news vehicles refueled? If the newsroom depends on just one gas station, what happens if it's closed down? When are batteries put on charge? When are computer files backed up –not just the main server but reporters' laptops? Instill the habit of refueling, charging, and backing up at the end of every shift. Develop alternatives to allow publishing or broadcasting to continue in case a disaster affects the newsroom directly.

Pre-produce

Save time by pre-producing graphic or design elements for coverage of the most likely local disasters like weather emergencies or plane crashes. Create camera-ready maps for locations like airport runways, train and bus stations, and major office buildings. For television, build a graphic for each reporter, including name and photo, to use during phoned-in live reports. Anticipate the kind of information that people will need after a disaster and create mock-up Web pages in advance. Consider producing a survival guide in advance for predictable, seasonal disasters like hurricanes or flooding.

Prepare for the long term

During a disaster, employees may spend long hours at the news organization, and some family members may come with them. Stock up on essential supplies: Water, food, cots, blankets, flashlights, batteries, first aid kits and so on. Decide who will check the inventory and how frequently. If possible, make arrangements with nearby hotels to accommodate staffers as needed.

Establish operating procedures

Hold an internal, top-level meeting to determine the process for changing your standard operating procedure in the event of a disaster so it can be done quickly. Most importantly, decide who has the authority to make these changes.

For newspapers

How to increase the size of the newspaper, reweb the press during the printing cycle, move advertising, replate?

For television and radio stations

When to take air, what to do with commercials, when to rejoin the network or resume regular programming?

For online

Whether to switch to a low-bandwidth format to handle increased Web traffic, what to do with advertising, how to add photos and video quickly?

Practice the plan

Once the plan is in place, distribute it to everyone in the organization, not just managers and not just newsroom personnel. Put in on the computer system but also create a paper version and keep multiple copies on hand. Make sure new staffers are briefed on the plan. Hold a disaster practice drill at least every six months. Revise the plan as needed. And be sure to review it after the plan has been used in a real news coverage situation.



Preview of destruction

10 worst Latin American disasters to come

In the past several decades, the number of disasters reported in Latin America and the Caribbean has grown substantially. Professor Juan Pablo Sarmiento of Florida International University says the increase is partly due to more widespread awareness of these incidents. But he also points to conditions that increase the risk of disasters and the vulnerability of people and property in the region. Among them: environmental degradation, lack of land use management, and population growth in proximity to potential hazards.

Sarmiento is part of a team funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development that is studying physical and social vulnerabilities in disaster-prone cities in Latin America, including cities in Chile, Colombia, Argentina, the

Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and El Salvador. The team will assess risks and provide assistance to fix problems before a disaster strikes. (<http://news.fiu.edu/?p=174>)

What are the most likely disasters facing Latin America in the near future? Here is Sarmiento's top 10 list:

Violence

The World Bank calls Latin America and the Caribbean the most violent region in the world. Sarmiento estimates that violence costs 185,000 lives in the region every year. "Looking at case studies such as Colombia," he says, "we can observe that in one year there were 38,070 deaths, which is twice the number of deaths from the [Nevado del Ruiz] volcano eruption in 1985." Violence associated with drug trafficking and street crime is on the increase in many countries, and, as the Committee to Protect Journalists reports, journalists have been targeted after reporting on violence and corruption. (<http://cpj.org/reports/2009/03/getting-away-with-murder-2009.php>)

Accidents

Transportation accidents are common in the region, but other hazards also exist.

Among them: industrial accidents, such as chemical leaks, explosions, mine collapses and fire. Argentina, Brazil and Mexico have aging nuclear power plants that could be vulnerable to accidents, as well.

Landslides

Mudslides, dry landslides and avalanches can affect tens of thousands of people and cause huge economic losses. In the past 20 years, there have been dozens of incidents, most of them in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

Volcanoes

Volcanic activity in the region is high, and the impact of an eruption can be devastating because so many people have settled on fertile volcanic land, Sarmiento says. Science Daily reports that 200 to 300 volcanoes in the "Andean Arc" region of Chile, Peru, Ecuador and Columbia are considered active. (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/05/080507105654.htm>) The 2008 eruption of Chile's Chaitén volcano forced the mass relocation of more than 5,000 people.

Floods and drought

These tend to be cyclical and short-term in Central America, especially prevalent in October and November, says Sarmiento. Drought tends to affect the Pacific side and flooding the Caribbean side. Mexico, Bolivia and Brazil are also

vulnerable to longer-term droughts, as is the United States.

Climate change effects

Extreme drought and flooding can be a consequence of “El Niño” and “La Niña,” natural weather patterns that may be intensified by climate change. Economic impact can be severe. In 1997-1998, Peru’s fishery exports dropped by 76 percent, according to the United National Environment Program.

The Inter-American Development Bank and the U.S. National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) have launched a new program to help the region prepare for the impact of climate change. “Millions of people in Latin America and the Caribbean are threatened by natural disasters that may worsen with climate change, including an increase in severe storms, reduced water from mountain glaciers, and the spread of diseases,” says NCAR project manager Lawrence Buja. (<http://www.sciencecentric.com/news/article.php?q=09062657-ncar-teams-with-idb-help-latin-america-prepare-climate-change>)

Tsunamis

Tidal waves may be rare in the region but Sarmiento says that does not mean there is no tsunami risk. He cites the 1960 case of Valdivia in Chile, where seismic activity touched off a tsunami that killed 4,000 people.

Tropical storms and hurricanes

Central America and the southern United States are particularly vulnerable to hurricanes. “Although building codes and infrastructure materials are now more resistant,” Sarmiento says, “we still have [a larger] exposed population.”

Seismic events

Earthquakes are likely in the region and they could be more devastating because urbanization has placed so much at risk. A major earthquake near Bogotá, for example, would affect a large population, the central government and the country’s economy.

Disease outbreaks

Heavily populated urban areas are particularly vulnerable to diseases like pandemic influenza, such as the 2009 outbreak of H1N1, the so-called “swine flu,” in Mexico. At the same time, an outbreak of dengue fever infected 50,000 people in Bolivia and more than 8,000 in Argentina. Sarmiento points to bird flu as a possibility that could have major repercussions, in a region where 40% of the animal protein consumed comes from poultry. The World Health Organization has a handbook for journalists on influenza pandemics, available online. (<http://www.newssafety.org/images/stories/pdf/safetyresource/guides/avianflu.pdf>)

For more background on natural disasters, check this CBS News Interactive:
http://www.cbsnews.com/hdocs/natural_disasters/html/frameource.html.



Newsroom start-up guide

It's amazing how few disasters happen between 9 and 5 on weekdays. Create a guide that is accessible to all staffers. Everyone in the newsroom needs to know these basic steps to get coverage started and have the ability to implement them in case managers are absent or cannot be reached.

Go

Send people to the scene immediately. It's always possible to pull people back or redistribute them, but it's important to get going quickly or access could be restricted.

Confirm

Assign a reporter in-house to work the phones. While crews are in transit, get as much information as possible from any and all sources and be sure to pass it on to journalists in the field. Over-communicate; it's better than letting things fall between the cracks.

Notify

Everyone needs access to a management contact list. It should be sorted in order of priority so it's clear whom to notify first. Send email, text message and/or call until someone can be reached; they should take over and notify the rest.

Put specific people in charge

One person should take charge in the newsroom and another person in the field (presuming there are multiple people at the scene). Make sure everyone knows who is in charge.

Get information out

Everyone should know how to file stories from the field, upload cell phone photos and video, and post text to the Internet. For television, everyone needs to know how to put up a news ticker, produce a phone interview and a news update. Old-fashioned skills like taking dictation may also be needed in a crisis if technology fails. Practice all of these skills on routine stories to prepare for "the big one."



Newsroom back-up planning

When a disaster hits home, newsrooms may be crippled. But planning ahead can enable a news organization to keep broadcasting or publishing even if the newsroom is directly affected. Here are some lessons learned from newspapers, radio and television stations that have strained to cover disasters that left them without power or even destroyed their buildings.

Back up everything! If the newsroom loses power, computers won't work. Keep back up copies of computer files off site. Keep critically important information on paper and keep copies off site, as well. This includes contact information and the disaster plan itself.

Keep at least one set of professional camera gear off-site at night and on weekends. Better yet, allow all photojournalists to take gear home with them.

Equip journalists who do not have their own gear with inexpensive Flip-type cameras and make sure they know how to use them.

Keep a copy of archives and critical files (news, advertising and financial) off-site. Save graphics, maps and other essential data to disk or portable hard drive and store them off site.

If possible, have a back-up power system or generator with enough capacity to keep key newsroom systems running in case of a blackout.

Have redundant communication systems. Land-line telephones may not work; mobile phone circuits may be overloaded. Text messages may get through when calls do not. Make sure not all mobile phones use the same service provider, in case of an outage. Maintain a two-way paging system, if possible, to use as a back-up. A satellite phone can be a life-saver.

Load newsroom software in two off-site computers at two different locations.

Designate staffers' homes or other facilities as makeshift newsrooms in case power outages are widespread. Contact a local University or college to see if they have a computer lab the news organization can use if disaster strikes.

Work out an arrangement in advance to use the facilities of another newspaper for publication or another broadcast station to distribute TV or radio signals in case of emergency.

Discuss in advance the possibility of combining resources with competing news organizations to cover news conferences or other planned events in the aftermath of a disaster.

Prepare to use social media, such as Facebook or Twitter, and mobile messaging to share news and information during a disaster, even if the main news outlet is unable to publish or broadcast.



Personal preparation

A crisis, by definition, means a story that will last more than a few days. It can often mean personal hardship for journalists and their families. Being prepared can help journalists focus on the job at hand and serve their audience better.

Disasters can happen at any time, so it's a good idea for reporters and photographers to keep a bag ready that they can grab on their way out the door. Suggested contents:

Essential

Phone, camera/recorder, laptop computer, notebook, ballpoint pens, business cards

Backups

Pencils, batteries, chargers for all electronics (with car adapter), phone card, cash and spare change

Survival

Water, food (such as high energy/protein bars), toiletries, first aid kit, personal medication, hand sanitizer, wipes, band aids, battery or crank-powered radio, compass, maps

Seasonal

Sunscreen, bug repellent, hat, boots, packable rain jacket, fleece pullover, hand/feet warmer packets

Practical

Flashlight (or headlamp), binoculars, knife or all-purpose “Leatherman” tool, large and small plastic bags, rubber bands, heavy duty tape, thermometer.

Reference

First aid guide (<http://www.newssafety.org/images/stories/pdf/safetyresource/guides/firstaidhandbook.pdf>), pocket guide to chemical hazards (<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npg/>), reference sheets on terrorist threats (<http://www.nae.edu/nae/pubundcom.nsf/weblinks/cgoz-642p3w?opendocument>).

It's also a good idea to keep a change of clothing at the office, especially for TV journalists who must go on the air.

Some of these items may be kept in news cars. At a minimum, all cars should be equipped with bottled water, a gas can and tire sealer, which can be used to mend a puncture. Some veterans recommend keeping a blanket and pillow in each car, as well.

Family concerns

Anticipating the impact of a disaster on family members can help journalists prepare to do their jobs under difficult circumstances. Journalists will want to let family members know that they are safe and to find out if everyone at home is safe as well. So it's a good idea to have a family emergency plan that includes an out-of-town contact person who can communicate information to separated family members.

Natural disasters know no boundaries. Journalists' homes may be damaged or destroyed along with everyone else's. It can be difficult to stay on the job knowing that one's home is not secure. If a disaster can be anticipated, such as

a hurricane, journalists should ensure in advance that their families will be taken care of.

Individual journalists may make different decisions about whether to stay at work. Some who have stayed on the job through past disasters say the decision gave new meaning to their work. “We clearly understand that we are the lifeline,” says Anzio Williams, who was news director at a New Orleans television station during Hurricane Katrina.



Managing crisis coverage

The first role of a newsroom leader in a disaster situation is to manage people and information, in the field and in the newsroom.

Assign and inform

Assign field personnel specific duties, such as covering the incident scene, hospitals, and officials. Make sure all reporters or teams know what they are responsible for, and what is being covered by others. Share information often and as widely as possible.

Assign newsroom personnel specific duties, as well. Put individuals in charge. As one newspaper editor put it, “committees do not work on deadline.”

Information gathering

Who will work the phones? Who will listen to police and fire emergency radio traffic? Who will monitor television, radio and Internet coverage, and take notes on official press conferences and briefings? Make sure everyone knows where these notes should be saved so they are easy to find. Assign follow-ups as needed. Collect and save databases of damage, victims, survivors and witnesses with contact information.

Product

Name an editorial supervisor who will clear information for immediate publication online and/or for broadcast. Assign someone to update the Web “breaking news” box and/or the TV news ticker. For broadcast, put one or more producers in charge of getting information to the anchors, arranging phone interviews and setting up guests. For newspapers, assign an editor to plan for and manage the print product.

Logistics

Put one person in charge of field liaison, determining where staffers should be assigned and what equipment or other support they need. A logistics person also should handle travel and housing arrangements as well as food for the field crews and newsroom, if needed.

Stay calm

Newsroom leaders set the tone. Think about who should be assigned to what duties and put people in charge who can also stay calm. Tone in the newsroom can seep into the reporting. A frantic newsroom can produce coverage that is shrill or hyped up. Keep close watch on crews in the field. For TV, radio or Web video, give reporters time to collect themselves before putting them on live.

Make good editorial choices

When a big story is breaking, accuracy may be the first casualty. Don't let that happen. Put systems in place to guard against mistakes. For example, be skeptical of people who call the newsroom claiming to be eyewitnesses. Ask questions that will verify the telephone caller's proximity to the breaking news and try to assess the person's motive for calling in before using any information provided. Having to go live puts more pressure on TV and radio to make good decisions quickly. Be prepared to cut away or consider using a delay when breaking news could turn violent or bloody.

Keep an eye on the staff

As soon as possible, create a work schedule and stick to it. Go 12 on/12 off if that works. Force people to go home, to rest. In some types of disasters, like a hurricane or mudslide, the staff may be personally affected. They may be worried about their family, their homes. Managers should do what they can, within reason, to help the staff communicate with family and get information about their personal situations.

Prepare to be overrun

If the story is big enough, it won't be a local story for long. Put someone in charge of dealing with the out-of-town journalists who will likely descend on the newsroom. The person running coverage can't take on this role without compromising the product.

Ask for help

Notify group owners and/or affiliate news services so they can ease the load. Get corporate support. Have freelancers lined up that can be called in to help. The BBC's flu pandemic plan, for example, includes procedures for continuing to produce news if a large number of the staff gets sick.

Stop and think

Even for just three minutes. Pull the managers together every hour or two and take stock of the situation. Schedule this, or it won't happen.

Offer encouragement and support

Tell the staff how important their work is for the community, and how proud everyone is to be working with them. Remind them to take care of themselves. After the terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001, the Associated Press added this sentence to its emergency plan: "Think safety: the first priority is your safety and the safety of your family."



Reporting a crisis

Stay calm. Be clear, accurate and compassionate. Choose words carefully to avoid enflaming a situation or causing additional stress or panic. Describe the scene and be specific. Broadcasters should watch their tone and be aware of volume, pitch and pacing. Practice deep breathing for relaxation before going on the air live. Expressing natural emotion on the air is one thing—U.S. National Public Radio reporters Robert Siegel and Melissa Block admitted they got “choked up” and even cried on air when covering the 2008 earthquake in China that killed more than 80,000 people, which they said made their coverage of the devastation more real. But journalists should take care not to express panic, which could damage their credibility when covering a disaster.

Inform as fully as possible

In a breaking news situation, reporters may go for extended periods with little official information. Beware of uncorroborated eyewitness reports. Tell what is not known as well as what is known. Correct any misinformation that may have circulated. If reporters are withholding information, such as tactical force movements during a hostage taking, tell the audience why, insofar as possible.

Avoid speculation

Attribute all information to named sources or sources that can be characterized to indicate credibility. Consider the harm if reporters guess about what happened on the air or online, where mistakes live on even after they have been corrected.

Use multiple sources

Research on risk communication (by Raluca Cozma) found stories that rely solely on government sources are seen as less credible than stories that include multiple sources like independent experts and industry officials. Multiple sources, combined with personal accounts, produced the highest levels of interest and credibility. (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3677/is_200607/ai_n19431795/?tag=content:col1).

Provide context

Don't oversimplify or draw parallels that may be misleading. But do offer background that helps the audience understand how the event fits with others.

Stay professional

Find out who's in charge of dealing with the media and make contact. Remember: everyone has a job to do during a crisis. Be courteous, professional and efficient. Anticipate efforts to restrict media coverage and think ahead about how to respond.

Ask for a timeline

Officials may not have much information to begin with, but reporters can and should ask when they can expect to be briefed and what information they can expect at what time.

Phrase questions carefully

A well-phrased question improves the odds that officials will answer it.

- ◆ Public health: What is the hazard and how can people protect themselves?
- ◆ Environmental/economic: What is the damage and how can it be cleaned up? When will it be clean enough to not endanger public health?

- ◆ Intelligence/national response: What does it mean and what will we do about it?

Provide maps

Help the audience visualize the extent of a disaster by providing up-to-date maps in print and/or online. Some organizations will help you do this for free. John Maines, an editor at the South Florida Sun-Sentinel newspaper recommends Air Worldwide (www.air-worldwide.com) for scenarios and damage estimates from hurricanes and earthquakes and Space Imaging (www.spaceimaging.com) and DigitalGlobe (www.digitalglobe.com) for high resolution satellite images of disaster damage.

Get visual

Images can bring the impact of a disaster home. Set up a live Web cam and stream video of critical areas. Remind photographers to shoot more than just close-ups. Wide shots will put damage in context. If possible, get some aerial or high-angle shots as well. Find shots of the same area before the disaster and use them side by side in print and on the Web. Solicit pictures from the community and create slide shows online.

Use all media

In addition to posting information quickly online, use social media like Facebook and Twitter to disseminate updates. Send out text messages and email updates. The news organization's mobile news feed may be accessed by more users than ever during an emergency. Keep it current and update it frequently.



Staying safe

Journalists in the field covering a major disaster must focus not only on the story but on their own safety. If they endanger themselves, they may compromise the news organization's ability to inform the public. Disaster scenes are chaotic and stressful, so it can help to have a plan for staying safe.

Be prepared

Many news organizations provide training for journalists who may be sent into hazardous situations. If training is not offered, journalists can and should prepare on their own. For tips on staying safe, consult the Committee to Protect Journalists' guide to reporting on dangerous situations (<http://cpj.org/reports/2003/02/journalist-safety-guide.php>), Journalists at Risk (<http://>

www.journalistsatrisk.org/safety_tips.php?CID=4) and the International News Safety Institute (<http://www.newssafety.org>).

Stay in touch

Journalists in the field should make sure at least one person, usually a supervising editor, knows where they are at all times, who they are meeting with, and when they are expected to return. That person should have a list of personal emergency contacts and should know what to do if the journalist does not check in as expected.

Minimize risk

Stay with a partner. WNYC radio reporters Beth Fertig and Marianne McCune worked as a team covering the 9/11 attacks in New York City—keeping each other calm, finding eyewitnesses to interview. As disaster experts say, calm reduces risk.

Get close (but stay safe)

If journalists are being prevented from getting close to a disaster scene, figure out why. Are authorities keeping journalists out to save their lives, or “just because?” If it’s “just because,” find a way in. Flak jackets provide some protection in dangerous situations. Wear them, if available. Gas masks or protective suits are not designed to let a person stay at a hazardous scene. Experts say they are mostly useful for getting away alive. Because gases are heavier than air, avoid low-lying areas when covering a chemical spill or attack. Stay upwind.

Avoid becoming a target

If covering riots or violence, don’t go in with a marked news vehicle and keep TV lights off. Don’t interfere with law enforcement or rescue efforts.

Pay attention

Journalists should be aware of their surroundings and stay as portable as possible, so they can move quickly, if necessary. Be alert for unusual sounds, such as loud pops, and for unexpected sights—does someone appear to be in the wrong place or doing something unusual? If reporters hear gas or vapor escaping, they are probably too close to a scene. If they can smell a pungent odor, they may have been exposed to a chemical hazard and may be contaminated; they should leave immediately. The U.S. National Academies has concise fact sheets on biological, chemical, nuclear and radiological threats that reporters may want to print out and carry with them. (<http://www.nae.edu/nae/pubundcom.nsf/weblinks/CGOZ-642P3W?OpenDocument>)

Limit exposure

Do not smoke at the scene. Gas lines may crack during natural disasters. Avoid eating or drinking at the scene. Chemical and biological hazards can contaminate food and drink.

Following up

Breaking news is likely to dominate coverage of a disaster in the first few hours or even the first day. But news organizations need to start looking at causes and consequences almost immediately so they can move beyond the issue of what happened and answer the key questions of how and why it happened.

Seek documents

Search public records for information related to the disaster. For example, in the case of a plane crash, look for previous incidents involving the same type of aircraft, inspection records on the plane that crashed, and so forth.

Consult experts

An independent, outside expert can help answer technical questions while at the same time raising questions worth investigating. For example, if a building or a bridge collapses, the newsroom might call on a structural engineer.

Stay on the story

In the short term, keep track of new developments, updates and corrections. Report what happens to injured survivors. Provide details on damage caused and the estimated cost, which will change over time. Follow official inquiries or lawsuits. Stay on top of relief and rebuilding efforts.

Tap expertise

Assign beat reporters to look for angles others might have missed. For example, an education reporter might look at how students have been affected; a business reporter could pursue the long-term economic impact.

Archive the coverage

Interest in major news stories lives on long after the immediate crisis has passed. Create an online home for all stories, video, slide-shows, maps and databases related to the story. The Gazette newspaper in Cedar Rapids, Iowa,

set up a blog “to preserve the stories of the people who went through [an] unprecedented, historic flood.” (<http://iowafloodstories.com/blogs/>)

Dig deeper

Investigate disaster preparedness and prevention. Anniversaries can be a good “peg” to for this kind of story. Is government money for disaster preparedness being spent effectively? Is the local infrastructure ready for a disaster? Are human activities and government policies contributing to environmental problems that will make disasters worse? For example, the 1998 Las Casitas mudslide in Nicaragua, triggered by Hurricane Mitch, was exacerbated by the fact that the area had been almost completely deforested.

Probe for patterns

Look closely at the extent of the damage caused by a disaster. Did some properties survive while others nearby were destroyed? Examine building standards, permits and maintenance records. Could some of the damage have been prevented?

Look ahead

Provide information that can keep people safe in a predictable disaster such as a hurricane. Reporter Enrique Flor was part of a team at El Sentinel del Sur de la Florida newspaper in the United States that produced a special section for the 2009 hurricane season, including advice on how to protect a home, a list of emergency supplies and phone numbers.

Internet resources

AlertNet for journalists. Thomson Reuters Foundation site has background on emergencies, interactive charts, lists of relief agencies, and online training for journalists. (<http://www.alertnet.org/mediabridge/index.htm>)

CBS News online links to resources for covering disasters (<http://www.cbsnews.com/digitaldan/disaster/disasters.shtml>)

Committee to Protect Journalists. Nonprofit defends the rights of journalists to report the news without fear of reprisal (<http://cpj.org/>)

Covering disasters, tips from journalism trainers via No Train No Gain (<http://www.notrain-nogain.org/train/res/reparc/disaster.asp>) and a “practical guide” (<http://www.notrain-nogain.org/Train/Res/Report/disast.asp>)

Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma. A resource for journalists who cover violence and disasters <http://dartcenter.org/>

Emergency response guidebook from the US Department of Transportation <http://phmsa.dot.gov/hazmat/library/erg>

Five steps to covering a disaster effectively, from the Dart Center <http://dartcenter.org/content/five-steps-to-covering-disaster-effectively>

Journalists Guide to Covering Bioterrorism from the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation <http://www.rtnda.org/media/pdfs/bestpractices/newsandterror/bioterrorism/bioguide.pdf>

KPBS crisis coverage plan. One local US radio station's approach <http://www.current.org/news/news0118crisiscoverage.shtml>

Life Cycle of a Disaster from the Victims and the Media program at Michigan State University. <http://victims.jrn.msu.edu/public/newslet/spring01/disaster.html>

Media responsibility in a crisis from media psychology professor Stuart Fischhoff <http://www.calstatela.edu/faculty/sfisco/MEDIA%20and%20Crisis%20Coverage.htm>

A US nonprofit has hazard guides on natural disasters from earthquakes to tsunamis, as well as terrorism threats. <http://www.flash.org/>



Journalism and trauma

Introduction

Covering tragedy and human suffering is at the heart of what journalists do.

In Latin America over the past 12 months, media rushed to the scene of riots after a military coup in Honduras; escalating drug wars and assassinations made headlines in Mexico; mudslides and floods dominated the news in Nicaragua, Guatemala and other countries in the region as thousands fled for their lives.

Taking on a watchdog role to report the news can be difficult but rewarding. There also can be a personal price to pay, especially when traumatic events are part of the equation. This chapter addresses two important issues:

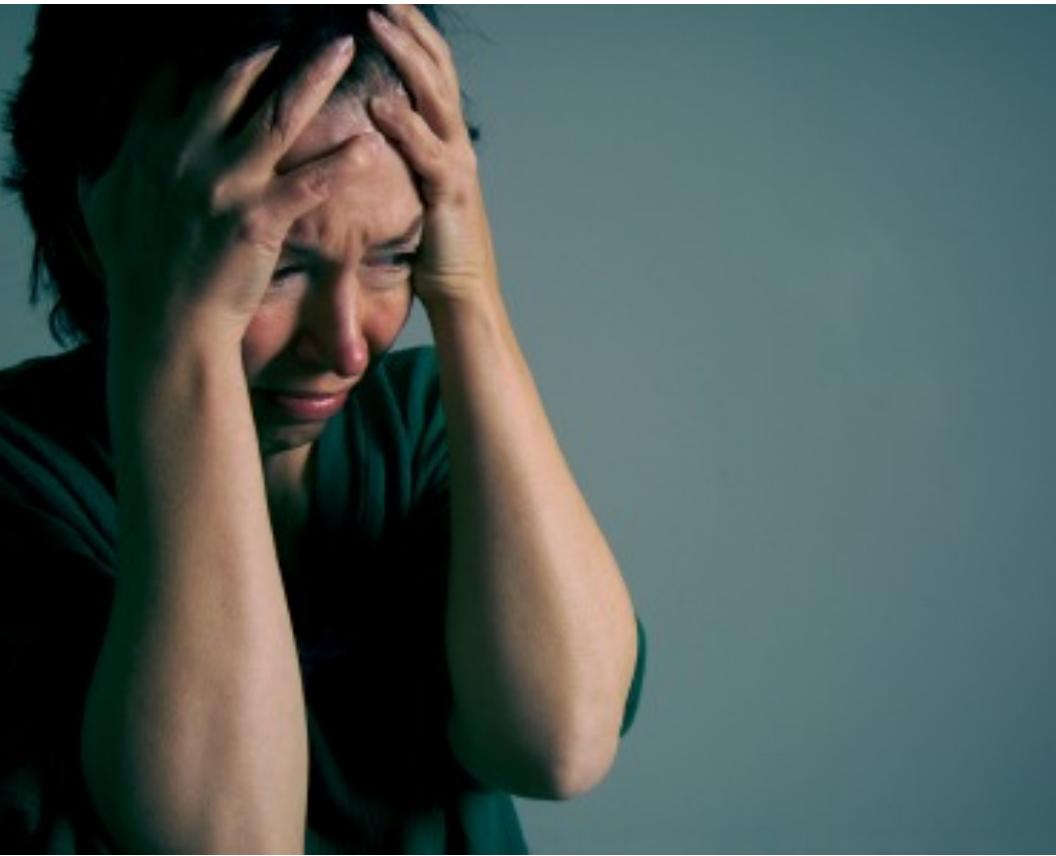
- ◆ How journalists interact with victims, survivors and eyewitnesses of tragedy
- ◆ How they cope with the emotional impact of trauma on their own psyches

Dr. Frank Ochberg, a pioneer in the study of journalism and trauma, believes understanding basic concepts of traumatic stress can help journalists do a better job of covering crisis and help us take better care of ourselves. The media's role becomes even more important when disaster strikes.

“The way journalists cover these events can have a profound effect on how a community reacts in the aftermath of a tragedy,” says Dr. Ochberg, chairman emeritus and founder of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma.

He stresses that during times of extreme shock, trauma and tragedy, it is important that peoples' thoughts, feelings and behavior be reported accurately. That kind of precise newsgathering helps the public digest what is happening and provides a framework for how they can begin dealing with it.

This chapter draws on material from the Dart Center and other media organizations that have made journalism and trauma part of their agenda. It was not designed to be a definitive guide, but rather to introduce important concepts and to make the case for journalists to take trauma seriously.



What is traumatic stress?

A terrible disaster and its emotional aftermath is likely to affect all first responders, including firefighters, emergency medical teams, and the police. Journalists, who also are first responders, are not immune.

It is important to know the difference between normal traumatic stress reactions and far more serious Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Distress in the face of tragedy is an ordinary human response, not a weakness. For most people, symptoms begin to ease after a few weeks. Under certain circumstances, exposure to extreme events may cause abnormal reactions, including PTSD.

Traumatic stress can accumulate over time and cause severe emotional problems if we don't know how to respond in a productive way. It is helpful to

understand the language of emotional distress, the symptoms and what can be done about them.

For the media in Latin America, this is particularly noteworthy. Medical experts warn that journalists who operate in countries where they are targeted for their work tend to be at higher risk for traumatic stress.

In a February 2009 report, the Committee to Protect Journalists noted that “powerful drug traffickers fighting for turf in Mexico, paramilitary gangsters in Brazilian slums, guerrillas and paramilitaries in strife-ridden areas of Colombia and violent street gangs in El Salvador and Guatemala are terrorizing the press.” CPJ ranked Mexico among the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists and published lists of attacks against the media throughout Latin America. (<http://cpj.org/2009/02/drugs-violence-press-latin-america.php>)

What are the signs?

Traumatic stress can change perception and memory in three ways:

Re-experiencing

Memories of the event intrude on our consciousness and won't go away. At the most extreme, these become flashbacks or recurring nightmares. Some journalists describe this as being “haunted” by the trauma they have experienced.

Hyper-arousal

We might become jumpy and develop a short temper with those close to us. Small incidents such as a child crying or an ambulance siren can trigger memories of the crisis.

Avoidance or numbness

Avoidance of any situation or stimuli reminiscent of the past trauma might occur. There might be a tendency to over-use alcohol or drugs to numb psychological pain or an emotional detachment from close relationships.

Common reactions after witnessing trauma

These are considered within the “norm” for individuals experiencing traumatic stress.

- ◆ Shock

- ◆ Irritability
- ◆ Sleeplessness
- ◆ Anger
- ◆ Guilt
- ◆ Grief
- ◆ Sadness
- ◆ Emotional numbing
- ◆ Feeling of helplessness
- ◆ Difficulty feeling happy or loved

Problematic reactions

Some responses are less common and might indicate the need to consult a mental health professional or medical doctor. Among some of the most problematic:

- ◆ Panic episodes/irrational fears
- ◆ Terrifying nightmares
- ◆ Inability to concentrate
- ◆ Paralyzing nervousness
- ◆ Fear of losing control/going crazy
- ◆ Sense of worthlessness/shame/loss of self-respect
- ◆ Self-blame
- ◆ Dependency on alcohol or drugs

The most serious are psychotic symptoms that show up as hallucinations, bizarre thoughts or images.



Nature of trauma

Traumatic stress, which most of us experience some time during our lives, has been defined as the pressure, force or strain on the human mind and body from a specific event or experience that shocks, stuns and horrifies.

Among common examples: observing serious injury or unnatural death of another person, natural disasters, traffic accidents, wartime combat and other violent conflicts, inter-personal violence, such as child abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence and criminal violence.

People cope in different ways -- struggling to come to terms with what happened can take longer with some than others. Most trauma survivors might be upset for several weeks following an event, but tend to recover without treatment. That's where self-care for journalists can make a difference.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, to be diagnosed with PTSD the person must have been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following were present:

- ◆ The person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others.
- ◆ The person's response to the trauma involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror.

The Dart Center's Frank Ochberg tells patients suffering from PTSD that there is nothing abnormal about it. "It is a normal reaction to abnormal events. Anyone could have PTSD, given enough trauma," the psychiatrist says.

Case study: Truth in the crossfire

An anonymous caller lured Jineth Bedoya Lima to a notorious prison near Bogotá, Colombia, by telling her that a paramilitary leader serving a sentence there wanted to talk. At the time, she was covering the conflict between the Colombian government and paramilitary groups for the newspaper *El Espectador*.

As she waited for clearance to enter the prison, Bedoya was kidnapped at gunpoint. That night a taxi driver spotted a woman, bloodied with hands tied, crawling out of a garbage dump. The reporter had been brutally beaten and gang raped. At one point, her captors ordered her to "pay attention. We are sending a message to the press of Colombia." The date was May 25, 2000.

Fifteen days after the incident, Bedoya was back on the job under the protection of a bodyguard. In 2001, she won a courage award from the International Women's Media Foundation. "I fell in love with my career and it has given me my greatest satisfaction, but also my greatest sadness," she said during the awards ceremony in the United States. Bedoya later went to work for Bogotá newspaper *El Tiempo*.

During an interview for a story in *American Journalism Review* on the dangers media faced in Colombia, she described being haunted by the horror she experienced. "There are days when I wonder why they didn't kill me. There are days I don't want to be alive because the sadness and the memories get me down," Bedoya said in 2002.

She credits her colleagues for providing emotional support during the darkest times. Outreach also came from abroad.

Dr. Ochberg helped arrange psychological counseling for Bedoya and her co-workers and spearheaded efforts to build a supportive network for endangered Colombian journalists. But Bedoya's ordeal was not over.

The reporter survived a second kidnapping, this time by FARC guerrillas as she was reporting on a village forced into cocaine production. A local priest and villagers intervened to get her and a photographer released in August 2003. She continues to work in journalism because, "This is my contribution to society," she says.

<http://www.ajr.org/article.asp?id=2749>

<http://www.iwmf.org/article.aspx?id=388&c=articles>



Tips for Dealing with Victims and Survivors

One of the toughest decisions for journalists is how to cover victims, survivors, and eyewitnesses to catastrophic events.

When crisis strikes, ordinary people find themselves thrust into the media spotlight during one of the most difficult times of their lives. They may be in shock or grieving; they may be waiting to hear about the fate of a loved one. Suddenly, cameras, microphones and tape recorders are being thrust at them.

On the other side of the equation, journalists have the responsibility to tell the story and help the public understand the tragic event. How do we balance truth telling with minimizing harm to vulnerable people?

The following are tips from media professionals on how to approach victims and survivors:

- ◆ Calmly and clearly identify yourself before you begin asking questions or filming. The person needs to know who you are and needs to understand that the material could be published or broadcast.
- ◆ Treat each victim with dignity and respect. Journalists walk a fine line: They must be sensitive, but at the same time, must not be timid.
- ◆ Never ask: “How do you feel?” Never say, “I understand how you must be feeling.” It is best to simply introduce yourself and let them know, “I am sorry for your loss.” Or, “I am sorry for what you are going through today.”
- ◆ Start the interview with open-ended questions that gently prod them into telling their story. “When did you learn of this? Who have you spoken to so far?” If a mother has lost a son in a plane crash, it would be appropriate to ask: “Could you tell me about Juan’s life?” Ask survivors what they saw and heard. These questions are non-judgmental and provide a chance for them to tell what they are feeling and thinking.
- ◆ Understand that people react differently in these situations – some withdraw, while others find solace in talking.
- ◆ If the person says no to an interview or becomes emotional about the media pushing for information, back off. Thank them kindly and walk away. Some journalists hand them a business card and say, “In case you would like to talk later” or “Please give me a call if you feel like it.”
- ◆ Give victims a sense of control. Ask if they would be more comfortable sitting or standing during the interview or whether they would like to go somewhere else, away from the chaos to talk. A kind gesture might be, “Is there someone you would like present?”

In their pioneering book, “Covering Violence: A Guide to Ethical Reporting About Victims and Trauma,” Roger Simpson and William Cote portray journalists as models of efficiency, hurrying among police, emergency workers, and bystanders to get the story. They have a mission and know how to do their jobs.

It is dramatically different for those in crisis who have just had their world turned upside down. They don’t fully understand what has happened; they are subject to the orders and direction of others and can do little to gain personal control over the chaotic situation. Simpson and Cote offer these tips:

- ◆ Respect the person's efforts to regain balance after a horrible experience.
- ◆ Anticipate emotional responses, and allow the subject to make decisions about stopping or temporarily halting the interview or filming.
- ◆ Listen carefully. Go over the main points of the interview with the subject before leaving.

Case study: Enrique's journey

Sonia Nazario wrote a series about children who come to the United States from Central/South America alone, in search of parents who left years before to find jobs to make a better life for them. Her article focused on Enrique whose mother left Honduras when he was five years old. The boy was 17 when he went in search of her in North Carolina.

The Los Angeles Times Reporter spent time with Enrique in Mexico as he desperately tried to make his way north and reconstructed his story through detailed interviews and observations. Nazario, born in Buenos Aires and raised in Kansas City, speaks fluent Spanish, which enabled her to pose questions to the children carefully and with compassion.

The reporter rode trains for 800 miles, witnessing the hardships, violence, and setbacks the children faced. Her stories told of the bandits who would rob, rape, torture and murder for a pair of shoes; of the dense jungles and deserts the children must cross.

The impact of the horrors she witnessed hit full force after she returned home. Nazario became ill and for six months had nightmares of "being chased by someone trying to rape me." She credits rest and therapy with restoring her spirit, but she wonders what impact she had on the children she interviewed: "I ask personal, probing questions. I stir the waters. How do they handle it afterwards?" she wrote in a piece for the Nieman Reports.

"Enrique's Journey" was published September 29 - October 7, 2002, and won a Pulitzer Prize for feature writing. This case study appeared in the Simpson/Cote book in a chapter on writing the trauma story. Nazario wrote about the ethical dilemmas she faced in telling Enrique's story for the Nieman Reports. <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100328>



Challenges for visual journalists

Photographers and videographers often are the first to arrive on the scene when news breaks. Instinctively, they move as close as possible to the action.

Visual journalists often have a more difficult time being non-intrusive. Reporter Sonia Nazario talked about being a “fly-on-the-wall” when she traveled with immigrant children. That is not so easy for those who carry cameras.

What factors should photojournalists consider to minimize harm?

Authors Simpson and Cote turned to professional media organizations, such as the National Press Photographers Association and the Radio-Television News Directors Association, to compile guidelines for how to deal with sensitive visual issues. Among those they list:

- ◆ Do not knowingly allow a live broadcast of a killing, whether homicide or suicide, especially in close-up and showing wounds and blood.
- ◆ Build in a delay of several seconds during live transmissions to allow managers to make a decision about whether to show something.
- ◆ Insist that photographers and photo and graphics editors join other news managers in deciding which photos to publish or videos to air. Don't rely on one person's opinion. Discuss it.
- ◆ Be sure relatives have been notified before announcing or showing the identity of a person who has been killed.
- ◆ Give viewers of television reports enough advance warning of what they are about to see so that someone can leave the room, remove children, or change the channel.
- ◆ Tell the whole story – before, during and after – of what happened to the human being involved, not just the death, no matter what photos or footage are used.
- ◆ Think about the effects of photos published on the front page and inside pages of a newspaper, as well as images in color versus black-and-white. Something that might be too graphic for the front page could be less troublesome on an inside page, in black and white, or on the Web site.
- ◆ Discuss the decision, how it affected survivors and the public, and whether the staff should have handled it differently as soon as deadline pressures ease

Case study: Photojournalist's dilemma

It was Monday around noon, after hurricane Katrina blew through New Orleans. There was word of flooding in the Lower Ninth Ward and Ted Jackson, a veteran photographer for the Times-Picayune, went to check it out. As he crossed a bridge, he spotted women and children stranded on a porch, pleading for help as water rose around them.

Yelling across the deep floodwaters that separated them, Jackson learned they had been clinging to porch railings for hours to keep from drowning. "I was trying to find some way to help them off that porch, and that definitely took priority over taking pictures," he later recalled.

The photographer faced a dilemma as he realized he had no way of getting to them. "I also knew that my editors – and the world – needed to see what was

happening here. I knew this would be a tough picture to shoot. I didn't want to make the situation worse or add to the family's trauma . . . I tried to become invisible, moving to the side and diverting their attention away from me. I then quickly raised my camera," wrote Jackson in a piece for the Fall 2007 Nieman Reports. (<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100148>)

He raced back to the newspaper, dropped off his memory cards, and rushed back to the bridge with an inflatable boat and rope. The porch was empty. Rescuers were on the scene, but none had seen the family.

"In my mind I could see the little girl slip beneath the water and the others losing their composure and following her. It felt as if my chest was caving in as I assumed the worst. Could I have done more? Did I do the right thing?" Jackson recalled.

The ethical quandary the photographer faced during coverage of Katrina in August 2005 was not unusual for journalists covering a crisis. When do they put down cameras and notebooks and pitch in to help?

Months later, a Times-Picayune reporter found the family safe in Houston, Texas. A group of teenagers had rescued them with a fishing boat.

"I couldn't wait to talk to them. I had so many demons to quell," wrote Jackson in his Nieman piece. On the phone, one of the women asked why he left them that day. He told her he returned with a rope and a boat. "Oh, I didn't know that," the woman responded. Then, she asked Jackson for a favor: "Can we get a copy of the picture? We'd like to have one to keep."

Tips for covering traumatic events in your community

A Dart Center booklet titled "Tragedies and Journalists: A guide for more effective coverage" lists the following:

Understand that your coverage of a traumatic event will have an impact on your readership, viewers or listeners. Remember that the tone of your coverage may reflect the tone of the community's reaction to it.

Write stories about the victims' lives and their effect on the community. These are short stories about victims, their favorite hobbies, what made them special, and the ripple effect of their lives.

Find ways people are helping, including acts of kindness, and report on them throughout the recovery process. This may provide hope for the community.

Constantly ask these questions: What does the public need to know and how much coverage is too much? A community is much more than a mass killing or a disaster. The coverage must reflect that.



Coaching through crisis

News managers routinely coach their staff on the news gathering process before, during and after a crisis. But another kind of coaching often is ignored: providing moral support to journalists covering catastrophic events. That is relatively new territory for most news organizations.

“Many editors and news directors have no idea on how to coach reporters and photographers about to go into a disaster zone,” says Don Fry, a coaching guru who has worked around the world to help improve newsroom communication.

“It is a different mind-set. It means changing the macho newsroom culture and getting rid of the stereotypes of the tough journalists who never are touched by emotion. It means listening and paying attention,” says Fry, an affiliate of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies.

Fry offers this advice to news managers:

Lay out a time frame with a beginning, middle and an end: There needs to be coaching for their emotional well being before they go, while they are on the scene, and when they return.

Brief reporters on what they might expect, such as seeing mangled bodies and fellow humans in pain. "People tend to handle things better if they have an idea of what they might face and what form it might take," says Fry.

Appoint a "duty editor" to take calls from staff in the field. That person becomes the main contact for updates on the newsgathering process and for journalists to share feelings about what they are witnessing. Fry's advice: "Be available."

Send a strong message to staff on the frontlines of the crisis: "Don't let yourself get isolated." Require them to call the office to stay in touch. Set a schedule if possible.

Joe Hight was managing editor of The Oklahoman on April 19, 1995, when a homegrown terrorist named Timothy McVeigh set off a bomb in an Oklahoma City federal building killing 168. After the tragedy, Hight came up with tips on how to help staffs cope with a horrific event.

Offer meals to reporters and editors during the first days or weeks of coverage. Then gradually end these so they will be encouraged to go elsewhere, signaling a return to normalcy.

Ask if they have problems, then listen. Encourage them to talk to others who have faced similar situations.

Allow staff to take breaks and get away from the coverage. Encourage them to participate in a family gathering, attend a sports event, or see a movie. The point is that they need to get away, even for a brief time.

Encourage staffers to help themselves. Post reminders in the newsroom or send emails about ways to relieve stress. Offer confidential counseling for those who want it and informal newsroom debriefings. The most important thing: remind them to share feelings and talk to those they trust.

Offer praise for the hard and difficult work the staff is doing. Don't forget that freelancers or even citizen journalists also do the work of covering tragedies. They are no less deserving of coaching and support than permanent staff.

Case Study: Editor reaches out

After the terrorist attacks of September 2001 on New York City's World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., some newsroom managers made extra efforts to stay connected to their journalists working around-the-clock to document the horror.

On September 13, 2001, William E. Schmidt, a New York Times editor, wrote a memo to his staff: "In the last few days, too many of you have seen things, done things, photographed things, that have sucked the emotional wind out of you. And this story is not going away any time soon.

"We all know there is a great tradition among journalists to put your feelings and fears behind you, and just get the job done. We applaud you for that kind of professionalism. But we also know just doing your job – as a reporter or photographer out in the streets, or as an editor or clerk in the newsroom – takes its toll on you and your family."

Schmidt listed resources the newspaper was providing and reminded staff that it is the journalist's job to bear witness, but the scenes of horror and human misery so many were witnessing could leave scars.



Self Care: Awareness is the key

There is much journalists can do to take care of themselves in times of stress. Here is a list of simple ideas suggested by counselors.

- ◆ Know your limits
- ◆ Keep life as normal as possible
- ◆ Talk about the incident and your feelings with someone you trust
- ◆ Try relaxation exercises
- ◆ Eat regularly and get enough sleep when possible

- ◆ If distress continues past three to four weeks seek professional help from a mental health care practitioner trained in trauma.

Among things not to do

- ◆ Isolate yourself
- ◆ Bottle up your emotions
- ◆ Drink alcohol or caffeine in excess
- ◆ Go without sleep or eating for long periods of time

How colleagues can help each other

- ◆ Take time to let someone who's been through a bad time tell their story
- ◆ Ask them open questions. Don't interrupt or come back with your own experiences.
- ◆ Don't tell them you know how they feel. You can't.
- ◆ Don't put down their experience and imply that they need to pull themselves together.

Final thoughts

Journalists have the reputation of being amazingly resilient and dedicated to their work. They also can be stubborn and avoid dealing with their emotions, especially if they think it will make them look weak in the eyes of their bosses or coworkers.

Over the past 10 years, that macho newsroom culture slowly has been changing toward a more benevolent model where reporters and photographers who cover crisis are handled with respect and care.

This manual provides a starting point for news organizations seeking to deal more efficiently with journalism and traumatic stress. Here is the link to the Spanish-language version of the Dart Center's guide to help journalists report on violence while protecting both the victims and themselves: <http://dartcenter.org/content/tragedias-periodistas-5>.

Other resources that can help

International Center for Journalists: <http://www.icfj.org>

Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma: <http://www.dartcenter.org>

Poynter Institute for Media Studies: <http://www.poynter.org>

Committee to Protect Journalists: <http://www.cpj.org>

International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies: <http://www.istss.org>

International News Safety Institute: <http://www.newssafety.com>

National Press Photographers Association: <http://www.nppa.org>

International Crisis Group: <http://www.crisisweb.org>

Institute for War and Peace Reporting: <http://www.iwpr.net>

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