

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING FOR JOURNALISTS

A Practical Guide



HANNAH STORM

Mental Health and Wellbeing for Journalists

This book offers a first-of-its-kind, practical and person-centred guide to managing and contextualising journalists' emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Drawing on the author's experience as a storyteller, journalist and media safety consultant, the book combines significant lived personal experience with reflections from an international network of journalists and mental health experts to collate industry good practice and guidance. It takes readers through a history of mental health discussions in the industry, moving from a focus on war correspondents and post-traumatic stress disorder to considerations of vicarious trauma, moral injury and the impact of online harm on journalists. It shows how pressures already faced by those in the sector have been exacerbated by the global pandemic, giving rise to the prospect of a mental health crisis in the media if these issues remain unaddressed. As a counter to this concern, Storm shares insights from experts on what leaders can do to create safer workplaces and processes, how they can channel the empathy that is core to healthy journalism to promote the health of its people, and how they should consider mental health as intersecting with other issues such as physical safety, diversity and inclusion. Insights from science shed light on resilience levels, how our brains and bodies respond to trauma, and strategies that can be adopted to help us recover from challenging experiences. While acknowledging that some news organisations are starting to take note, Storm shows how others need to do more, offering ways in which newsrooms can learn from the lessons of recent years to bring about long-lasting change.

Mental Health and Wellbeing for Journalists is written for news media professionals, educators, and students, as well as anyone interested in promoting more sustainable journalism through supporting the industry's most precious resource: its people.

Hannah Storm is a media consultant specialising in journalism safety, mental health and leadership. She is the founder and co-director of Headlines Network, a community to improve mental health conversations in the news media. She is the former CEO and director of the Ethical Journalism Network and served as director of the International News Safety Institute. She began her career at Reuters, and has spent more than two decades working internationally across diverse forms of media, including broadcast, print and digital.



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Preface

The author's story

I became involved in the conversation around journalism and mental health because of my own experiences of being injured through my work.

In late 2019, I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after a series of traumatic experiences, related to my journalism. These included incidents that occurred during repeat visits to Haiti in 2004 and 2010, which coincided with periods of deadly political and gang violence, and the aftermath of a devastating earthquake which killed tens of thousands of people. They also included two serious sexual assaults, one of them a rape, by men I met related to my work in Haiti, and an abusive relationship with someone who, again, I met through my journalism.

It took me many years to realise my mental health had also been impacted negatively by the cumulative toll of the graphic images, interviews and accounts I was exposed to simply by being a journalist. I was also affected by the behaviours of certain colleagues who abused their positions of power and subjected me to harassment. From the start of my career, the cultures within which I worked conditioned me to behave in certain ways, even where this made me feel uncomfortable.

I first spoke publicly about my PTSD in 2020 in an article for Poynter.org, the website of the US-based media institute. Over the years, I have formed a fuller picture of my story, and writing this book has allowed me to better understand my experiences and how the cumulative nature of my trauma exposure, coupled with an environment that rewarded certain behaviours and repressed others, impacted my mental health. In this chapter, I'll share something of my perspective, which I hope sheds light on why I am writing this book.

Some of what follows may not make for easy reading.

It's tempting to work chronologically, to show how things built up over time, but one of the things I have learned about mental health is that things are rarely linear. Recovery is not – that's certain. And when we try to unravel our stories and understand the sources of our traumas, we find they aren't linear either. It makes sense to me to start from the bottom and work up, because it was only by hitting the bottom that I was able to find a way back towards the light, and a sense of purpose.

In April 2018, I was at the International Journalism Festival in the Italian city of Perugia to moderate a series of panels, including one on #MeToo in the media. It was six months after the hashtag went viral and became a global cry against sexual harassment. There had been allegations made against several high-profile journalists, some of whom had lost their jobs in the wake of the movement, but many colleagues I spoke with believed that some news organisations continued to protect the perpetrators, while those who were harassed and assaulted had been conditioned to put up with, and shut up about, these unacceptable behaviours.

At this point, I had never spoken openly about my experiences of sexual harassment as a journalist. I'd never mentioned the sources who'd invited me back to their homes; the news boss who had done the same, told me his marriage was failing and that only I understood him; the older married colleague who seduced me with similar sentiments; and those who suggested strongly that if I wanted to be part of the team, I join them at the lap-dancing club. I'd never mentioned the hands on my legs, waist, bum, the sexual comments from colleagues, interviewees, strangers in the crowd, bosses. Like many of my colleagues, I had been conditioned to assume they were part of my job. Over time, there were so many incidents that, to this day, I sometimes remember experiences of harassment that I had completely forgotten.

I had kept quiet too about the sexual assaults I had suffered, perpetrated by men I met through my work. Instead, I had spent years advocating for survivors and teaching reporting on gender-based violence for the United Nations, and I'd co-authored a groundbreaking book, which, more than a decade after its 2012 publication, is still an important reference in newsrooms in terms of the safety of women journalists.

Ostensibly, *No Woman's Land: On the Frontlines with Female Reporters* was published in response to the change in conversations around the safety of women journalists after the rape of CBS correspondent Lara Logan in Egypt's Tahrir Square. But my own experiences provided a subconscious motivation as I collated the stories of our 40 women contributors, even as I kept my own a secret. In retrospect, the book helped me process some of my trauma, but it also added to my emotional load, even if not all the stories featured harassment or assault.

By the time I got to Perugia in 2018, I had been working at the International News Safety Institute (INSI) for eight years and its director for more than half that time. Much of my work saw me liaising with news teams from around the world, sharing fast-moving safety information from front lines and fault lines and coordinating safety conversations, as well as collating the casualty figures of the dozens of news media workers who died doing their work every year.

During that time, I was also exposed, as many colleagues were, to the weaponisation of social media and a ratcheting-up of online violence, including the use for propaganda purposes by the Islamic State of a horrific video showing the murder of the American journalist James Foley in Syria.

In my personal life, the years preceding 2018 had brought an accumulation of distressing experiences, including the legacy of the abusive relationship that I had fled years previously and the traumatic birth of my second child.

Back in Italy, though, I was also moderating a panel on a recent study I had co-authored into moral injury in the media. Walking through the cobbled streets of the Umbrian university city to that panel, a concerned colleague took me aside. I remember her warning that I was heading for a crash, and that I could either apply the brakes and slow down to reduce the impact or ignore the signs and hurtle headlong into serious harm. Either way, it was going to happen, and it was probably going to hurt. I only half heard her at the time, but I now know how important her words were, and I am very grateful to her for them.

That evening, I attended a dinner organised by the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma. Sitting with a colleague, feasting on delicious Italian food and copious wine, we bonded with the intensity that comes from knowing how it feels to live on the edge. During that meal, we shared some of the most intense moments we had experienced as journalists – the sights, sounds and smells we would never be able to shake, the people whose faces were seared into our minds, the things we had done or failed to do, the memories, decisions and behaviours we felt nobody else but those who belonged to our journalism tribe could really understand.

I fell into my bed, drunk and depleted, waking the next morning from nightmares, twisted in sweat-drenched sheets. I panicked as I tried to escape the clutches of my chaotic dreams, trapped inside the bedding and my past. I thought the room was shaking. Perugia is, after all, on a fault line and has a history of earthquakes, even if it is thousands of miles from Haiti. I managed somehow to drag myself out of bed, and continue through the rest of the conference, only just holding it together.

I knew I could not carry on in this vein, but I also felt I had no option but to do so. I made the decision that day to ask for help, though it took more than 18 months for me to get a diagnosis. I would reach the point of considering suicide on more than one occasion, even after I confided in colleagues. But, looking back at that time in Perugia, in April 2018, this was when everything changed.

Through another colleague I met during that conference, I arranged to write publicly about my sexual assaults and my experiences of being conditioned to behave in certain ways, which became the 2020 piece for Poynter.org. I received an outpouring of support, but I wasn't prepared for the mental health crisis that ensued. Putting my words out into the world had made my experience real, even if I could not yet acknowledge its psychological impact.

I felt intense shame. I questioned my decisions and behaviours that had preceded the assaults. I remembered being told by one of the perpetrators that nobody would believe me. I blamed myself for not being able to identify the other man who assaulted me. I thought about all the women whose stories I'd

been privileged to share as a journalist and I constantly compared myself with them, telling myself that my trauma wasn't valid because they had endured worse. As a woman working in the predominantly male environment of journalism safety, I also feared that speaking about my experiences would be an admission of failure, that those who thought my work was 'no place for a girl' would have been right all along.

My mental health deteriorated. I had intrusive thoughts frequently. Reminders of my traumas would ambush me: sounds, smells or places that made me feel as if I was trapped. I avoided crowds, lifts and public transport, restrooms with doors that locked to the ground. I became intolerant to loud noises, and found certain sounds extremely distressing, such as cars backfiring, low-flying planes, jackhammers, drills at the dentists. I felt myself panicking every time things shook around me, such as when a heavy vehicle passed or when the ground vibrated because of an underground train. I became hyper-vigilant to men with similar accents to my attackers. I struggled to concentrate. My memory was poor. I was irritable, most of all with those closest to me. But I was also terrified something awful would happen to those I loved. I drank too much alcohol, exercised to excess, ate too much sugar, skimped on healthier foods. I struggled to sleep, often scared to close my eyes because of nightmares. My body was inevitably affected. I had gastro-intestinal issues, which repeated visits to nutritionists failed to diagnose. Some nights I itched all over. My hair grew thin. I was always cold, apart from when I relived certain experiences, when my body would break into intense sweating.

The journalistic environments in which I worked enabled me to mask some of my behaviours because others were doing similar, especially in terms of the drinking. Even as the director of a journalism safety organisation, I did not feel safe to share my experiences, which saddens me now. PTSD brought huge guilt and shame and a sense that I did not have the right to speak about my experiences because there were so many others out there, journalists and those whose stories we covered, who had it so much worse. Somehow, I managed to keep on working, even as I kept my symptoms from colleagues and concealed certain behaviours from those closest to me. For years, I felt ashamed and alone.

It took repeated visits to the doctor, seeking help for other symptoms, many of them physical, before I was told I was suffering from burnout. I was signed off work but didn't get better. Without mental health support at work, I was advised to self-refer and did so through the National Health Service in England. I got as far as an initial chat with someone who asked for my history, before I realised that they were completely the wrong individual and had no clue about journalism, what motivated us or our ways of working. I'd had previous experiences of unsuitable therapists and it, once again, felt like an uphill struggle at a time when I was going downhill fast.

It was clear to me that what I was experiencing was something other than burnout. I had to return to my job, but by then I knew recovery would only begin when my INSI role ended. I took another job as director of the Ethical

Journalism Network, where I did not have to deal with journalism safety issues on a daily basis. I started to confide in people who understood where I was coming from, some of whom had been injured by their work. I finally got an appointment to see a therapist.

I was diagnosed with PTSD just before the Covid pandemic, in the late winter of 2019, a result that confirmed my long-held suspicions. My own PTSD stems not from one experience but from many. In diagnostic terms (and a diagnosis that isn't always seen as distinct from PTSD), I have complex PTSD, something I was not aware existed. However, the more people I speak with, the more I realise trauma can be cumulative, especially in journalism. To me, it felt like a skein of interconnected threads, hard to unravel. I was, however, determined to unravel them, before they were able to do the same to me.

I began therapy as the pandemic began. Sessions with my therapist happened across Zoom. I was reticent about seeing him because I had found most previous therapeutic interactions made things worse. But I decided to stick with it, and during the weird early weeks and months of Covid, he was another connection with the outside world. Early on, I admitted I didn't want to cry because I was scared of what might happen if I did. I used the analogy of an emotional flak jacket with him, and he told me that a flak jacket serves no purpose if it is hiding an injury. He said that if keeping the body armour on meant we prevented ourselves seeking treatment for something, the injury would simply get worse. I understood this analogy, from places where I had worn physical flak jackets, where we would don this protective equipment proactively. In order to get help for PTSD and to really embark on the road to recovery, I had to take off my ill-fitting flak jacket and allow things to get worse before they got better.

Covid brought challenges to therapy. I was in lockdown with my family, facing my fears and speaking about them through a screen with someone I had only met once in person. I worried that my family would be able to hear some of my horrible experiences. Instead of having me speak about them, my therapist encouraged me to write down my experiences, in the present tense. Time and again, I focused on one specific incident, writing and re-writing it until I could remember more clearly. PTSD had messed with my memories, leaving big gaps in my history but reminding me repeatedly about other parts. Over time, I began to piece together the jigsaw pieces of my past. For years, my inability to clearly remember my assaults exacerbated my shame. But through this therapy, I learned to safely unpack the boxes where my memories had been wrongly stored, to safely relive those experiences and then put the memories back in their rightful boxes.

Writing and therapy allowed me to move forwards. I found other things that helped me too. I benefited from speaking with friends and colleagues, and spending time outside. Running was a great exercise, a way to feel grounded and with nature. Gradually, I became able to write publicly about my mental health experiences. It was the start of my mission to use my mental health

journey to help others. I have since written a collection of flash fiction, with several stories inspired by my experiences. After being recognised for my writing with awards and nominations, I began working on a novel about a journalist who, in the course of her work, makes a difficult ethical decision that has devastating consequences.

I have launched a company called Headlines Network to promote more open conversations about mental health in journalism. Working with my colleague, John Crowley, as well as with clinicians, mental health experts and other journalists, we deliver workshops and develop practical resources for the news industry. We also host a podcast, hearing from celebrated journalists about the stories that have affected them and how they manage their mental health. The conversations have confirmed to me the power of storytelling, not only as a tool for journalism, but also as something that could benefit journalists' mental health.

I recognise we are often told that we must not become the story and that we're conditioned to keep on going, often at the expense of our mental health. Things are changing, though, and conversations are becoming more commonplace – I welcome this. But there are still far too many people who are fearful of sharing their experiences because they are genuinely worried about negative repercussions. My own career was punctuated with times when I felt ashamed to speak about my experiences. Looking back, I was conditioned to behave in a certain way, and keep quiet about my distress.

Beginning with my first role as a graduate trainee journalist at Reuters in 1999, many of our conversations in the pub provided a place for us to confide in each other. We shared stories we felt only we could understand. This continued for the next decade or so, even as I changed jobs, with regular visits to drinking holes where we would debrief and let our hair down after particularly difficult stories. In those times, I felt part of a tribe, sharing a unique language. I remember the secrets we swore would stay with us, the things that happened on tour that we agreed would stay on tour, the affairs that grew from alliances formed quickly in dangerous places, the black humour that helped us process painful things.

Early in my career, I remember a colleague, in his early twenties, drinking throughout the night, sleeping in the office toilet, and then appearing at his desk the next morning in the same clothes. Others applauded his stamina. Later, from afar, I watched his mental health collapse, saddened that his seniors had not provided the support he needed.

The interview for my second journalism job took place in a bar on Fleet Street, the spiritual home of journalism in London. There was just me, aged 24, and a veteran journalist from the Home News desk, who was probably twice my age, and the interview process seemed to involve assessing how much wine I could consume before I became too drunk to hold a conversation. Days into my role at that news organisation, one of the editors yelled and swore at me for a reason I can't remember. Nobody expressed their support for me, and I kept my crying for the bathroom. I now know this editor's reaction was less

about me and more about his inability to cope with the stressors of his work. Not that I condone his actions. As a young journalist, it hurt me and showed me that bullies could make it big in newsrooms. Fortunately, he no longer works in newsrooms.

In my subsequent job, I was on the desk of a British TV newsroom when I was asked by someone more senior than me to view a live feed of images from one of the news agencies. I was to decide what was too graphic to show our audiences on a nightly news programme. It was 2003 and the first night of the bombing of Baghdad by the US-led coalition. I was given no training, not told what I was likely to see, not asked how I was, or reminded of the purpose of my work. I was a junior in a newsroom and the glory and attention went to those who were out risking their lives in the field.

I saw images I still remember decades on. Shortly afterwards, I began having nightmares, drinking too much, engaging in risky behaviour. I began to question why I was doing my work and struggled to equate what I had seen with my work environment in a London newsroom, where there was no risk of bombs falling from the sky, destroying buildings and lives. A few months later, I moved overseas to be a journalist in the field, where I hoped that I would finally get noticed, like the men, for the most part, who had been in Iraq. I didn't yet recognise that I would also be exposed to other kinds of trauma. I did not know then that vicarious trauma is trauma.

March 2003 marked the first time that the work I was doing in journalism really impacted my mental health, despite my earlier exposure to the toxic management styles that had conditioned me to put up and shut up. The vicarious trauma aspect was not something I considered until many years later, when I was running INSI and once again found myself dealing with graphic images.

I mentioned these early experiences in passing to a colleague at an awards dinner shortly before the 20th anniversary of the Baghdad bombing, and they reminded me that whoever tasked me with this work was probably also incredibly young and not equipped with the tools themselves to know how to limit exposure to potentially distressing content. This is not an excuse, but I hope it shows that some things have changed and that now most line managers would be able to support their colleagues to avoid the risk of vicarious trauma.

Our mental health can be affected whether we are exposed directly or remotely to distressing events. In 20 years of working in journalism, I have seen this too often. More recently, I have questioned why I did not spot the signs that another older male colleague was suffering. He died by suicide years after we covered a traumatic story together, and after a career covering an accumulation of difficult and dangerous news events. Of course, I don't know the full picture in terms of what he was enduring, but I remember asking myself if I could have done anything differently and feeling confused by how the newsroom responded to his death. They applauded his work and I wondered if anyone had actually taken the time to do that when he was alive, to ask him

how he really was. Had there been fewer taboos around talking openly, might his story have ended differently?

Too many journalists have ended their lives during my own career. I fear for others. We must do more to normalise conversations about mental health, because – even now, a generation on from when I started my work – journalists are still breaking. I feel fortunate to have survived, though there were times when I felt I might not, when even getting through the day felt like an insurmountable challenge, only managed by coping strategies and support from others.

I still find myself reliving aspects of my trauma sometimes. I still have really dark days too. When I was most unwell, intrusive memories would floor me, but now I am more aware of my reactions, of what helps and what does not. Now I am more aware of how much I need to pace myself, say no, take time alone, listen to my body. There are days when the sun seems to stubbornly sit behind the cloud, but these are days I know will pass. I know my story is just one person's history, from her perspective, but I hope that some of it will resonate and that others will take from it a recognition of the small part we can all play in sustaining the people who keep journalism alive.

1 Introduction

The costs of not addressing mental health are great. Also great are the costs of not ensuring that conversations around wellbeing are positioned front and centre in our work. Where journalists are not safe, they will take greater risks at work, their journalism will suffer, and so will their journalism colleagues. Where journalists are not safe, journalism will see reduced performance and productivity, rising presenteeism, problems with retention and increasing costs in terms of sickness and injury, as well as increased pressure and payouts related to staff turnover.

Good journalism relies on journalists being well, and yet the mental health of news media workers has simply not been a priority for many in our industry. This book seeks to make the case for why we need to take the mental health of our journalists seriously, for their sake and for the sake of journalism.

Like physical security, psychological safety in journalism has often been seen through a narrow Western lens. Conversations have been dominated by those who make up the status quo in newsrooms – straight, university-educated white men – further marginalising those who do not see themselves represented in these discussions. Although some stigma exists almost everywhere, in some countries where there are significant societal taboos, conversations about journalism and mental health may be almost non-existent. Furthermore, a focus on mental health can seem a privileged perspective, when you live in an environment that frequently exposes you to physical danger, or where your job as a journalist is regularly insecure and unpaid.

I spoke with more than 40 people from more than a dozen countries when writing this book, and I hope their diverse insights will offer new and more nuanced and inclusive perspectives. The aim is to provide practical insights into the connection between journalists' work and our mental health, and to consider the ways in which both the stories we cover and the environments in which we work affect us. It offers tips from people who recognise the realities of our work: journalists, clinicians who have treated people in the media, and other experts at the intersection of journalism and wellbeing. They share measures taken to support their own mental health and steps they have seen taken by individuals, institutions and the industry.

2 *Introduction*

The book begins by charting the history of research in this field and how conversations have evolved across time and cultures. It considers key moments that spurred change, sparking a recognition of the need to consider mental health in all forms and across our industry. But it also shows there are still significant taboos and stigmas in parts of the world and facing certain communities.

It also details the barriers within our industry that prevent conversations about mental health from becoming commonplace and how the environment of the newsroom has often conditioned the people working in it to keep quiet. The book therefore offers suggestions for creating more inclusive and open newsroom cultures, where people feel safe to speak without fear of repercussions.

While the issue of mental health in journalism has historically been seen through a narrow lens, this book shows there's a move towards considering how mental health exists across a wide spectrum. We all have mental health, as we all have physical health, and we experience it in different ways. The book draws out specific examples of systemic stressors, as well as highlighting hostile environments that have a greater impact upon certain people because of their identity, and calls for greater awareness in newsrooms of how identity-based violence and inequity can hurt specific communities.

Several chapters mention mental health conditions and include descriptions of how our bodies and brains typically respond to stress and trauma. Trauma, for the purposes of this book, derives from the Greek word for 'piercing' or 'wound' and refers to a distressing or disturbing experience, as well as the emotional response to such an event. However, this is not a science publication, nor am I a scientist. Mental health is still a contested field in many ways, and though I recognise that labels, names or diagnoses may be helpful for some, the focus of this book is on people, not pathology.

Throughout this book are reminders that it is normal for the body and brain to react in certain ways when exposed to terrible and traumatic things. As we would expect to make time for, and benefit from, support and resources for recovery from physical injury, psychological recovery also benefits from us being able to find support and resources. That might be through self-care, from friends and family, or via more specialised support from medical professionals; and our needs may vary over time.

If this book is about people, it is also a reminder that the skills that help make us good journalists can also help us from a mental health perspective. Empathy allows us to walk alongside those whose stories we amplify. We can also use it to promote our own wellbeing and that of others. One chapter shows the value of empathy in leadership. Without compassionate leaders walking the walk and talking the talk, newsrooms will not be able to normalise conversations around mental health.

During my research for this book and in my wider industry work, I have heard frequent expressions of good intent. People do care. Many recognise the importance of conversations about mental health, and the need to invest in

them. But many also feel unable to do so, juggling the relentless demands of journalism and diminishing resources, emerging from a global pandemic with extra pressures in their personal lives and a blurring of the boundaries between work and home. This book offers a clarion call. Investing in journalism and investing in journalists are not mutually incompatible.

We must take these conversations more seriously. There is an economic, emotional, ethical and efficiency cost to not doing so, for newsrooms and our news makers. Journalists are journalism's most precious resource and unless we invest in them, we risk losing them to ill-health, to burnout, stress. This book is dedicated to those of my colleagues who feel and have felt alone in their experience of mental health.

Those I interviewed come from all over the world: from Ireland to India, Pakistan to the Philippines, Mexico to Lebanon, Kenya to the United States, Germany to Canada. Some are journalists, while others are clinicians or work to promote more open conversations around journalism and mental health. Their collective wisdom is wide and shows there is no one single conversation around mental health, even within their own countries. Through their generous insights, therefore, they demonstrate there can be no singular approach to supporting the mental health of journalists; good practice differs depending on the context, just as there is no singular experience of mental health.

I have been humbled by how many of these individuals agreed to speak on the record to me. Unfortunately, I could not include everything I was told, but I have used all I learned to shape this book. For the purposes of consistency across my interviews, I asked colleagues versions of the following questions: how did you become involved in the field of mental health and journalism; how have you seen conversations change; what do you see as the most significant challenges; what does good practice look like?

My colleagues' insights are incorporated throughout the chapters, and in several instances, I share their stories at greater length, with their permission. Their experiences show that many aspects of mental health overlap, and therefore their inputs are integrated throughout the book, with some crossover of themes.

Although this book is based on a diverse group of interviews, I would have liked it to include more geographic breadth. I spent months trying to arrange conversations with many other people, but sadly could not secure as many as I would have liked. I do know that some people may still feel uncomfortable speaking openly with strangers about their mental health – even more reason for me to write this book.

We are all different, but we are all human. And sometimes, in the clamour to feed the news beast, I fear we forget this. Speaking with these individuals has reminded me that we all have that in common. My first question to all my interviewees was about how they became involved in the conversation around journalism and mental health. Many told me they were driven by their own personal experiences of being hurt. This is a testament to their empathy and compassion and an indictment of how often action is left to individuals

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rather than institutions or the industry. I hope hearing this multitude of diverse voices, many of them united by a common desire, will act as a call for collaborative action.

It has been a privilege to hear other people's stories. As journalists, our work centres on listening to and amplifying the stories of others. We are conditioned to not become the story. But those I spoke with told me frequently that hearing the stories of others can help, can enable them to feel less alone. At the heart of this book is an invitation to empathise, an invitation to remember the skills we have as storytellers, to listen actively, to do so non-judgementally, and to create and hold spaces where people share their authentic selves.

The following work is my attempt at a nuanced look at the history of conversations about the mental health of journalists, by considering the key challenges faced in this field by our industry, institutions and individuals and sharing examples of good practice. It cannot be entirely conclusive, but it is as comprehensive as possible. Without journalists, there would be no real journalism. We need to protect the messengers in order to protect the message, to ensure we can continue bearing witness. It is this mission that often motivates us to become journalists in the first place and it can be one of the most powerful protective measures for our mental health.

My own experience of journalistic injury brought me to the bottom, a place where I felt so alone and ashamed that I believed there was no way out and nobody who could help me. But there was, and during my recovery I committed to ensuring I did all I could so others did not suffer as I did. I know this is a lofty ideal, that people will continue to hurt, but I also recall someone messaging me after I first spoke about my PTSD, thanking me and telling me they had heard something of their experience in mine. I can only ever speak from my perspective. I shared more of my story in the preface and am profoundly grateful to those – some of whom I interviewed for this book – who walked alongside me during my darkest days.

2 The evolution of mental health conversations in journalism

The question that troubled me was: she was very smart, so why had she not reached out for help when she realised that she was getting into difficulties? And she said to me, 'Well, you don't understand this profession. If I told my editors I was feeling this way, they would never send me out in the field again.' This was 1999. And I thought this was pretty punitive.

—Professor Anthony Feinstein¹

In journalism, there is often a thin line between risk and reward. Although the physical dangers inherent in our work have been understood for a long time, actual discussions about journalism safety are relatively new. In order to understand how conversations developed around the psychological impact of journalists' work, it is necessary to consider the evolution of those around physical safety.

In the United Kingdom and the United States, home to some of the most well-resourced and long-standing newsrooms, initiatives involving physical safety really gained traction in the late 20th century. In 1981, the Committee to Protect Journalists² (CPJ) was founded, with its head office in the United States, in response to the harassment of the Paraguayan journalist Alcibiades González Delvalle. A little later, around the same time as the Balkans wars in the 1990s, the advent of cable television opened up the opportunity for continuous news and increased the pressure on journalists.

Around 140 journalists were killed³ after the break-up of Yugoslavia. One of them was the BBC journalist John Schofield, who was fatally shot in August 1995, close to the Bosnia–Croatia border. 'John Schofield was killed, and that really changed the dial in terms of our whole industry, looking at safety in general – you know, physical safety,'⁴ said Sarah Ward-Lilley MBE, a former managing editor of BBC News. 'His tragic death really kick-started the whole hostile environments training and then we had the Gulf Wars coming soon after that,' she added.

At around the same time, the first Hostile Environment and First Aid Training (HEFAT) courses were launched in the UK. By the end of the 1990s, courses were being offered to local journalists too, via the Rory Peck Trust, an