



THE IMPACT OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS ON JOURNALISTS CREATIVE POTENTIAL AND COGNITIVE EFFICIENCY

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary information ecosystem characterized by digital noise, fierce competition, and continuous technological transformations, occupational stress has emerged as a key factor influencing a journalist's performance. This paper examines the impact of stress on journalists' creative capabilities, initiative, and intrinsic motivation. Employing research methodologies such as literature review, questionnaire surveys, interviews, and creative activity data analysis, the study explores the mechanisms through which stress alters cognitive and emotional functions. Furthermore, key factors and actionable pathways for developing psychological resilience (stress tolerance) are discussed to mitigate the negative consequences of occupational pressure.

Journalism is a unique profession that demands not only rigorous professional skills but also high levels of creativity, initiative, and intrinsic motivation. However, journalists frequently face severe occupational stress stemming from intense work schedules, unpredictable events, public scrutiny, negative feedback, and high expectations regarding material quality. Although acute stress can occasionally serve as a stimulant to enhance short-term focus, chronic stress in journalism exerts a demonstrably negative impact on a journalist's creative potential.

Historically and continuously, journalism remains a profession fraught with high risks of psychological strain. These risks range from physical threats to safety in conflict zones ("hotspots") to the subtle, internal psychological challenges inherent to creative individuals [1, p. 89]. In the modern world—marked by information overload, market competition, and continuous technological changes - stress has become a primary determinant of a media professional's productivity. This research aims to investigate the influence of stress on journalists' creativity, initiative, and motivation, to analyze the underlying biological and psychological mechanisms, and to identify factors that cushion these adverse effects.

Stress activates the sympathetic nervous system, increasing the systemic secretion of adrenaline and cortisol. While these hormones temporarily heighten brain alertness, they simultaneously diminish activity in the prefrontal cortex—the anatomical region responsible for strategic planning, complex problem-solving, and abstract creative thinking.

Prolonged exposure to stress leads to a measurable decline in attention span, concentration, working memory, and analytical reasoning. Consequently, this cognitive impairment directly suppresses creativity, making it significantly harder for journalists to generate original editorial ideas, find non-standard solutions, or synthesize complex data streams.

Persistent stress precipitates states of anxiety, depression, apathy, and emotional exhaustion. These negative emotional states directly suppress creative impulses, strangling the psychological freedom required for creative expression. Occupational stress weakens confidence in one's own professional competencies. When journalists begin to doubt their expertise and capabilities, their willingness to take initiative and accept leadership over challenging new media projects drops drastically. Stress leads to risk-averse behavior, encouraging journalists to seek safe, comfortable, but routine topics. Fearing mistakes or harsh criticism, media professionals become conservative in their decision-making, turning down ambitious ideas. Furthermore, elevated stress often leads to rushed, flawed choices regarding story angles, information sources, or presentation formats.

Stress impairs intrinsic motivation—the internal sense of satisfaction derived from meaningful work and self-expression through journalism. Stress erodes extrinsic motivation linked to public recognition, professional awards, or financial compensation. When enormous creative efforts fail to yield expected recognition, journalists experience deep professional disappointment. Severe stress suppresses the urge for professional self-development. Exhausted journalists often forgo advanced training courses, professional literature, and scientific/practical conferences.

Journalism is inherently coupled with high stress levels. Rigid deadlines, event unpredictability, editorial pressure, and ethical dilemmas often culminate in professional burnout. Stress tolerance (resilience) stands out as a fundamental prerequisite for media professionals.

Whether working in print, broadcast, or digital media, a reporter requires physical and psychological endurance to survive overload. The psychological strain on editorial staff is immense. As veteran journalist and author Andrey Dmitrievich Konstantinov notes, journalists frequently face professional deformation that severely alters their mental well-being; while physical danger threatens journalists intermittently, psychological strain acts continuously, 'much like penetrating radiation—at times invisible, yet equally lethal' [2].

Psychologist and journalist Darya Yakusheva underscores that reporters exist in an atmosphere of constant stress, even when their duties carry no physical danger. Journalists consume and process dozens of overwhelming news streams daily, training their brains to work to exhaustion: "You realize that you must remain tuned into the latest news nearly around the clock. Incoming calls, social media feeds, official statements, leaks, insider reports, press releases—and amidst it all, you stand alone, forced to orient yourself instantly and transform a sea of raw data into readable material. And you know there is a massive line of competitors, meaning if you relax even for a moment, you miss a great story" [3].

Major factors increasing stress among journalists include:

- **High Work Intensity:** Short deadlines, urgent information processing, and constant readiness for emergency assignments.

- **Unpredictability:** Handling emotionally heavy, negative, or inherently dangerous events.
- **Fierce Competition:** Continuous rivalry with competing outlets for exclusive news.
- **Public Pressure:** Hostile social media comments, peer criticism, and public scrutiny.
- **Moral and Ethical Dilemmas:** Navigating the tension between objectivity, sensationalism, and ethical reporting standards.

Stress resilience is not an immutable innate trait, but a dynamic skill set that can be cultivated and perfected through conscious practice. Key mitigation strategies include:

- **Stress Management Practices:** Relaxation techniques, yoga, meditation, and regular physical exercise to maintain emotional balance.
- **Emotional Intelligence Development:** Understanding personal and others' emotions to manage conflicts, build constructive dialogue, and foster healthy editorial relationships.
- **Supportive Work Environment:** Encouragement and backing from colleagues, editors, and newsroom management.
- **Finding Meaning in Work:** Maintaining a strong awareness of the societal impact and higher purpose of journalism to sustain inspiration.
- **Self-Regulation Skills:** Controlling emotional reactions, practicing mindfulness, and ensuring dedicated periods for mental reset.
- **Mental Health Maintenance:** Prioritizing adequate sleep, proper nutrition, and physical activity.
- **Time Management:** Setting realistic task priorities, structuring working hours, and avoiding continuous multitasking.
- **Professional Psychological Assistance:** Seeking help from psychologists or psychotherapists when stress becomes unmanageable.

Stress is an inescapable element of journalistic work, yet its detrimental impact on creative capabilities and cognitive performance can be effectively mitigated. By mastering stress management, fostering emotional intelligence, building supportive newsroom cultures, and re-anchoring professional mission, journalists can protect their creative potential, avoid emotional burnout, and consistently deliver high-quality media content.

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