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"I Empathize With Them": How Newsroom Leadership Assesses Mental Health and Hostility Toward Their Journalists

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ABSTRACT

Journalists have long faced harassment, but recent research shows the issue growing in intensity and impact. With journalists leaving the profession at alarming rates and harassment having lasting effects—like self-censorship and mental health struggles—it is vital scholars explore how newsroom leadership assesses the issue and what actions they take. Using organizational support theory (OST) as a foundation, a survey of U.S. newsroom leaders working at local TV, print, and public radio institutions was conducted, revealing managers see harassment as an issue, and believe it happens more often than reporters do. However, they continue to take a reactionary (and not proactive) approach to mental health among their staffs, relying on journalists to report their struggles and ask for help.

KEYWORDS

Harassment; hostility toward the press; mental health; journalistic well-being; organizational support; survey

Hostility against the press is not a new issue in the U.S., nor are journalists' struggles with mental health (Fedler 2004). For decades, journalist have had to hone resiliency as they navigate a profession that is wrought with low pay, long hours, public scrutiny, personal attacks, trauma exposure, and associated mental health struggles. However, while these challenges and seeming "features" of journalistic work are not novel, they *are* gaining more attention. Journalists and scholars have begun to speak out, highlighting the need to better understand the experiences (over studies focused solely on news content), and advocate for their well-being (e.g., Baroni and Marinho 2023; Hughes et al. 2021; Mesmer 2023). And for good reason: in recent years, "journalists have shown increasing frustration, anxiety, and mental health-related issues in relation to their work" (p. 859, Holton et al. 2023). In many instances, this comes after covering traumatic events, as well as repeated attacks from the public and politicians (Carlson, Robinson, and Lewis 2021; Jukes, Fowler-Watt, and Rees 2022).

The effects of this trauma, harassment, and overall job stress are pointed—including diagnoses of PTSD, anxiety, unhealthy coping strategies, and intentions to leave journalism (Kim and Shin 2025; Miller and Kocan 2024; Seely 2019). While research has looked at journalists' experience to understand hostility's nature and effects (Waisbord 2020), as well as struggles with mental illness (Seely 2019), few have examined how

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newsroom managers assess these issues and what they do to address these concerns—particularly from the managers themselves. As a result, newsroom leaders were surveyed from across the U.S. to examine how they view the nature and severity of abuse against their journalists, as well as the state of their journalists' mental health. Based on findings, this research makes tangible recommendations for individual and organizational level changes that could benefit individual journalists and their well-being. Moreover, as abuse of journalists mounts, and mental health becomes an increasing conversation, this scholarship adds to understanding news work as we seek to better understand the effects of this abuse.

Hostility toward the Press

Because of the critical role journalists play in society, they face issues of harassment, hostility, and violence globally (Carlson, Robinson, and Lewis 2021; Hamada 2022). This abuse comes in many forms, from physical hitting and stalking to online name-calling, unwanted sexual advances, and doxing (Miller 2021). In fact, digital spaces are hubs of abuse for journalists, with many noting the harassment and violence can occur frequently (Posetti et al. 2021). The overt connection to online abuse is perhaps the most obvious connection to digital journalism, as it relates to "digital technologies" (Steensen and Westlund 2021). However, scholars such as Robinson, Lewis, and Carlson (2019) note that this also includes research "occurring around news and other acts of journalism as they relate to broader issues" (p. 370). As online abuse often leads to abuse of journalists in person, the study of journalists' experiences with harassment—and the subsequent mental health effects they face—are not mutually exclusive and must be examined as a "broader issue" mentioned by Robinson, Lewis, and Carlson (2019).

This issue, while growing in scope and study, has long been seen as an expected risk of the profession (Claesson 2023), causing journalists and organizations to normalize abuse (Adams 2018). Some journalists see abuse as a "badge of honor" to which one must simply grow "thick skin" (Chen et al. 2020, p. 887; Miller 2023, p. 14). However, others see abuse as the "price you pay" to do journalism as a woman or person of color (Miller 2023, p.14). This is because the attacks on journalists are most pointed for women who receive more harassment online and in-person when compared to men colleagues (Nelson 2023; Panievsky, 2023; Posetti et al. 2021). A 2018 study found that 70% of women journalists experience varying forms of threats, harassment, and attacks as part of their work (Ferrier 2018). And women journalists not only receive more sexual harassment than their men colleagues, but they also received more non-sexual harassment as well (Miller, 2023). Furthermore, journalists from marginalized backgrounds experience increased abuse compared to their white, cis-gendered colleagues (Waisbord 2020)—leaving harassment often the most pointed for journalists with intersectional identities (Miller and Nelson 2022). While some news organizations have begun to address this through safety protocols or trainings, there remain few mechanisms to confront these issues from the organizational level—with most newsroom leaders seeing it as an issue for journalists to confront individually (Holton et al. 2023). However, research has made it clear this issue transcends individuals.

Exposure to harassment in relations to one's work has effects impacting not just the individual journalist, but the institution. For example, harassment causes many journalists to self-censor for protection from possible further abuse (Binns 2017; Relly and González de Bustamante 2014, Miranda et al. 2023). This includes avoiding interviews with certain people or avoiding coverage of certain topics (Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring 2016), which affects the democratic nature of journalism (Miller 2021). Harassment affects journalists' credibility by undermining their reporting and questioning the overall value of the institution (Egelhofer and Lecheler 2019). While these effects are detrimental to journalism, individually journalists face many effects as well. Waisbord (2023) notes, "Vicious, malicious harassment, laced with death threats, racism, and sexual violence, can leave devastating psychological consequences" (p. 1763).

Individual Effects: Mental Health

Struggles with mental health have long been a part of journalistic work (Reinardy 2009). While salary, schedules, and deadlines can add stress, it is often exposure to trauma that is a larger issue—both covering traumatic events and experiencing traumatic events through harassment and violence (Smith et al. 2015). This leaves journalists at a higher risk of developing mental illnesses (Greenberg et al. 2009). A 2022 study of Canadian journalists found that 69% say they struggle with anxiety while 46% say they struggle with depression (Pearson and Seglins 2022). Moreover, about 11% of journalists—especially after covering Covid-19—report prominent symptoms of PTSD. Many journalists report unhealthy coping strategies like poor diet, withdrawal from friends/family, and even binge drinking (e.g., Holton et al. 2023; Kim and Shin 2025; Seely 2019). Some rates are alarming, with 46% reporting higher-risk drinking and 26% reporting as heavy drinkers (Pearson and Seglins 2022).

Despite the prevalence of mental health struggles, journalism is plagued by a "tough-it-out" culture, in which exposure to trauma, like harassment, is considered an expected part of the job (p. 1818, Claesson 2023; Adams 2018). Journalists are expected to toughen up and become immune or be seen as weak and emotional. These masculinized views are common (Claesson 2023; Meeks 2013) and as a result create a culture in which journalists are rewarded for toughness and feel they will be judged as weak for sharing their struggles (Claesson 2023; Greenberg et al. 2009). A 2009 study revealed journalists are more likely to turn to their family members for help with their mental health rather than their employers and are often hesitant about seeking professional help (Greenberg et al. 2009). For these journalists, the fear is judgment, with 47% saying they believe they would be less likely to be given roles/tasks if their managers found out (Greenberg et al. 2009). This is increasingly troubling as newsroom managers are often the primary responder to issues related to work (i.e., feeling unsafe at work, needing time off, etc.), and the primary advocate to connect staff to company-covered mental health services.

Theoretical Framework: Organizational Support

Management studies have long examined organizational support theory (OST), which suggests employees develop perceptions about how much their organizations care

about them and their well-being (Eisenberger et al. 1997). This theory contains concepts of perceived organizational support (POS), perceived supervisor support (PSS), and perceived coworker support (PCS). Ng and Sorensen (2008) define PSS and PCS as the extent to which supervisors and coworkers provide support, whether instrumentally or emotionally.

Regarding POS, "Employees evidently believe that the organization has a general positive or negative orientation toward them that encompasses both recognition of their contributions and concern for their welfare" (Eisenberger et al. 2002, p. 565). POS has been associated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and other attitudinal outcomes (Kurtessis et al. 2017). Notably, POS results in greater psychological well-being—meaning the more an employee believes their organization supports them, the greater their mental health and happiness (Kurtessis et al. 2017).

Transitively, employees have views about how their supervisors care about their contributions and well-being (Eisenberger et al. 2002). This is known as perceived supervisor support, or PSS. The National Labor Relations Act in the U.S. defines a supervisor as one person with authority over another employee or the responsibility to direct their work (NLRA 1935). PSS is tied to POS, as employees tend to view their supervisor's treatment as indicative of their organization's support (Eisenberger et al. 1997). As supervisor's evaluations of employees are conveyed to upper management, employees tend to see them even more as associated and positively correlated (Eisenberger et al. 2002). As a result, PSS has a positive relationship with POS (Eisenberger et al. 2002) and is found to have a strong impact on employees' well-being (Van Emmerik, Euwema, and Bakker 2007). Moreover, PSS is found to have an even stronger relationship with job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and affective commitment than PCS (Ng and Sorensen 2008). As a result, managers should care about how their employees experience vitality and learning at work, as this has a direct impact on stress, burnout, and overall health (Spreitzer 1995).

Because OST and its related PSS concept deal with outcomes of well-being, this psychology-based theory is well-suited for exploring the well-being of journalists as to how it relates to newsroom managers. This is especially pertinent as one explores well-being elements like mental health and support, which investigate psychological perceptions and effects. In newsrooms, scholars such as Reinardy (2009) have shown that the more a journalist feels supported by their organizations, the more satisfied they are. Miller (2021) noted that while supervisor support improved a journalist's job satisfaction, harassment negatively affected satisfaction. This suggests support is key to journalists' happiness and well-being when facing negative work experiences.

However, journalists are not getting the support many believe they need. Miranda et al. (2023) found that 94.8% believed to some degree "that their news organizations should take more concrete steps to protect them" (p. 5139). In another study, many journalists said they felt little support after experiencing a traumatic event—especially when caring for their mental health (Kocan and Miller 2024). What was often noted by journalists was not that their news managers did not care, but that they perhaps did not understand the impact or severity of the frequent abuse (Holton et al. 2023).

The issue is two-fold: journalists often feel their organizations do not have instruments in place to proactively protect them nor provide the support they need as

they cope with repercussions of exposure to trauma (Miranda et al. 2023). This is pointed for journalists who face more abuse (women, journalists of color, younger journalists) whose managers are often older, white, or men (Ferrier and Garud-Patkar 2018; Waisbord 2023). Scholars like Waisbord (2023) say organizations need to make advancements in this area, as they have been slow to "recognize and prioritize the problem" of harassment (p. 1764).

This lack of organizational support ultimately influences many journalists to leave the industry (Mathews, Bélair-Gagnon, and Carlson 2023). It is not "deadlines, long hours, clashes between work and family" that most influence journalists' intentions to leave, but lack of support and encouragement from managers (Reinardy 2009, p. 126). Scholars like Binns (2017) warn news managers to act against harassment of their journalists—particularly online—or they will continue seeing increasing numbers of journalists leave the industry.

Research Questions

While researchers have done well to explore harassment toward journalists and the effects of such abuse, few have looked directly to newsroom managers to better assess how *they* evaluate the issue, and what they say they do to support their staff when struggles arise. Organizational support theory's suggestion that the more an employee feel supported by their supervisor, the greater their well-being and perceived organizational support. As a result, this research explores how journalism supervisors assess employee well-being through the following research questions:

RQ1: What factors affect how newsroom managers assess the hostility their reporting staffs face?
RQ2: How do news managers compare to reporting journalists in their assessment of harassment issues?
RQ3: How do newsroom managers assess the mental health of the journalists they manage?
RQ4: What do newsroom managers do to address journalists' mental health?

Method

To understand the possible disparity between what journalists say they experience and managers' evaluation of those experiences, this study surveyed a sample of U.S. newsroom managers at local newspapers, public radio stations, and TV news stations. The survey explored questions about how managers examine hostility toward local journalists. Specifically, how do they view the problem faced by their journalism staffs? What do they believe to be the effects (e.g., mental health, poor reporting, exodus of staff) if any, and what are they doing to address it? These newsroom managers were also asked about how they view and assess the mental health of the journalists they manage.[1]

Sample

The sample was constructed by randomly selecting half (105) of the TV news markets in the U.S. according to the 2023 Nielsen ratings (see e.g., Miller 2021).[2] This was done for two reasons: (1) Doing this helped ensure the sample was gathered from news organizations operating in the same cities to adequately compare, and (2) there are more cities with newspapers than with TV/radio stations, therefore utilizing cities with TV stations ensured only towns with all three would be sampled. From there, the "about me" or "meet the team" pages were searched for all the TV, print, and public radio stations operating in the market (e.g., McIntyre, Dahmen, and Abdenour 2018). If emails were available for staff, they were collected.[3]

Newsroom managers were defined in this study as those working directly with reporting staff who hold a position of power over them to manage their assignments, listen to concerns, and influence their work directly. Emails were collected for News Directors, Editors, Sports Directors, General Managers, Content Directors, etc. The email recruitment began by asking for only those who directly supervised reporting staff to complete the survey. This weeded out many email recipients who are not in a managerial role. Furthermore, the first survey question used skip logic to weed out recipients who are not directly managing reporting staff. This approach is in line with work by other scholars, who note a clear definition of "supervisor" is not provided to allow participants to create their own meaning (Goyanes and Gentile 2018). However, using titles such as news director or editor aligns with pervious literature as to how newsroom leadership is defined (e.g., Papper and Henderson 2022), as well as understandings of newsroom operations.

The survey was sent to 1,142 email addresses. Based on job titles, the net was cast wide to ensure no one was missed in selection, though several of those included did reached out to indicate they did not manage reporting staffs. There was a response rate of 32%, with a completion rate of 21%. In total, 362 surveys were started, with 238 completed. After cleaning data and removing responses that indicated they did not supervise journalists, 133 surveys remained. While this number may seem low, it is not uncommon for a news organization to have only one person who directly manages reporting staff. Coupled by historically low response rates from journalists (Molyneux and Zamith 2022), this means this response rate was strong considering both the small sample size and the low rate of responses when emailing journalists.

The sample was made up of 36.4% women, 61.4% men, 0.7% non-binary identifying persons ($n = 1$), and 0.7% as gender not listed ($n = 1$). Sadly, the underrepresentation of women in this study is on par with the national makeup of women in newsroom leadership (Papper and Henderson 2022). Moreover, scholars such as Papper and Henderson (2024) note the response rates among women news directors is also lower than that of men in the same positions.

Racially, the sample was made up of respondents with the following identities: 3.1% Black or African American, 1.5% Asian or Asian American, 0.8% Indigenous/Native-American/Alaska Native, 92.4% White, and 2.3% as not listed. Most leadership being made up of white mangers is on par with national leadership trends (Papper and Henderson 2022). Additionally, 4.6% of respondents identified as "Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino/a."

Survey

To aid in the study's reliability and validity, the survey was sent to five newsroom managers ahead of launch, who provided feedback and clarity. The survey also utilized an established scale for examining harassment of journalists in previous research (e.g., Miller, 2021). Scale answers were later compared to answers provided by reporting journalists from a data set shared by Miller (2021). This allowed the researcher to compare how news managers view harassment's frequency with that of reporting journalists in the U.S.

The scale for examining journalists' perceived mental health was built based on research from scholars such as Reinardy (2009), Kocan and Miller (2024), and Seely (2019). The questionnaire noted, "Research has shown journalists are increasingly showing signs of mental health concerns because of their work. Every journalist is different, however, when thinking broadly about the news/sports staff you manage (namely byline/reporting journalists), how often do you believe their mental health is directly affected by the following?" Options ranged from work features such as hours and pay, to exposure to trauma or a lack of support from managers (PSS), their organization (POS), or coworkers (PCS).[4]

The survey consisted of both qualitative and quantitative questions. Qualitative responses were utilized to allow respondents to add insight where previous research did not lend enough information to create quantitative questions. These were utilized to ask managers how they support staff, who they believe experiences the most abuse, and what the effects of abuse are. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Through constant comparison, responses where coded into themes, then reviewed for further refinement (Memon, Umrani, and Pathan 2017). This data adds explanatory value to quantitative responses and is also valuable data itself (Wimmer and Dominick 2013). Roughly 75% of qualitative questions were completed—which is expected considering some questions used skip logic based on the quantitative responses.

In accordance with Molyneux and Zamith's (2022) recommendations, the survey was kept short to increase the response rate, with a median completion time of 15 min. In addition, an incentive was provided for those who completed the survey (Molyneux and Zamith 2022), such that for every survey completed (up to 250), $1 would be donated to the Committee to Protect Journalists ($238 was donated to the organization).

Limitations

While this research has strong implications for journalism research, it is not without limitations. The primary limitations are (1) the low response rate and (2) small sample size. Firstly, as previously mentioned, there was a response rate of 32%, with a completion rate of 21%. However, of those who completed the study, only about half were in positions where they managed reporting staff. Therefore, while the previous numbers are high, the net N was quite low. This contributed greatly to the second issue, which was a small sample. While this is common for journalism

research (see Molyneux and Zamith 2022), it means findings are not generalizable. Therefore, one must be cautious in drawing large-scale conclusions from this research.

Because newsrooms often have only one person who manages reporting staff, it can be difficult to reach this smaller population. Additionally, with shrinking news staff (and as this research shows, with how many managers also report), editors and news directors are frequently trying to do more with less. This often leaves little time or interest in completing online surveys. Of note, recent policies prohibiting research/survey participation (such as one created by the Hearst Media Group) were also cited by many newsroom managers, who respectfully declined in email to participate. These realities of conducting research resulted in data that is valuable, but limited in its broader implications.

Another limitation is the lack of response from diverse respondents. While many response rates for women or people of color are close to that of their actual representation within newsrooms (e.g., there are fewer women in leadership compared to men—thus lower representation here), these voices are perhaps the most important to understand. Therefore, while the sample in this paper may reflect percentages equal to that of many U.S. newsrooms, that small number hinders extrapolation of any significant findings. For example, scholars like Miller and Nelson (2022) note that while reporting staff who identify as women and people of color are facing the most abuse from those outside the newsroom (online and in person), they are often not represented in these management roles, where policies are made, or support is provided. With a larger sample of non-white men, stronger findings can emerge about the role personal identities play in the assessment, prevention, and support around harassment and mental health. However, this paper could not make any statistically significant conclusions from such a small sample (i.e., only 8% were non-white, and 36% women).

Findings and Analysis

Findings indicate that newsroom managers see harassment and mental health as key issues in newsrooms. The findings below are broken into three sections as they answer RQs 1–4.

Hostility

RQ1 asks, "How do news managers assess the hostility their reporting staffs face?" A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict how severe participants view hostility toward the reporting staffs they manage when controlling for demographic factors such as age, years in leadership, years in journalism, racial identification, gender identity, newsroom size, and medium, as well as whether they currently do reporting. A significant regression equation was found ($F(8,117) = 3.635$, $p = 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.199. This indicates a positive relationship. Therefore, managers working in larger newsrooms and who report regularly, often report beliefs that their reporting staff experience more harassment.

Table 1. Multiple linear regression predicting how frequently managers believe reporters are harassed ($N = 133$).

	β
Years in journalism	−0.058
Years in leadership/management	0.100
Regularly report (0 = No, 1 = Yes)	−0.185*
Medium	−0.106
Age in years	−0.180
Gender identity (0 = Women, 1 = Men)	−0.118
Racial identity	0.011
Newsroom size	0.261**
Total R^2 (%)	19.9

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$
Values are final standardized beta (β) coefficients, except explained variance (R^2).

Of the managers surveyed, 58% say they do not do any reporting, while 42% say they still "regularly" report. When asked on a scale of "0 = never happens" to "6 = always happens," how often do you believe your reporting staff experience 16 different forms of harassment, managers who regularly report averaged 1.107 compared to an average of 1.627 for managers who do not regularly report.

This finding, while perhaps surprising, is likely the result of factors associated with working in cities with larger circulations/viewership. For example, news managers who regularly report are more associated with smaller news organizations who perhaps operate on smaller budgets and in smaller markets. While one might assume a manager who is out in the "trenches" with reporters would be more sympathetic, the reality is they are likely experiencing significantly less harassment compared to reporters who face more visibility in larger cities working for larger news organizations (e.g., Miller and Lewis 2022). This is supported by the additional finding that the more editorial staff an organization has, the more managers believe their reporters face harassment—indicating the relationship has more to do with organizational/market size, and less to do with actual experience of reporting.

To better understand how news managers assess hostility faced by reporting staffs, they were asked if abuse affected their staff. In total, 15% said staff are not affected, 2% said staff are affected professionally, 25% said staff are affected personally, and 58% said staff are affected both personally and professionally. This suggests that 85% of news managers believe staff are affected in some way by hostility, particularly in their personal lives.

For those who indicated there was an effect, they were asked a qualitative follow-up about what those effects looked like. There were four effects that emerged consistently: (1) disillusionment with the journalism field and thoughts of leaving, (2) avoidance of covering certain people or topics, (3) feeling unsafe or fearful, and (4) decreased confidence.

Firstly, managers noted their staff became disillusioned with the profession, noting that while many expect the low pay and long hours/tough schedules, the hostility and abuse add an unexpected element. As one noted, "I have seen it make them question whether they want to continue in this profession." Another stated, "They begin to have doubts about staying in this field, which is demanding and comparatively low paid." Secondly, managers noted some journalists would avoid covering certain topics or interviewing certain people. For example, "it makes them wary of

doing their jobs (i.e., reporting on certain people/subjects/things) because they might be afraid of a similar or repeated reaction." This effect is possibly more common than managers note, as is well documented in literature (e.g., Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring 2016), and possible journalists would not want to admit to their supervisors they are professionally affected (Greenberg et al. 2009).

Thirdly, managers noted hostility has led to an increase in fear and more discussions about safety. One manager noted, "These sorts of instances lead to distrust of the public and in some cases a feeling in public that your safety is compromised." Another noted, "They are much more cautious when they leave the building." Some even went as far to suggest this effect is most pointed for women, arguing "I believe that the female-identifying and presenting members of my staff have personally been affected by this and it has led to feelings of terror in their day-to-day lives."

Lastly, managers noted that after experiencing hostility, reporters have decreased confidence. This included fear of covering certain topics or more controversial stories. One manager noted a journalist requested to no longer cover controversial topics. Another noted, "They have doubts about their own abilities and talents, and second-guess doing tougher, more meaningful stories out of fear they will be attacked, either physically or verbally." Ultimately, managers surveyed believe that the abuse shakes journalists' confidence, leading to low efficacy and self-censorship.

While this was not an effect, what stood out was that managers noted age was a large factor in who was most affected by abuse. As one respondent noted, "Most of our journalists are recent college graduates who are still growing in their professional maturity and, in most cases, lack life experience. I have found that these employees have heightened sensitivity to incidents like these, and take it very personally, whereas others with more life experience or maturity may not or may be less affected." They noted younger journalists lack "thick skin" that more experienced journalists possess, suggesting this is a trait that has developed. One manager noted, "As they learn to be great journalists, they also have to learn how to manage reactions they experience from their viewers. I believe that they are affected both personally and professionally, due to their lack of experience and maturity." Recent research by Mesmer (2023) suggests that younger journalists often feel unprepared for such abuse in the field. When considered together, this suggests that managers believe young journalists must learn to normalize the abuse so that it does not affect them, or they will likely leave the profession (Table 1).

Managers vs. Reporters

RQ2 asks: "How do news managers compare to reporting journalists in their assessment of harassment issues?" When asked how much they agree that harassment is an issue, 85% of respondents "somewhat agreed," "agreed," or "strongly agreed." Interestingly, managers surveyed see this issue as occurring more frequently than reporting staff. In Miller's 2021 study, they examined how often U.S.-based print and broadcast journalists experience 16 key forms of harassment. Data from that study was compared to how often newsroom managers believe staffs experience the same 16 forms of harassment. Table 2 shows that for all harassment forms, news managers believed their reporters experienced harassment more frequently than journalists

Table 2. Mean frequency of types of harassment based on position ($N = 592$).

Forms of harassment	Harassment components	Journalist	Manager
Incivility and disruptive harassment	Had your appearance critiqued or made fun of	1.77** (SD = 1.70)	2.29** (SD = 0.1.74)
	Been called "fake news"	2.63*** (SD = 1.74)	3.40*** (SD = 1.57)
	Been called offensive names or profanities, such as an "Idiot" or "fat b**ch"	1.66** (SD = 1.67)	2.12** (SD = 1.59)
	Had someone intentionally try to embarrass you	1.86** (SD = 1.63)	2.25** (SD = 1.53)
	Had interviews or standups interrupted by name-calling or gestures	1.09** (SD = 1.53)	1.56** (SD = 1.53)
Sexual harassment	Been touched in an unwanted sexual manner	0.34*** (SD=.88)	0.73*** (SD = 1.02)
	Been sent sexual pictures, such as images of genitals	0.34** (SD = 1.03)	0.61** (SD = 0.95)
	Been solicited for sex or sexual acts	0.35 (SD=.98)	0.53 (SD = 1.01)
	Received repeated requests for dates	0.94** (SD = 1.54)	1.36** (SD = 1.44)
	Been stalked	0.50*** (SD = 1.14)	1.21*** (SD = 1.30)
	Had people make jokes or derogatory comments about your gender, such as sexist comments	0.92*** (SD = 1.50)	1.80*** (SD = 1.51)
Personally attacking harassment	Had people make jokes or derogatory comments about your race or ethnicity	0.41*** (SD = 1.09)	1.37*** (SD = 1.47)
	Had people make jokes or derogatory comments about your religion	0.27*** (SD=.87)	0.79*** (SD = 1.17)
	Been doxed (i.e., had your personal information released)	0.31*** (SD=.93)	0.79*** (SD = 1.08)
	Been threatened with physical harm (to you or your family)	0.66*** (SD = 1.11)	1.16*** (SD = 1.31)
	Been physically attacked, such as hit, pushed, slapped, kicked or spit on	0.18*** (SD = 0.54)	0.48*** (SD = 0.86)

Numbers are means from a scale of 0 = never to 6 = always.
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$, Indicates a significant relationship based on gender.

themselves believed they did. In total 16 individual independent samples *t*-tests revealed the differences were statistically significant for 15 of the 16 harassment elements.[5]

Close examination of Table 2 reveals that managers surveyed tend to believe harassment occurs more often for their reporting staff than journalists report. While it is unclear why this might be the case, there are some likely reasons. For example, when managing reporters, you are the point of contact for them when they are having issues, including experiences with harassment. When acting as the point person for several journalists, it becomes easy to have what might be less common interactions for your journalists seem more common when having to help manage several journalists at once. This could be filing police reports for stalkers, responding to social media trolls, or adjusting schedules so journalists do not report alone.

Mental Health

RQ3 asks, "how do newsroom managers assess the mental health of the journalists they manage?" When asked "how common do you believe it is for the journalists you manage to struggle with their mental health?" a majority saw it as a relatively

common issue. In total, 38% said slightly common, 26% said somewhat common, and 12% said very common, which is roughly 75% of newsroom managers saying mental health is a struggle for many of their reporters. When asked how common they believe it was for journalists generally in the U.S., the number is even higher, with 92% saying it is a common issue. This data reveals that while newsroom leadership does see mental health as a problem, they believe the problem to be even worse outside their newsroom.

To better understand what factors predict a newsroom manager's likelihood of seeing mental health as a common problem for their staffs, a multiple linear regression was calculated. A significant regression equation was found ($F(5, 122) = 3.299$, $p = 0.008$), with an R^2 of 0.119. As evident in Table 3, age had a negative, statistically significant relationship with how common a manager believes the journalists they manage struggle with mental health. Therefore, older managers are less likely to see mental health struggles as a common problem for the staff they manage.

RQ4 asks, "What do newsroom managers do to address journalists' mental health?" Qualitative data was gathered to address this. Four main points emerged consistently in respondents' written responses: (1) offer time off, (2) point journalists to company-supported counseling services, (3) offer a listening ear, and (4) regular check-ins with reporters.

Firstly, news managers said they offer time off to those who need a mental health break. This included everything from leaving work early, to unlimited days off, though the most common was a few days off after an incident. Others also noted these days off come with a "no-questions-asked" policy. They noted, "as a manager, I'm extremely lenient when people need to take a mental health day." Another respondent noted, "I give them time off. I can't change their work schedule or give them a pay raise or make deadlines go away."

Secondly, news managers pointed to company funded counseling services. In total 10% of respondents said their company has no such services, 81% said their company did, and 9% were unsure. These free (or low cost) therapist visits ranged from virtual to in-person, or a few free visits, such as five to ten. Some even noted their organizations had "in-house therapists." What emerged as interesting was how many managers wrote specific details about the coverage and plans provided for mental health care. Others knew such coverage existed, but didn't know any details. For example, one respondent noted "Not sure—it's part of our benefits. I haven't used it." The divide between respondents was stark.

Table 3. Multiple linear regression model predicting how common managers believe it is for their reporting staff to struggle with their mental health ($N = 83$).

	β
Age in years	−0.266**
Gender identity (0 = Women, 1 = Men)	−0.138
Medium	0.032
Racial identity	−0.032
Newsroom size	0.136
Total R^2 (%)	11.9

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.
Values are final standardized beta (β) coefficients, except explained variance (R^2).

The third way news managers addressed mental health concerns is by offering to listen. This was the most common tactic mentioned. They note that they "Offer a sympathetic ear and a referral to company resources if desired." Another noted, "I listen and show them how to get help. I do not have the power to change schedules or situations." Many suggest that listening to concerns and allowing journalists to vent can allow them to share their own struggles or point to resources.

There is a pressing issue with these first three mental health reactions. Primarily, they rely on the journalist to come forward and advocate for themselves or be open and honest about mental health struggles. As one respondent noted, "If my team ever came to me with a struggle, I would support them any way I could …" The issue lies in relying on journalists to come forward.

In the survey, news managers were asked how open they believe the journalists they manage are with them about mental health struggles. While 2% said definitely not, 32% said probably not, 35% said might or might not, 23% said probably yes, and 8% said definitely yes. This means 70% of newsroom managers are uncertain about the transparency of their staff as it relates to mental health struggles. This begs the question that if managers believe staff are withholding information about their mental health struggles, how accurate are news managers' interpretations of the issue, especially as it relates to how they support and react to concerns? It may not be enough to have a reactionary approach to mental health issues in the newsroom, such as listening or offering a few days off, as those require the journalists to come forward first.

However, the fourth tactic of checking in with reporting staff uses a more proactive approach. One respondent noted, "I empathize with them. I check in with them frequently—daily quite often. I look for triggers or emails that indicate they are under stress." This tactic was less common, compared to the previous three. These respondents note that by checking in regularly, they can try to address issues before they escalate. One respondent noted journalism often has a culture of silence, and check-ins can help to address that: "The nature of journalism is taxing from a mental health standpoint. The first line of support is communication. No one is superhuman. You must give journalists the time to recover, the time to vent, the time to air grievances. No one should suffer in secret. People often do, but communication can help break those barriers."

Discussion and Conclusion

Journalism has a known harassment problem (Binns 2017; Relly and González de Bustamante 2014), but there continues to be a lack of organizational and managerial support for journalists under attack (Bélair-Gagnon et al. 2022; Henrichsen 2022). This lack of support leaves many journalists feeling isolated and at times undervalued (Holton et al. 2023; Kocan and Miller 2024). As a result, this study surveyed newsroom managers to better understand how they assess the issues of harassment and mental health of the journalists they manage, as well as what actions they take to combat and respond to said issues. For newsroom managers surveyed they see harassment as occurring frequently and regularly for staff, especially for women and journalists of color. Compared to previous data, news managers, on average, believe harassment

occurs more frequently than reporting journalists do. What's more, they believe that such abuse affects staff. As findings indicated, 85% of managers surveyed said journalists are affected in some way. This includes: (1) disillusionment and thoughts of leaving the business, (2) avoidance of covering certain people/topics, (3) feeling unsafe or fearful, and (4) decreased confidence in the ability to do the job.

While managers see harassment and hostility as a job reality, there was an interesting divide in how they believed it affected staff. While it is troubling that nearly 15% of managers believed their staff were not affected, the interesting divide came in who believed their staff were professionally affected, with 25% saying staff were *only* personally affected while 58% said they were affected both personally and professionally. For example, several managers made comments like this: "They are upset by the comments but not intimidated to keep doing their jobs well," as well as, "I believe they get hurt feelings. I don't believe it stops any of them from doing their job." However, scholars have shown that is not the case, with effects ranging from self-censorship and silence, to even leaving the industry (Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring 2016; Posetti et al. 2021; Waisbord 2020). As one manager noted, the effects can be far reaching:

> It's extremely damaging to them mentally, skyrockets stress and anxiety, and occasionally it makes some journalists more tentative (we have one male journalist on staff who now openly avoids controversial stories after being attacked for a COVID story about movie theaters). It can also have wide-ranging effects on them personally.

The notion that journalists are not affected both personally and professionally by hostility likely comes from journalism's history of toughness and grit, part of journalism's masculinized nature (Meeks 2013). It is this history of silence that encourages journalists not to speak up (Mesmer 2023), rather acting as the resilient and unstoppable professional (Miller, 2023). And for those who do not possess the toughness needed for success, they are told to grow a thick skin or leave (Kocan and Miller 2024). This history of journalists simply having to have "thick skin" is well documented (e.g., Chen et al. 2020; Hardin & Shain, 2006; Ivask, Waschková Císařová, and Lon 2024), with some describing journalism as having a "thick-skinned culture" where journalists are valued for being "tough-minded" (Binns 2017, p. 185).

Herein lies one of this paper's greater contributions—recognition that newsroom managers are part of the journalistic culture that pushes for a milieu of grit, toughness, and mental resiliency that can belie the reality of a journalist's personal and professional struggles. While the managers surveyed here note they attempt to support their staffs—and do recognize harassment as a key issue—they nevertheless lack the proactive approach perhaps most needed to begin altering the masculinized culture of the field. In fact, many managers see the issue of harassment and safety as one for the individual to address, and not the organization as a whole (Henrichsen, 2022). It is this "thick-skinned" culture that needs further assessment and exploration.

Additionally, these findings and insights help us to better understand how OST can play a major role in the way scholars consider organizations and management in the well-being of journalists. It is not enough to note what journalists are experiencing, but also to research and explore what support does or does not exist from management and organizations. Research has shown consistently that supervisor

support in newsrooms has a positive impact on job satisfaction for journalists (Reinardy 2009), with satisfaction leading to higher retention. A lot of research so far has looked at journalists' perceptions of support, and not the managers' perceptions of how they support their journalists. What supervisors *say they do* and what they are *perceived as doing* are not the same thing, and often times do not align. This study has used OST's concept of PSS to understand where that misalignment exists in the newsroom setting. Moreover, it has highlighted that the very concept of what "support" is differs greatly based on the person defining it (i.e., the supervisor and the worker). Furthermore, it has shed light on how newsroom managers believe their support does or does not affect their staffs.

As scholars begin to further explore the POS and PSS of journalists as they relate to their mental health and harassment, this study helps set a foundation for how those supervisors assess these issues and the support they provide. It lends itself to future points of inquiry, such as if there exists a disconnect between perceived support and actual support, where positive change can occur to strengthen resiliency in newsrooms as they continue to navigate challenges of abuse, safety, and well-being.

Future Research

As scholars continue to study journalists using surveys, it is critical that they continue to look not just for "representation" of what newsrooms are currently looking like, but also seek to understand the voices in newsrooms that continue to not be heard or studied. This means sampling methods may need to move away from randomization toward more purposive and snowball methods in order to more intentionally find these diverse voices.

Moreover, these topics remain stigmatized, evidenced by supervisors seeing their newsroom as having fewer concerns with mental health than their analysis of U.S. journalists at large. Therefore, it can be difficult to know how honest respondents are when answering questions about support, concerns, and effects.

With this research serving as one of a few to directly study newsroom managers, future research should continue to explore these issues as they relate to leadership. While this study focused primarily on how managers assess and respond to these issues, little is known about the issues they personally face. Not only do managers face hostility and mental health struggles themselves, but they can often find themselves as the first point of contact for an employee in crisis. In many instances, it is unclear how prepared they are for such encounters, and what support they feel they themselves have, especially as they perhaps experience vicarious trauma through the journalists they manage.

Notes

1. The researcher's institutional review board granted this human-subject research as exempt and approved the study in full.
2. The choice to gather emails from only half of the markets was made to most effectively utilize research time, and is a proven practice in other studies (e.g. Kocan and Miller 2024). Typically, this results in appropriate randomization while also creating a large enough sample size with ¼ being too small and 100% being unnecessarily large.

3. It is important to note that not all organizations make employee emails available though most do outside of larger markets.
4. The scale provided was a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "0 Never" to "6 Always." This scale was utilized throughout the survey.
5. The one t-test that was not statistically significant had a p value of .06, suggesting that the difference, while small, could be significant with a larger sample size.

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