

*Hearing Filipino Journalists' Side of the Story:  
A Mixed Method Approach*

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**Abstract**

Journalists have the power to relay important information to the public, sometimes endangering their own safety and health in order to cover stories. The researchers studied the experience of Filipino journalists covering wars, conflicts, natural disasters, police reports and accidents. The study used content analysis to analyze the semi-structured interviews and multiple regression to analyze the results of burnout, well-being and dispositional resilience scale. Hardiness was found to moderate the relationship of burnout and well-being ( $p < 0.005$ ), so despite high levels of burnout, a person with high hardiness has better well-being than a person with low hardiness. Majority of the journalists claimed that they became stronger after entering the profession. Some have trouble sleeping at night, and experience dreams about the things they have witnessed. Emotional effects include being immune and callous to events they cover and feeling an assortment of emotions – anxiety, sympathy and excitement. Journalists employ different ways to cope with the demands of their work such as talking about their experiences with friends, making jokes and laughing about it with their colleagues. Others would build a wall to separate their experiences on the job from their personal life while others would resort to traveling, drinking and smoking to help them de-stress. The researchers suggest that the study be extended to a larger sample size and other factors that affect a journalist's well-being. Also, the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines and news networks should provide an avenue for counselling, briefing and debriefing of journalists.

Keywords: Journalists, well-being, experience, coping, hardiness, burnout

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## **Introduction**

Media covers worldwide events and reports on different stories and news. It relays information about national events, international news, business, stocks, sports, weather, entertainment, leisure and other aspects of people's lives. Journalists work from curiosity, trained to answer who, what, when, where, why and how questions to inform the public under pressures and deadlines. (Hager, 1990). They are catalysts for dissipating information on different topics such as kidnappings, plane crashes, auto wrecks, conflicts, wars, and ever-present issues such as the poor, workers, minority groups, sex and violence.

Journalists are exposed to different kinds of events, both good and bad, and some that may be harmful or dangerous. It is an inevitable part of a journalists' profession to experience disastrous events such as wars, conflicts, natural disasters, and accidents repeatedly, which potentially endangers their safety and health. While journalists try to be detached, it may not always be possible and, journalist may share the emotion being felt by the public affecting the journalist's welfare (Coleman & Wu, 2011).

Journalists' experiences are distinct from the experiences of other professions such as volunteers and social workers who are exposed to wars and natural calamities as well. Though journalists often experience or witness stressful events, they are not expected to involve themselves but rather assume the role of a spectator instead. Not having a direct, helping role when attending to incidents may present journalists with complex ethical dilemmas - an unpleasant feeling with an accompanying belief that one should have acted differently (Browne, Evangeli & Greenberg, 2012). A recognized reaction after an incident is trauma-related guilt and Kubany (1996) has described it as "an unpleasant feeling with an accompanying belief that one should have thought, felt or acted differently" (p. 429). Research has provided evidence that journalists who cover trauma and disaster events are at risk for developing posttraumatic stress and secondary traumatic stress from witnessing trauma at disasters, war-related conflicts, accident scenes, homicides, and murder trials, to name a few types of events.

The researchers studied Filipino journalists covering events such as natural disasters, wars, police reports and accidents and focused on job burnout, wellbeing and hardiness as well as experiences in journalism, reactions to coverage, effects of the coverage and journalists' ways of coping.

## **Literature Review**

### **Experience of Journalists**

Smith (2008) and Smith and Newman (2009) found that 86-100% of daily news-gatherers were exposed to events that could result to possible traumatization leaving them at high risk of developing crisis-related psychological trauma (Backholm, 2012). Journalism can lead to job burnout (Backholm and Björkqvist, 2010) and consequently, a decline in well-being (Burke and Greenglass, 1996). Upon disasters, journalists tend to work intensely on adrenaline. After however, comes a period of mental exhaustion, burnout, fatigue and a tendency to feel confused and depressed (Ricchiardi & Gerczynski, 1999). Journalists who cover trauma or emotionally distressing or disturbing events and disasters are at risk for developing traumatic stress (Feinstein and Nicholson, 2005). Ricchiardi (1993) stated, "some journalists who have coverage of gruesome stories say they fear that admitting to any mental

distress may be viewed as weakness” (p. 36) choosing a culture of machismo instead (Massé, 2011) as cited by Long (2013).

### **Coping Strategies of Journalists**

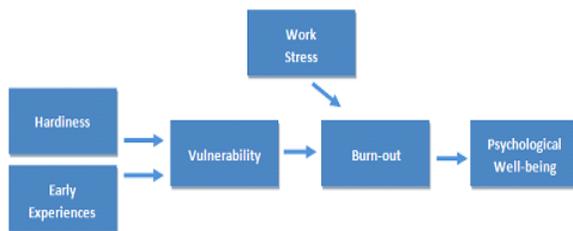
According to Buchanan and Keats (2011) journalists often use the avoidance method to cope with traumatic events and continue with their work. Other coping methods include exercising and using of substances (alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin).

### **Psychological Well Being**

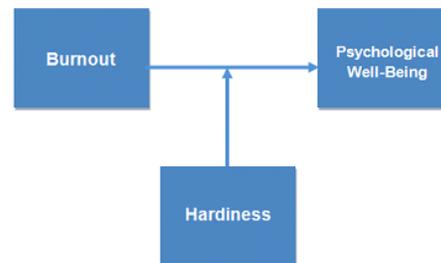
A journalists’ psychological, personal and professional sense of well-being or match between a person’s actual life and their ideal life (Zou, Schimmack& Gere, 2013) is at risk of suffering due to the nature of a journalist’s work to ignore managing his or her physical and emotional needs and trauma (Kalter, 1999). Hardiness is a personality structure that functions as a resistance resource under adversity Kobasa (1979). A hardy personality can reduce the effects of life stress on physical or psychological disturbance (Ganellen & Blaney, 1984) such as when a journalist stifles his or her reaction after witnessing witness painful and chaotic events.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The researchers utilized early experiences, hardiness, burnout and well-being in the diathesis-stress model to assess the experiences of Filipino journalists as seen in Figure 1. On the other hand, Figure 2 shows that interrelations to be studied.



*Figure 1*  
Diagram for the diathesis stress model



*Figure 2.*  
Diagram for variables to be studied

A journalist’s psychological well-being depends on the interaction between the degree of vulnerability towards developing burnout and the degree of stress (Monroe and Simons, 1991). In this study, the diathesis is manifested through vulnerability which is determined by hardiness and early experiences while stress is manifested through the journalists’ erratic schedules, ineffective coping, and the like. A journalist’s early experiences and involvement in trauma-related workload and coverage risks the vulnerability of developing burnout (Maslach & Courtois, 2008). However, hardiness allows a journalist to cope better with stress protecting the journalist from developing burnout (Bonnano, 2004).

Improper treatment of burnout may affect one’s well-being negatively (Hobfoll, 1989) and cause psychological health problems such as distress, depression, and psychosomatic complaints (Shirom, Melamed, Toker, Berliner, & Shapira, 2005). Although Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) and Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli (2006), found in their model that burnout was negatively related to health. The degree of how a person deals, or is affected by burn out can be moderated by hardiness. Hence, a

burned out journalist's psychological well-being may not be affected if he or she is protected by hardiness.

### **Research Questions**

This study aimed to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the levels of job burnout, psychological well-being and hardiness of journalists? (2) Does job burnout predict psychological well-being for Filipino journalists? (3) Does hardiness, as a personality trait, moderate the relationship between job burnout and psychological well-being? (4) What are the experiences of journalists when they cover events like wars, natural disasters, police reports and accidents? (5) What are their reactions whenever faced with these situations? (6) How are they affected cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally? (7) How do they cope with their reactions or feelings?

### **Hypotheses**

The researchers hypothesized the following answers to the study's research questions:

1. Job burnout significantly predicts psychological well-being for Filipino journalists.
2. Hardiness moderates the relationship between job burnout and psychological well-being.

### **Significance of the Study**

Journalism is a dangerous line of work not only due to the adverse circumstances required by their work but there have been numerous unsolved and unjustified cases of captivities and murders of journalists in the country have kept the Philippines among the list of the most dangerous places for journalists in the world. In fact, in 2009, the Philippines was named as the most dangerous place for journalists due to the infamous Maguindanao Massacre (Medina, 2013) also dubbed by the Committee on Protecting Journalists as the "deadliest single attack on press history" (Papa, 2009).

Presently, there are only several researches done regarding the effects of traumatic stress in journalism (Keats & Buchanan, 2009). Most of the studies are anecdotal, with only a number of empirical studies that measure post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among war correspondents (Feinstein & Nicholson, 2005), some survey research on trauma tackling news reporting in general (Marais & Stuart, 2005) and a few other studies examining journalists covering on disaster events (Weidmann, Fehm, & Fydrich, 2008). It is rare to hear that a journalist, unlike military and other professions, has received trauma training in preparation for reporting on disaster and trauma events or received psychological debriefing or assistance on returning home (Keats & Buchanan, 2009; Simpson & Boggs, 1999; Teegen & Grotwinkel, 2001 as cited by Backholm 2012).

This research paper aimed to shed light on the experiences of the journalists in the Philippine culture. The paper identified a myriad of processes that journalists go through on a daily basis, and identified them thoroughly to achieve an understanding regarding the kind of attention these people need. The study looked at the work environment and situations journalists have to cover, the support they receive from their employer and family, and the coping strategies journalists employ. It opted to contribute to the lack of literature in this affair. The study also aimed to look at the

resilience and susceptibility to trauma of different journalists. The paper looked at factors causing stress and factors that facilitate coping.

The results that were gathered by the end of this research gave a deeper understanding of the influences that job burnout has on an individual. Furthermore, the results also showed how the moderator, hardiness, used as a personality trait, may affect a journalist's well-being. The study is helpful for future reference as a means to pursuing studies regarding the well-being of Filipino journalists. Furthermore, the results of this study also contribute to the knowledge of training and preparations a journalist can undergo to help cope with stressful work. This study opens a new perspective of looking at the safety and psychological health of Filipino journalists. Lastly, this study aimed to give information about a journalist's experience in the face of traumatic events.

### **Research Design**

The study used a mixed method approach, utilizing quantitative and qualitative methods to test the hypothesis and understand the experience of Filipino journalists. The quantitative non-experimental research design, allowed for research regarding burnout, well-being and hardiness. The qualitative design allowed for a supplementary and an in-depth exploration of the experiences of the journalists. The data was gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews and transcripts of the interviews were subjected to content analysis.

### **Instruments**

The Shirom Melamed Burnout Questionnaire consisted of 14 items, Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale consisted of 17 items, and Dispositional Resilience Scale contained 9 items were used to measure burnout, well being and hardiness respectively. For the semi-structured interview, a general to specific approach was used. Pilot tests were conducted to increase reliability of the test and revise the interview questions.

### **Procedures**

Data gathering for the quantitative research and qualitative research were done at the same time, using a retrospective time orientation. The researchers used convenience sampling of 100 Filipino journalists. They were handed a packet that included 3 scales, which measured hardiness, burnout and well-being. As for the qualitative method, the researchers interviewed 10 Filipino journalists using a semi-structured interview.

### **Data Analysis**

A non-parametric test was used since both independent and dependent variables were measured at an interval level. To determine the influence of burnout towards well-being, a multiple regression analysis was applied. The qualitative data was analyzed through content analysis. The researchers identified codes from the transcript, and then made into subthemes and themes to identify patterns and processes relevant to the topic (Shannon and Hsiu - Fang, 2005).

## Results

### Quantitative Results

The mean age of the participants of the survey was 37 years old and the average number of years on the job was 13 years. Burnout and well-being have a negative, moderate relationship; hardiness and well-being have a positive, moderate relationship; and interaction of burnout, hardiness and well-being have a positive, moderate relationship. A journalist with high burnout has low well-being, however hardiness modifies the relationship. The higher the hardiness level of a person, the more positive the well-being of the person will be.

Table 1. *Relationship of Burnout and Wellbeing as Moderated by Hardiness*

|                              | b*    | Std.Err. | B     | Std.Err. | t(96) | p-value |
|------------------------------|-------|----------|-------|----------|-------|---------|
|                              | of b* |          | of b  |          |       |         |
| Intercept                    |       |          | 1.26  | 0.99     | 1.27  | 0.21    |
| IV Burnout                   | -0.35 | 0.091    | -0.28 | 0.07     | -3.83 | 0.00    |
| Moderator<br>Hardiness       | 0.26  | 0.09     | 0.91  | 0.32     | 2.86  | 0.01    |
| Product<br>Burnout*Hardiness | 0.26  | 0.082    | 0.06  | 0.02     | 3.13  | 0.00    |

### Qualitative Results

The average age of the interviewees was 40 years old and they have been on the job for an average of 20 years. The 4 main themes represent journalists' experiences in journalism, reactions to coverage, effects of the coverage and their ways of coping. Results show that the work of a journalist is different compared to other jobs because they look for stories that bring them closer to danger. Challenges of the job as a journalist include not having control over their time and there is no predictability of safety. Not all journalists receive the same amount of support from their networks for debriefing. While some journalists recognize the need for a debriefing after particular coverage, others dismiss it.

Journalists react differently to coverage; some journalists react with anxiety, sympathy or excitement. Some are fearful and anxious, others feel sad and sympathize with the people they encounter, and some journalists claim that they don't feel scared during coverage because of the adrenaline they feel. Different coverage has different emotional, cognitive and behavioral effects on journalists. Journalists learn to be stronger and feel invincible as part of emotional effects. Some would start out very sympathetic and empathetic towards the people they encounter, but as they continue in the profession, they detach themselves from the situation and concentrate on the story at hand. Cognitive effects include having events that they cover become etched in their mind. After surviving coverage, they realize how blessed they are and their perspective of the world changes. The perception of danger changes and they may become overly confident. Many of the journalists had difficulty sleeping after their coverage and would have troubling dreams about the coverage as part of the behavioral effects.

To cope with the work, journalists use engagement and disengagement responses. Talking about their experiences is a form of therapy for journalists. Journalists would have a watering hole where they would share their experiences with each other. One

mentioned trying to separate work and personal life apart, so she practices “*pagpag*”. Others would go on vacations, drink, or smoke in attempts to control their emotions. A number of news networks provide briefing and debriefing as a standard operating procedure and others give a hotline where journalists can seek professional psychological help.

### **Discussion**

Job burnout significantly predicts psychological well-being of Filipino journalists while hardiness moderates the relationship. Burnout affects the well-being of a journalist in a negative way, the higher the burnout, the lower the well-being. Hardiness contrary to burnout protects the well-being. Therefore, higher the level of hardiness, the higher the well-being of a journalist would be. A journalist with high burnout should result to low well-being, however when coupled with a hardiness the less affected the well being of the journalist.

Journalists are exposed to feel an assortment of emotions – anxiety, sympathy and excitement. Reactions of anxiety like panic and fear, reactions of sympathy like feelings of compassion and awareness of suffering, and reactions of excitement like courage and eagerness. According to Kalter (1999), journalists experience effects of their coverage after the task at hand, like insomnia come after the story has been wrapped up. Journalists mentioned that emotional effects include being immune and callous to events they cover. Majority of the journalists claimed that cognitive effects include becoming stronger after entering the profession. It also changes the way one views the world, and makes one more confident because of what one has gone through. Majority of the journalists have trouble sleeping at night, and experience dreams about the things they have witnessed as part of behavioral effects of the coverage.

Journalists employ different ways to cope with the demands of their work. Many reporters use engagement response such as talking about their experiences with friends and making jokes and laughing about it with their colleagues. Bonanno (2004) said that laughter and other positive activities may lead to resilience. Disengagement responses include traveling, compartmentalizing and separating personal and work matters. Others would resort to drinking and smoking as attempts to control their emotions and this was found to be a way journalists use to de-stress (Buchanan & Keats, 2011).

### **Diathesis Stress Model**

Job burnout significantly predicts psychological well-being of Filipino journalists and hardiness moderates the relationship between job burnout and well-being. Changes in the well-being of a person can be attributed to the different levels of burnout and hardiness. Findings showed that burnout affects the well-being of a journalist in a negative way, the higher the burnout, the lower the well-being. Hardiness has a positive relationship with well-being so the higher the level of hardiness, the higher the well-being of a person. Hardiness, as a moderator, also has a significant effect on well-being. A journalist with high burnout has low well-being, however hardiness modifies the relationship. The higher the hardiness level of a person, the less affected the well-being of the person will be.

According to the diathesis stress model, each individual has a predisposing risk factor for developing burnout which could serve as a foundation for various psychological problems. According to a study by Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001), burnout has been associated with psychological distress, anxiety, and depression. In the study, the researchers utilized hardiness and early experiences in order to predict vulnerability that could lead to burnout and eventually, affect the well-being of a journalist. The development of burnout is predicted by vulnerability. If the person is highly vulnerable, he or she is more susceptible to burnout. Consequentially, if the person has low vulnerability he or she is less likely to develop burnout.

The predisposition vulnerability is influenced by two factors, early experiences and hardiness. Experience includes direct encounter or observation of event as it unfolds and hardiness, as defined by Kobasa (1979), is a personality that helps a person be immune under adversity. For example, some journalists claimed that exposure to dangerous, tragic, stressful and atypical events their work brings is just a matter of getting used to. In addition, some journalists claimed that they have become braver, tougher, wiser and stronger as compared to their rookie selves as time went by. As the frequency of their exposure towards such events increased, the less affected they became, indicating that consistent exposure to traumatic events can either develop a person's hardiness or become immune to the hostile and possible traumatic factors involved in coverage. However, there is also a possibility that it could take a toll on the journalist and make him or her vulnerable to burnout.

**Hardiness as a moderator.** Hardiness predicts vulnerability and was found to mitigate the relationship of burnout and well-being. Hardiness serves as a protection towards well-being and buffers the degree to which a person is affected by burnout. For example, the higher the level of hardiness, the less vulnerable a journalist is towards developing burnout and the less likely the well-being of a journalist will be harmed. Therefore, despite high level of burnout, a person with high hardiness is unlikely to be vulnerable to succumbing to poor well-being compared to person with low hardiness who would be more vulnerable.

**Stressor.** However, apart from vulnerability work stress can also influence burnout and well-being. Work stress such as irregular working schedules, lack of control over the coverage assignment, immediate deadline, threat to safety, and pressure to get a story affects a journalist. Work stress triggers the predisposition and in effect, the journalist's likelihood to manifest burnout. A study by Lee, Lim, Yang, & Lee (2011), said that burnout is related to journalists' high levels of stress and erratic schedule. If a journalist who is vulnerable encounters a stressful situation, such as a cross-fire during coverage, he/she may cultivate burnout therefore, his/her well-being may decline. On the contrary, when journalist with low vulnerability encounters a similar situation, he/she will most likely not be burned-out nor will his/her well-being be affected.

### **Reactions to Coverage**

Journalists are exposed to feel an assortment of emotions – anxiety, sympathy and excitement. In this light, the researchers have uncovered how journalists react to their coverage. Reactions of anxiety like panic and fear, reactions of sympathy like feelings of compassion and awareness of suffering, and reactions of excitement like courage and eagerness. Some journalists' reactions of excitement included feelings of

adrenaline that increase during the coverage, therefore lessening feelings of fear. Additionally, Johansson et al. (1973) as cited by Dienstbier (1989) suggests that an increase in adrenaline levels in an individual has better social adjustments and emotional stability. Other journalists have witnessed horrifying events that could make them fearful. Some journalists are caught off guard, being empathetic and sympathetic to the victims of a tragedy.

### **Effects of Coverages**

Coverages leave lasting effects on the journalists who cover them because they are exposed to traumatic events 86-100% of the time (Smith, 2008 & Smith & Newman, 2009). There are emotional, cognitive and behavioral effects of coverage. Journalists mentioned that emotional effects would include being immune and callous to events they cover. Feinstein (2006) as cited by Novak & Davidson (2013) found in his study that being able to identify with a situation or people involved on a personal level would increase the risk of traumatic reactions. Hence, being objective and emotionally distant seemed to diminish being emotionally overwhelmed. A journalist also said that as his level of fear went down as he gained more experience, and he is less inclined to avoid dangerous situations. Rose, Bisson, Churchill, and Wessely (2005), found that members of the media are required to communicate potentially distressing events in great detail to their audiences and this is in direct contrast with the idea that distancing oneself from such events may be a naturally adaptive defense mechanism against distress.

According to Kalter (1999), journalists experience the negative effects of their coverages after the task at hand; he claims that the fear, numbness, and insomnia come after the story has been wrapped up. Cognitive effects and realizations make themselves known to the journalists after certain experiences. They claim that it helps them appreciate the little things, and that there is so much more to life than what they cover. Majority of the journalists claimed that they became stronger after entering the profession. It also changes the way one views the world, and makes one more confident because of what one has gone through.

Majority of the journalists have trouble sleeping at night, and experience dreams about the things they have witnessed as part of behavioral effects of the coverage. One reporter claimed that even though he fell asleep, he would still scream in his sleep. Keats and Buchanan (2012) said that effects of covering traumatic events include distressing memories or images of an incident, flashbacks, nightmares or dreams about other frightening themes around the event, and becoming upset.

### **Ways of Coping**

Journalists employ different ways to cope with the demands of their work. Their ways of coping can either be engagement, which are attempts to change the situation or one's reaction, or disengagement, which include attempts to avoid the stressor and distract oneself. News networks also assist the journalists by providing training and briefing and debriefing seminars.

Engagement responses include being able to talk about their experiences with their fellow journalists. One journalist stated that it haunts her when she is not able to talk about it with anyone. The journalists have a watering hole where they can freely express themselves and share stories with fellow journalists. Many reporters tend to

make jokes and laugh about it with their colleagues. Their actions are supported by research done by Bonanno (2004), who said that laughter and other positive activities may lead to resilience.

However, other journalists use disengagement responses to cope with what they go through. Some would compartmentalize personal and work matters and try to separate them as much as possible. Many of the respondents would travel and take a vacation after a stressful coverage to help them forget about their experience. Other would resort to drinking and smoking as attempts to control their emotions. Many respondents emphasized taking breaks after stressful coverages, which may serve as distractions from the encounters still fresh in their minds. These responses were designed to avoid the memories and experiences of their coverage.

### **Future Research**

The researchers suggest that studies be done to look at other factors that may affect a journalist's well-being. The study can also be extended to a larger sample size and a variety of respondents from the Philippines who have covered different types of events. The researchers suggest that journalists from different news networks and journalists using different media be included in the study, as well. The gender, age, years of experience and frequency of coverage of events of the journalists may have affected the results of the study, so the researchers propose that future studies use a sample size with equal characteristics.

Future research can also focus on the experience of journalists who have a shared experience like the coverage of certain events. Studies should also be conducted to analyze the reaction and coping of journalists who aren't affected or detached during coverage. Further research regarding secondary or vicarious trauma, depression, and coping can also be done to expand the knowledge on the experience of journalists. Journalists encounter dangerous and near death situations that puts them at risk so studies on perception of danger of journalists can also be conducted. Succeeding research can also look at resilience of journalists, stress, and life satisfaction.

### **Practical Implications in the Philippine Setting**

The researchers recommend that ample briefing and debriefing be available for journalists who cover different events and that news networks provide such support. The news network must explain beforehand the purpose of consulting a psychologist and deem it necessary to evaluate the journalist. Although some news networks provide training, seminar and debriefing, the researchers strongly suggest that the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines provide an avenue for counseling, briefing and debriefing of journalists. The journalists must be aware and knowledgeable about the possible dangers, effects and risks of the job and help them cope with the demands of the job. The culture of machismo and the stereotype of seeing a psychologist must also be changed so journalists are more open to seeking professional help.

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