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N. 2025-1-IT01-KA220-VET-000350227



REWRITING MEDIA NARRATIVES ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Resilience and Self-Care

Professional Learning Suite
For Journalists and Communication Professionals

Section: MENTAL HEALTH

Module No.9

by: Hochschule Wismar

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1. Why this subject matters

Journalistic research, editing and reporting often happen under high pressure:

- to be first with news;
- to deliver features on time and in verified, top quality;
- to perform consistently and professionally in live formats;
- to keep up with the latest advances in digital tools and platforms;
- to sell a story to pay the bills as a freelancer, etc.

Many journalists work under such stressful, sometimes dangerous conditions, and regularly come face to face with severe human suffering. In such an environment, it is essential to remain resilient and to take care of oneself in order to preserve one's health, motivation to work and a constructive mind-set.

Biases in journalism often portray resilience as "toughing it out," viewing mental health struggles as weakness, leading to stigma, self-censorship, and a lack of institutional support, despite evidence that trauma is common; self-care is sometimes wrongly seen as a solo fix, when systemic issues, like toxic cultures and heavy workloads, also demand organizational changes, not just individual coping, though personalized, holistic support is crucial for journalists facing immense stress.

Journalist resilience and self-care are crucial for sustaining mental health, preventing burnout, and maintaining reporting quality when exposed to trauma and stress, allowing journalists to "bounce forward" rather than just "bounce back," ensuring both their well-being and the future of ethical, sharp journalism by managing traumatic impacts, setting boundaries, and building support systems.

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2. Learning Outcomes



01

Understand that resilience and self-care are not private luxuries or temporary "quick fixes," but fundamental professional duties essential for sustaining the quality of journalism, mitigating the risk of compassion fatigue, and preventing burnout when reporting on gender-based violence.

02

Develop and apply practical skills to establish clear boundaries between professional and personal life, implementing effective digital disconnection routines and actively monitoring cognitive and emotional load during high-stress reporting cycles.

03

Implement active recovery strategies and structural peer-support systems to safely process the emotional impact of continuous exposure to trauma, ensuring a sustainable and healthy journalistic practice.

3. Definition

Resilience is the ability to adapt and bounce back from adversity, trauma, or stress, while self-care is the practice of taking proactive steps (like exercise, sleep, nutrition, and social connection) to maintain and improve your overall well-being, which directly builds and supports resilience, helping you manage life's challenges effectively. In essence, self-care provides the resources needed for resilience to function, allowing for recovery and sustained functioning during tough times.



4. Psychological and neurolinguistic mechanisms

Table 2 reveals mechanisms of the competence in resilience and self-care.

Table 2: *Mechanisms of the competence in resilience and self-care*

Competence elements	Sub-elements	Description
Resilience	Cognitive Restructuring and Mental Agility	Involves challenging negative thoughts and reframing challenges as opportunities for growth. It includes maintaining a positive, realistic outlook and adopting a "growth mindset".
	Emotional Regulation and Mindfulness	The ability to manage emotions, reduce stress, and maintain calm through practices like deep breathing, yoga, and meditation.
	Active Coping and Problem-Solving	Using psychological and behavioral resources to directly address stressors rather than avoiding them. This includes setting achievable goals and taking small steps to resolve issues.
	Social Support Systems	Fostering strong, supportive relationships with friends, family, or colleagues, which enhances cognitive functioning and provides emotional relief.
	Self-Concept of Competence	Self-Concept of Competence
Self-care	Physical Maintenance	Regular exercise, balanced nutrition, and adequate, high-quality sleep are foundational for enhancing resilience.
	Boundary Setting	Defining clear limits between professional and personal life to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue.
	Daily Disconnection and Relaxation	Taking scheduled breaks, vacations, and engaging in hobbies to rejuvenate.
	Self-Compassion	Treating oneself with kindness and understanding, especially during setbacks, rather than harsh self-criticism.

5. Typical errors in journalistic practice

Table 3 presents the overview of typical errors in journalist practice and reports related to resilience and self-care.

Table 3: *Typical errors in journalist practice*

Typical key error	Error dimension	Description
Media reports	Self-Care is Selfish	Misleading audiences into believing that taking time for one's health is selfish.
	"Quick Fix" Mentality	Promising that simple, fast solutions can cure burnout.
	Gender Bias	Framing self-care as only for women, discouraging men from addressing their own stress.
Storytelling in media	Individualizing "Resilience"	Framing resilience as solely a matter of personal strength, ignoring the necessity of community support, structural resources, and systemic factors.
	Misrepresenting Self-Care	Reducing self-care to "aesthetic" indulgence (bubble baths, skincare) rather than necessary mental health work.
	Commercialization	Pushing the idea that self-care requires purchasing products, rather than focusing on behavioral changes.
	Stigmatizing Language	Using terms like "psycho," "nutter," or "crazy" to describe individuals, which trivializes mental health issues.
	Over-simplification of Trauma	Depicting recovery as a linear process, failing to acknowledge long-term effects of adversity.
	Linking Mental Illness to Violence	Exaggerating the risk of violence posed by those with mental health problems, despite them being more likely to be victims.
	"Superhero" Tropes	Presenting individuals who overcome adversity as extraordinary, which can set unrealistic standards for recovery.

Professional behaviour	Ignoring Emotional Impact	Assuming journalists are immune to the trauma they cover, which can lead to PTSD and burnout.
	Bottling Up Emotions	Unhealthy coping mechanisms where journalists hide their stress to appear professional.
	Neglecting Peer Support	Failing to maintain social connections, which are the single biggest factor in journalistic resilience.
	"Doomscrolling"	Overdependence on devices and social media, which increases stress and neurological arousal.
	Ignoring Physical Signals	Not recognizing signs of exhaustion, such as impaired memory or low concentration.
	Imposter Syndrome/Lack of Self-Worth	Difficulty accepting compliments for accomplishments, often leading to overworking.



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6. Impact on media narratives on gender-based violence

Table 4 outlines typical errors' impact on media narratives and public perception.

Table 4: *Errors' impact on media narratives*

Impact	Description
Preventing Silence	Resilience support helps journalists avoid deactivating social accounts or withdrawing from "controversial" Gender-based violence topics.
Avoiding Re-traumatization	Mentally resilient journalists are better equipped to follow "Do No Harm" guidelines, such as obtaining informed consent and avoiding judgmental language that implies survivor blame.
Balance in Narrative Myths"	Resilience allows reporters to maintain a balance between empathy and journalistic distance, preventing them from making unrealistic promises to sources that could lead to further distress for both parties.
Shifting Norms	Accurate, resilience-informed reporting helps dismantle toxic masculinity and outdated myths, portraying survivors as advocates and agents of change rather than just victims.
Resource Integration	Journalists practicing high levels of self-care are more likely to include essential service information (hotlines, support groups) in their reports, directly aiding survivor risk mitigation.



7. Positive Reframing

Table 5 reflects positive reframing of resilience and self-care in media narratives on gender-based violence.

Table 5: *Resilient reporting about gender-based violence*

Competence	Skill	Description
Resilience	Empathetic Active Listening	This skill is vital for building trust with sources (especially Gender-Based Violence survivors) and ensuring accurate reporting.
	Psychological Safety	In team settings, creating environments where people can admit mistakes or share struggles without fear of judgment is a "non-negotiable" for resilience.
	Peer Support Networking	Regular social and collegial connections are the single most significant factor associated with preventing burnout.
Self-care	Self-Awareness & Naming	Identifying and "naming" an experience or emotion prevents feelings from festering and becoming long-term trauma.
	Mission Clarity	For media professionals, a strong, articulated sense of mission and ethical standards is a top factor for resilience, protecting against "moral injury".
	Micro-Autonomy & Goal Setting	Breaking insurmountable tasks into small, manageable steps—or "micro-learning"—preserves energy and builds a sense of agency.
Profession	Digital Security & Agility	Understanding digital security is an ethical imperative to protect sources and oneself from cyber threats. Being "digital strong" includes mastering AI tools to automate routine tasks, thereby reducing mental load.
	Trauma-Informed Interviewing	Resilience for Gender-Based Violence reporting includes knowing when to offer breaks, maintaining empathetic distance to avoid unfulfillable promises, and bringing the interviewee back to the "here and now" at the end of a session.
	Capacity Management	Intentional "tech-free days" and "reset days" are standard strategies to clear mental clutter and prevent information overload.



8. Case study

Mini Case study: The 24/7 Cycle and the Cost of Empathy

Anna is a senior crime reporter covering a high-profile, gruesome femicide trial. For three weeks, she has been analyzing court documents, reading the victim's diaries, and interviewing the grieving family. Her editor expects real-time updates and pushes her to monitor social media reactions constantly. Recently, Anna has started suffering from insomnia, feels an overwhelming sense of guilt when she stops working, and finds herself snapping at her partner at home. She believes that taking a day off or turning off her phone would mean abandoning the victim's story and failing in her journalistic duty.

Questions for discussion:

- How does Anna's belief that "taking a day off is a failure" reflect the toxic media culture that views self-care as a selfish act rather than a professional necessity?

- What specific digital boundaries should Anna negotiate with her editor to prevent total burnout while still fulfilling her professional obligations?

- What peer-support or debriefing routines could the newsroom implement to help journalists like Anna process the secondary trauma of covering gender-based violence?

9. Practical Exercises

01

Quiz: How Resilient Are You?

Objective: to strengthen learners' resilience skills
Duration: 20 minutes
Materials: paper and pencil or computer
Instructions (step-by-step):

1. Please, answer the questions:

1. Positive Attitude
Answer the following quesion based on the answers below.
I start the day with a positive attitude

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Consistently

2. Self Praise
Answer the following quesion based on the answers below.
I praise myself when I do things well

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Consistently

3.Comfort Zone
Answer the following quesion based on the answers below.
I enjoy stepping out of my comfort zone and doing new things

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Consistently

4.Confidence
Answer the following quesion based on the answers below.
I am a highly confident person

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Consistently

5.Life Challenges
Answer the following quesion based on the answers below.
I feel able to handle the challenges that life gives me

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Consistently

6.Appreciation
Answer the following quesion based on the answers below.
I deliberately make an effort to appreciate what I have in life

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Consistently

7.Self Control
Answer the following quesion based on the answers below.
I feel calm and in control of my life and what I do

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Consistently

8.Emotions
Answer the following quesion based on the answers below.
I don’t let my emotions get the better of me

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Consistently

9.Personal Growth
Answer the following quesion based on the answers below.
I consider setbacks as an opportunity for personal growth

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Consistently

10.Stress Management
Answer the following quesion based on the answers below.
I deal with situations and people in a calm way that limits my stress

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Consistently

- Calculate how many “Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, and Consistently” you have in your answers.
- Make conclusions about the status of your resilience.
- What kind of your resilience skills need to be improved?

Expected Output: a self-made conclusion on the respondent’s resilience and identification of resilience skills to be improved.

Debriefing / Reflection Questions:

- Is self-evaluation of own resilience skills beneficial? Please, explain why.
- Can resilience be trained?
- What kind of self-care measures help strenthen resilience?



02

A Portrait of Resilient and Self-Caring Journalist

Objective: to create a portrait of resilient and self-caring journalist
Duration: 45 minutes
Materials: a table in the Word file or a paper and pen
Instructions (step-by-step):

1. Please, fill in the table with relevant 3-5 adjectives per each feature that describe your vision of a resilient and self-caring journalist

Table 6: *Features of a portrait of resilient and self-caring journalist*

Portrait aspect	Features of the portrait	Description with the use of adjectives
Resilience	Emotions	
	Behaviour	
	Problem solving	
	Links with society	
	Profession	
Self-caring	Healthy lifestyle	
	Mental health	
	Networking	
	Finance	
	Occupation/job	

2. Please, draw a portrait of a resilient and self-caring journalist. You can use the AI (Artifical Intelligence) to help you.
3. If you used AI for making a portrait of a resilient and self-caring journalist, are there any similarities or differences between the portrait of a resilient and self-caring journalist prepared by you and AI?

Expected Output: a portrait of a resilient and self-caring journalist

Debriefing / Reflection Questions:

- What portrait features describe a resilient journalist?
- What portrait features describe a self-caring journalist?
- Can the portrait of a resilient and self-caring journalist change in time? What can be a reason of the changes?

03

The Disconnection Protocol

Objective: To design a personal and structural boundary-setting routine for managing traumatic news cycles and preventing burnout.

Duration: 30 minutes

Materials: Paper and pen or computer.

Instructions (step-by-step):

- Imagine you have just finished a 10-hour shift covering a difficult story on domestic abuse. Your mind is racing, and your phone keeps buzzing with notifications from the newsroom. You need a protocol to transition from "journalist mode" to "personal mode."
- Define Physical Boundaries: Write down two specific physical actions you will take to signal the end of your workday (e.g., leaving the laptop in another room, going for a 15-minute walk before entering your house).
- Define Digital Boundaries: Establish a strict rule for your devices. At what exact time do you turn off email notifications? How do you communicate this boundary to your editor? Write a short, professional email template to your editor explaining your unavailability after hours.
- Define Emotional Debriefing: Identify one peer (a colleague or mentor) with whom you can establish a "10-minute debriefing call" to process the day's heavy news before taking the stress home.

Expected Output: A customized, written "Disconnection Protocol" tailored to the journalist's daily routine.

Debriefing / Reflection Questions:

- Why is setting a digital boundary often the most difficult

Expected Output: A customized, written "Disconnection Protocol" tailored to the journalist's daily routine.

Debriefing / Reflection Questions:

- Why is setting a digital boundary often the most difficult step for modern journalists?
- How does a structured debriefing routine with a colleague differ from just "complaining" about work?
- How does protecting your own cognitive space ultimately result in better, more ethical reporting on gender-based violence?

Checklist time!

Before submitting a story on gender-based violence, journalists and editors should use this checklist to ensure their work aligns with the highest ethical standards. This is not just about compliance; it is about professional integrity.

- Truth & Context: Have I framed this incident within the broader systemic context of gender inequality, rather than treating it as an isolated "private tragedy"?
- Minimize Harm: Have I prioritized the safety, dignity, and privacy of the survivor over the potential for higher audience engagement (clicks/views)?
- Survivor-Centered: If interviewing a survivor, did I respect their autonomy regarding what details to share and when to stop the interview?
- Accountability: Does the focus of my reporting rest squarely on the actions and responsibility of the perpetrator, avoiding any implicit victim-blaming or "himpathy"?
- Transparency: Am I prepared to publicly explain the ethical choices made in this reporting and promptly correct any mistakes if they occur?

If the answer to any of these questions is "No," the editorial team must halt publication and review the ethical framing of the piece.

Resources

- Bonn Institute. (2025). Mental health, self-care and resilience in journalism. https://www.bonn-institute.org/en/news/psychologie-im-journalismus-12

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N. 2025-1-IT01-KA220-VET-000350227

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© May 2026 – Skill Up Srl, Hochschule Wismar, INDEPCIE sca, Innovation Frontiers IKE, Latvian Zonta E-klubs, Novi Sad School of Journalism.
This publication was carried out with the financial support of the European Commission under Erasmus + Project "MEDUSA-Rewriting media narratives on gender-based violence", N. 2025-1-IT01-KA220-VET-000350227.

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