

## Measurement of Psychological Stress in A Group of Journalists Working in One of The Private Journalism Institutes in Egypt

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** mental health problems are rising in number and severity between journalists & media field workers. Keeping mental well-being of media field workers is a must that is so hard to be achieved by most societies.

**Objective:** This research aims to study the prevalence of stress & associated psychological disorders (depression- anxiety) and their association with some factors.

**Patients and Methods:** a cross-sectional-questionnaire based study was conducted among journalists working in one of the private journals in Egypt. Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale-42 (DASS-42) was used to assess stress & associated psychological disorders along with a socio-demographic questionnaire designed by the researcher. A total of 100 journalists participated in the study, they compose about 83% of the whole journalists working in the organization, Overall, the prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression was 61%, 57%, and 64% among studied sample respectively.

**Results:** higher stress scores were significantly associated with lower age group & lower job satisfaction. Higher anxiety scores were significantly associated with demanding psychological support from family and friends & exposure to work-related trauma. Higher depression score was associated with lower job satisfaction & using smoking as stress relief.

**Conclusion:** high percentage of journalists was suffered from stress, anxiety and depression. The associated factors include lower age, low job satisfaction level, smoking, and exposure to work-related trauma. Further studies need to be conducted to identify other associated factors related to working as a journalist.

**Keywords:** psychological stress, journalists working, Egypt.

### INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) mental health disorders are one of the leading causes of disability worldwide, three of the ten leading causes of disability in people between the ages of 15 and 44 are mental disorders, the other causes are often associated with mental disorders<sup>(1)</sup>.

The current mental health action plan for 2013–2020, published by the WHO<sup>(2)</sup> showed that a collective evidence based effort is required to improve mental health.

Stress is a term that refers to the sum of the physical, mental and emotional strains or tensions on a person. Feelings of stress in humans result from interactions between persons and their environment that are perceived as straining or exceeding their adaptive capacities and threatening their well-being. The element of perception indicates that human stress responses reflect differences in personality as well as differences in physical strength or health<sup>(3)</sup>.

Anxiety is a psychological, physiological, and behavioral state induced in animals and humans by a threat to well-being or survival, either actual or potential. It is characterized by increased arousal, expectancy, autonomic and neuroendocrine activation, and specific behavior patterns. The function of these changes is to facilitate coping with

an adverse or unexpected situation. Pathological anxiety interferes with the ability to cope successfully with life challenges<sup>(4)</sup>.

While many symptoms of depression include, persistent sad, anxious or “empty” feelings, feelings of hopelessness, feelings of guilt, worthlessness and/or helplessness, irritability, restlessness, and loss of interest in activities or hobbies once pleasurable<sup>(5)</sup>.

It seems that man’s occupation affects his personality, thinking, and behavior, physical & psychological disorders. Certain disorders are common among workers of a certain occupation so they are occupational disorders<sup>(6)</sup>.

Journalists are a special occupational group of people that are exposed to high levels of stress every day in different ways, One of the most common problems of working as a journalist is repeated exposure to trauma, due to covering news of violence, disasters & other accidents, researchers reported that repeated exposure to trauma can result in different psychological effects include altering basic world assumptions, drug abuse, PTSD, Depression & anxiety<sup>(7)</sup>.

Several studies reported high rates of psychological morbidity among journalists & workers in the field of media using various instruments<sup>(8,9)</sup>, Newman *et al.*<sup>(8)</sup> reported during

his study that about 98% of news workers were exposed to what’s called in psychological medicine potentially traumatic event (PTE) like car accidents, fires& murder, 6% of his sample had enough symptoms to diagnose PTSD.

Another study **Feinstein et al.**<sup>(9)</sup> suggests that frequency rather than duration of exposure to images of graphic violence is more emotionally distressing to journalists working with User Generated Content material. Given that good journalism depends on healthy journalists, news organizations will need to look anew at what can be done to offset the risks inherent in viewing User Generated Content material. The findings, in need of replication, suggest that reducing the frequency of exposure may be one way to go.

A lot of work-related factors make journalists suffer from time shortage, inability to take care of themselves & inability to establish balance between personal life & career, i.e. having healthy diet, keeping relationships, enough night sleep & enough physical exercise<sup>(10)</sup>.

The current study aims to explore the prevalence of psychological stress & associated disorders (anxiety - depression) among journalists in one the private journalism organization in Egypt. The study also aims to explore the association between these disorders and some factors such as age, life style, work-related trauma exposure, work-related stress and job satisfaction.

**Aim of the work**

This research aims to study the prevalence of stress & associated psychological disorders (depression-anxiety) and their association with some factors.

**SUBJECTS AND METHODS**

**Ethical consideration:**

We got an approval for this study from the **Medical Research and the Ethical Committee of Faculty of Medicine, Al-Azhar University, Cairo division**. Before filling the questionnaire, a verbal consent was gained from all participant journalists.

**Study design:**

It’s a cross-sectional study; it was conducted from October to December, 2017 on journalists working in one of the private journals in Egypt; Al-Masry Al-Youm (it is one of the most popular private journals in Egypt); it was the only journal that gave us permission to conduct the study with journalists who were available in the newsroom, in the journal main office located in Almobtadian street of Kasr Al-Aini street, Cairo.

**Sample population:**

The sample type is the available sample, during the time of the research in 2017 the total number of journalists working in the journal main office was 125, all were invited to participate, and of those, 120 gave verbal consent and 100 participated with no faults or incomplete data.

All available journalists were invited to participate in the study after explaining purpose of the study, and confidentiality was ensured. The self-administered questionnaires were distributed. Filling questionnaire lasted about an hour, From a total of 120 distributed questionnaires, 100 completed questionnaires were returned with participation percent 83%.

**Study tools:**

To assess demographic data, and life style, work related stress factors, work-related trauma exposure and job-satisfaction of participant journalists, a self-administered questionnaire (designed by the researcher) was used.

The Arabic version of the standardized Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-42 (DASS-42) was used to assess psychological disorders. DASS-42 is a set of three self-report scales designed to measure the negative emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress with 14 items per scale. The stress scale assesses being easily agitated, nervous arousal and relaxing difficulty, the depression scale assesses dysphoria, self-deprecation, hopelessness, and lack of interest. The Anxiety scale assesses autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effect...etc <sup>(11)</sup>.

**Table (1): DASS-42 scoring system**

Meaning	Depression	Anxiety	stress
Normal	0-9	0-7	0-14
Mild	10-13	8-9	15-18
Moderate	14-20	10-14	19-25
Severe	21-27	15-19	26-33
Extremely severe	28 or more	20 or more	34 or more

**Handling data**

Data were coded and entered using the statistical package SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 25. Data was summarized using frequency (count) and relative frequency (percentage) for categorical data. For comparing categorical data, Chi square ( $\chi^2$ ) test was performed. Exact test was used instead when the expected frequency is less than 5. P-values less than 0.05 were considered as statistically significant.

## RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics of the 100 journalists participated in the study, this number composes 83% of the total number working in the journal, 62% were males, 38% females, 52% were married, 47% single, 1% divorced, 53% reported holding university degree in media-related specialties, 44% reported that their university education was not related to media, 61% were

members of the Syndicate of Journalists, the rest were not members, 10% of the sample reported suffering from medical disorders i.e. hypertension, diabetes, thyroid gland disorders & other medical unmentioned disorders, 34% had experience less than 5 years, 30% reported having 5-10 years experience, 32% reported 10-20 years experience, but only 4% of the sample their experience exceeded 20 y, 78% of the sample group reported only working in the journal of interest, 22% of the sample reported working in other places beside the journal, the major part of the sample population (70%) reported working about 40-60 hours/week, 13% less than 40 hours/week, 17% more than 60 hours up to 90 hours/week, only 2% of the sample group population reported sleeping more than 8 hours/day, 5% slept less than 4 hours/day, 35% 4-6 hours/day, the majority (58%) reported sleeping from 6 to 8 hours/ day, 25% were smokers.

**Table (2): Demographic data**

		Count	N %
Age group	18 - 35 years	65	65.0%
	35 - 55 years	35	35.0%
Gender	Male	62	62.0%
	Female	38	38.0%
Marital status	Divorced	1	1.0%
	Married	52	52.0%
	Single	47	47.0%
Education	Intermediate degree	3	3.0%
	University (media-related specialty)	44	44.0%
	University (non-media related specialty)	53	53.0%
Job satisfaction	Less than 5	28	28.0%
	More than 5	72	72.0%
	Smoking	25	8.0%

**Table (3): Work & life style data**

		Count	%
Another work beside the journal	Yes	22	22.0%
	No	78	78.0%
Working hours/week	Less than 40 h	13	13.0%
	40-60 h	70	70.0%
	60- 90 h	17	17.0%
Daily sleeping hours	0-4 hours	5	5.0%
	4-6 hours	35	35.0%
	6-8 hours	58	58.0%
	more than	2	2.0%

**Table (4): Stress associated factors**

		STRESS				P value
		Yes		no		
		Count	%	Count	%	
Age group	18 - 35 years	46	75.4%	19	48.7%	0.006
	35 - 55 years	15	24.6%	20	51.3%	
Job satisfaction	Less than 5	22	36.1%	6	15.4%	0.025
	More than 5	39	63.9%	33	84.6%	

**Table (5): Anxiety associated factors**

		ANXIETY				P value
		Yes		no		
		Count	%	Count	%	
Other work related traumas I,e (fire, stalking victimization, child death, carnage & other PTEs)	Yes	31	54.4%	11	25.6%	0.004
	No	26	45.6%	32	74.4%	
seeking psychological support from family & friends as a way for calming down	yes	22	38.6%	8	18.6%	0.031
	no	35	61.4%	35	81.4%	

**Table (6): Depression associated factors**

		Depression				P value
		Yes		no		
		Count	%	Count	%	
using smoking to calm down	Yes	16	25.0%	3	8.3%	0.041
	No	48	75.0%	33	91.7%	
Job satisfaction	Less than 5	23	35.9%	5	13.9%	0.018
	More than 5	41	64.1%	31	86.1%	

**Table (7): Relation between Depression, Anxiety, stress**

		DEPRESSION				P value
		Yes		No		
		Count	%	Count	%	
ANXIETY	yes	47	73.4%	10	27.8%	< 0.001
	no	17	26.6%	26	72.2%	
STRESS	yes	53	82.8%	8	22.2%	< 0.001
	no	11	17.2%	28	77.8%	
		ANXIETY				P value
		Yes		No		
		Count	%	Count	%	
STRESS	yes	49	86.0%	12	27.9%	< 0.001
	no	8	14.0%	31	72.1%	

## DISCUSSION

The aim of the current study is to measure levels of psychological stress and associated factors among journalists. The data were taken from 100 journalists from different journal departments, their ages ranged between 18 to 55 years. We found that there was 61% overall prevalence of stress, 57% overall prevalence of anxiety & 64% overall prevalence of depression among participated journalists.

Regarding the tools used, DASS-42 questionnaire was used. The reliability and validity of the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress scales 42 version (DASS-42), questionnaire in measuring the dimensions of stress, depression and anxiety, have been proved in many different studies<sup>(12)</sup>. It is suitable for screening normal adolescents and adults & usually used as an indicator only & couldn't replace clinical examination. This scale was psychometrically validated to the Arabic culture by **Taouk et al.**<sup>(11)</sup>.

The current study found association (P value=0.018) between job satisfaction & suffering from depressive symptoms, as only 64.1% of those who suffer from depressive symptoms have job-satisfaction= 5 or more, but the percentage raises to 86.1% between those who don't suffer from depressive symptoms, also occurs with stress symptoms (P value=0.025), 63.9% of those who suffer from stress have job-satisfaction= 5 or more, but the percentage of job-satisfaction= 5 or more raises to 84.6% between those who do not suffer from stress symptoms, these results met with **Tabolli et al.**<sup>(13)</sup> which found that high levels of job-satisfaction associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety & emotional exhaustion.

A significant association of stress score with lower age group, as there is association (P value=0.006) between (18-35 y age group) & stress, 75.4% of those who have stress lies within this age group & 70.8% of its members have stress. This results met with **Gökçen et al.**<sup>(14)</sup> study on health care workers which stated that stress, anxiety & burnout levels decreased over increasing age group, so the age group over 40y old had least level of stress as they can handle stress & adjust with it.

There's also association (p value = 0.041) between using smoking to calm down & depressive symptoms, 25% of those who suffer from depressive symptoms use smoking to calm down in comparison with only 8.2% of those who do not have depressive symptoms & use smoking to calm down, these results could be close to results of **Fluharty et al.**<sup>(15)</sup> that analyzed 148 previous studies & found that there's bidirectional

relationship between smoking & suffering from anxiety & depression symptoms.

This study found that there's association (P value=0.031) between anxiety & seeking psychological support from family & friends as a way for calming down. We also found that there's association (P value=0.004) between anxiety & work-related trauma exposure (category other= fire, stalking victimization, child death, carnage & other PTEs), about 54.4% of those who suffer from anxiety symptoms had exposed to work related trauma, the percent drops to 25.6% between those who do not suffer from anxiety symptoms.

The overall prevalence of stress symptoms is 61%; there's strong association between depressive symptoms.

## LIMITATION

In this study, some limitations should be considered. The sample is not representative to the whole journalist group, so results cannot be generalized to the whole profession but results could be an indicator of what journalists face in their profession, many journals refused to conduct the study in their organizations because of the stigma of psychiatric disorders, fear of the participants that their answers could reach the HR department although confirmation of privacy & confidentiality of the collected data, factors like exposure to personal trauma are not included, & finally there's no special questionnaire for PTSD to detect specific symptoms like intrusive memories.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Three axis process, the first: journalists should be aware of hazards they are exposed to during performing their professional duties, they should also realize symptoms of psychological disturbances & the importance of seeking psychological help without delay or denial of symptoms, despite of the stigma, practicing relaxation & stress management techniques in order to magnify positive emotional states & job satisfaction, establishing balance between career, social life & other life activities, giving special attention to physical health & nutrition, finally trying to be more flexible while facing the conflict between ethics & real life practice.

Second axis is the syndicate of journalists, journalism organizations & local authorities: providing good working conditions with fair salaries, job security, physical safety during performing job duties, special attention should be given to training programs, psychological support & treatment during or after exposure to traumas

related to work, establishing clear vision, justice, decision making, financial & administrative systems that could decrease a lot of work stress & conflicts inside organizations, giving more attention to usage of new technologies in the field of journalism to decrease stress & increase productivity, finally providing protection against stalking victimization & prisoning by local authorities, that should respect low & guarantee environment of freedom without harm to the supreme interests of the state.

The third axis includes researchers & research institutes that should do more research in this field.

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