Occupational Distress in UK Factual Television

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About the Dart Centre

Dart Centre Europe, a not-for-profit organisation based in London, is the regional hub for the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, a unique international thought leader in trauma-informed media practice. Affiliated to the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University New York, for twenty years the Dart Centre has been leading the debate on what resources, training and support journalists and filmmakers need in order to cover traumatic events ethically and effectively.

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Introduction

Documentary and factual television is both a cornerstone of responsible, engaged broadcasting and a target of well-earned criticism for sensationalism and exploitation. As a sector, documentary film and factual TV comprise wildly diverse programming, ranging from reality shows and true crime to in-depth public-service documentaries. Behind this diverse sector lies a skilled workforce largely invisible to the public: researchers, producers, camera operators, editors and a wide range of other professionals, often working under challenging and even traumatic conditions. Those professionals are both the subjects of this report and the sources that inform its content.

This enquiry into occupational distress in factual television, commissioned by the Wellcome Trust and prepared by the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma, is the first of its kind. This report has three goals:

- To map out the drivers of occupational distress in factual TV;

- To understand how effectively the industry responds to significant sources of occupational distress;

- To recommend potential steps for moving forward.

In addressing these goals, we deliberately take a broad sweep, looking both at productions with a high trauma content (for example those made in hospital wards and conflict zones); as well as lighter, structured, reality-style productions, where the possibility of coming up face to face with human distress may be just as real, but is less readily recognised. We consider the varying impacts of filmmakers' direct exposure to violence and tragedy; their extensive engagement with vulnerable, often traumatised sources and the significant ethical dilemmas it entails; their ongoing professional exposure to violent or disturbing imagery; and their encounters with bullying, harassment and other abusive behaviour within the industry. And we make a series of recommendations for research and reform, drawn from our interviews and from evidence-informed practice.

This report was commissioned and researched prior to recent controversies concerning the ethical treatment of vulnerable contributors in reality TV, but our findings relate closely to those debates. Indeed, issues related to vulnerable and at-risk contributors emerged as the central theme of our research.

When asked, "Why do you work in TV?", industry professionals will offer a range of reasons. Many enjoy the work's scope for autonomy and creative expression. Even more value the privileged access and insights the work can give into other people's lives. Sometimes those encounters may be light, carrying little long-term consequence for either contributors or filmmakers. But frequently, filmmakers come into close proximity with people who are leading difficult lives impacted by illness, trauma and stark levels of social injustice.

For some filmmakers, the terrain of suffering may be their primary area of work – driven by their skill at making empathetic connection or bearing witness to catastrophic crises; a strong sense of public mission; a desire to bring attention

to wrongs that don't get the public attention they deserve. But the simple fact is that any member of a production staff in almost any role and on any kind of programme – including seemingly lighter entertainment formats – could find themselves working with vulnerable contributors or traumatic content on a regular basis.

To provide some sense of scale - according to estimates from the Scottish NHS 20% of women experience intimate-partner violence, and more than one in six UK residents are victims of physical or sexual abuse in childhood. A recent study found that 8% of children have experienced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) by the age of 18, mainly as a result of sexual abuse and maltreatment.[i] Most people are resilient and flourish despite these adverse experiences; but a significant proportion of contributors who appear on TV will nevertheless be carrying vulnerabilities which emerge in their encounters with TV production teams.

Long-term, repeated professional exposure to "second-hand" human distress – the details of others' traumatic experience, along with graphic imagery and other aversive content – can have significant occupational-health consequences, long recognised by medical science as "vicarious traumatisation" or "secondary trauma". The most recent edition of the U.S. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V) specifically recognises such vicarious exposure as a pathway for PTSD. Meanwhile, a growing body of research in fields as diverse as military service and journalism has focused on "moral injury" from the linked experience of trauma and ethical violation.[ii]

Factual TV, as an industry, has not examined these occupational health questions, and has done little to prepare programme-makers for the profound challenges to ethics, craft and emotional capacities that may accompany frequent engagement with highly vulnerable contributors.

The present crisis in reality TV, stemming from the suicides of contributors, may be one expression of this neglect. This study, however, suggests that issues related to contributor care are also intimately tied to other sources of occupational distress – including bullying and other workplace abuses – woven deep into the culture of factual TV.

While drama and comedy are beyond the scope of this report, our findings nonetheless may shed light also on broader industry concerns. Filmmakers who worked on docudramas cast light on what it takes to reconstruct trauma and violence; producers working at the lighter end of factual entertainment had much to say that would be relevant to comedy production. The fundamental employment and structural issues – freelance precarity, a culture of high-demands and long working hours, the potential that powerful individuals have to abuse their power – are the same across the industry. Consequently, this study's implications go beyond the factual television sector.

Terminology and methodology

This report is framed in terms of *occupational distress*. Our primary interest is in understanding the distinct pressures generated by work in the TV industry, particularly when inflected by trauma, moral violation and related issues. What practices might be deleterious to staff well-being? How effective are individuals, production companies, and broadcasters in mitigating these risks? (Although pre-existing mental health challenges are also relevant to the challenges people experience in the workplace, they are not our principle focus in this report.)

We investigate TV work from the perspective of traumatic stress research, a field that seeks to understand the intense emotional experiences and deeper psycho-biological reactions that result from exposure to distressing content or threatening situations.

Research for this report concentrated on factual television production. This includes everything from one-off long-format documentaries, such as the BBC Storyville strand, to blue-light shows (i.e. those that depict life behind the scenes in hospitals and police stations) and general factual production (i.e. history, gardening and other life-style shows), all the way to what we might call "Challenge TV," a category that would include any reality TV format in which contributors are also contestants (e.g. Dragons' Den and Love Island).

This report draws on 22 interviews conducted with TV producers and representatives of stakeholder organisations, including broadcasters, industry professional organisations, educational organisations and labour unions. Stakeholder organisations included PACT, BECTU, Directors UK, the National Film and Television School and representatives from Channel 4, the BBC, and for comparative purposes, Australia's ABC.

The interviews were divided equally between female and male industry professionals. Of the 22 interviewees, 16 work in programme production; the remainder, in a variety of industry support roles. The production category includes executive producers as well as current and former commissioning editors. Interviews also included two registered psychologists who had participated in psychological assessments of contributors. We are grateful for the time and insights of each contributor.

All individuals were interviewed on condition of anonymity, to provide a maximum sense of security. Interviews were semi-structured, combining certain standard questions with wide scope to identify gaps in existing knowledge and research. Transcripts were tagged, with key responses analysed quantitatively.

Research also included a literature review, and a review of policies in other trauma-facing sectors.

It should be noted that this report has certain deliberate limitations. It is a qualitative survey, not a comprehensive quantitative assessment of trauma impact within the industry. It doesn't address general news output. It does include, however, specific current affairs formats that have a rhythm and production style that are closer to the factual television mainstream, such

as magazine shows that extensively mix news items with lighter material and documentaries that deal with current affairs-related issues at home or abroad.

This report was originally conceived as a narrow enquiry into the impact of occupational distress on workers in factual television. Contributor care was not the original focal point for this research, and, indeed, we did not anticipate in-depth discussion or recommendations on this issue. In our interviews with production staff, however, it became apparent that these two strands are so intricately intertwined that attempting to separate them would be counter-productive.

Core findings

Detailed analysis of interviews is presented later in this report, but certain consistent patterns and themes emerged.

GENERAL: DISTRESS, PSYCHOLOGICAL INJURY RISK AND TRAUMA EXPOSURE

- **Production staff across all genres of factual TV come into frequent contact with violence and suffering, both directly and indirectly.** For many this prolonged, repeated contact exacts a toll not reflected in the public debate around mental health risks in the industry.

- **The exposures are highest in a category we call "human-impact TV"** – peak-time TV series shot in hospitals and emergency settings, current-affairs documentaries filmed in hostile environments, and films that centre on the lives of trauma-affected contributors (including victims of crime, the bereaved, and those living with terminal illnesses). Here, a significant minority of interviewees reported trauma-related distress from direct witnessing of events, or threat/attack aimed at themselves or their teams. A larger group reported distress related to vicarious traumatisation – prolonged immersion in the aversive details of stories, the tragedies in contributors' lives or disturbing images. (*Direct and vicarious trauma exposure in the course of professional work are established risk factors for PTSD and other psychological injury. Studies in journalists have found rates of PTSD in the region of 10-20% for those doing comparable trauma-related work; similar rates are also found among the police and emergency personnel TV producers may be working alongside.*[iii])

- **All producers we interviewed – 100 percent – mentioned significant strains associated with working with vulnerable contributors.** These challenges were encountered not just in overtly trauma-related contexts, but in all genres, including lighter reality-TV formats. Junior producers working on dating and talent shows and general factual programmes often encountered vulnerable members of the public with prior histories of issues like suicide, self-harm and depression. The challenges of working with such people in the make-or-break environment of TV were described as considerable, and can increase risks for moral injury, burnout and other difficulties.

CONTRIBUTOR CARE, ETHICAL DISTRESS AND MORAL INJURY

- **Dilemmas involving highly vulnerable contributors extend across genres, including moral doubt about informed consent, manipulation of contributors and concerns about abuse of psychological testing of contributors.** Nearly one-third of interviewees volunteered, without prompting, that they had been forced at one time or another to act against their conscience in this regard.

- **Nearly all producers identified a lack of training or preparation in how to build appropriately-bounded relationships with contributors, minimise**

harm during interviews, and understand contributors' reactions. (In the human-impact production category, we found highly-proficient senior producers dedicated to mentoring junior staff. These producers had considerable experience working on sensitive-issue driven stories and a strong focus on supporting their teams. But the only producers who benefited from this approach were the ones who worked directly with these senior producers.)

- **Interviewees expressed significant ethical doubt about the use of psychological testing to screen vulnerable contributors** – in particular, some interviewees described an "abuse of the screening" process to manipulate contributors' on-screen reactions, rather than protect them from harm.

- **We note with concern that in trauma-facing professions, research strongly indicates that ethical distress combined with a high degree of exposure to violence, suffering or graphic imagery may worsen risk for PTSD, or lead to related moral injury.**

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

- **Bullying within the industry as a whole was described as pervasive – 63 percent of our interviewees identified bullying as a significant danger.** Victimisation through bullying can occur at any level of the industry, from runners to commissioning editors. Freelancers were thought to be most at risk, and least able to defend themselves.

- **Half of all interviewees described sexual harassment as a significant issue**, though most interviewees also reported progress in the last decade or more.

- **In issues that closely intersected bullying and sexual harassment, we found that freelancers believed that they had little to no agency to question instructions from those senior to them. Freelancers felt this to be morally dubious and potentially harmful to the vulnerable contributors they were working with.** This was a significant source of anxiety for many, and may be a contributing factor for people leaving the industry mid-career.

- **A more general culture of long working hours and unreasonable demands** was thought to add significantly to the overall pressures, and to limit or undercut resilience.

- **Our interviewees were doubtful that recent MeToo-related initiatives could do much to change the situation without mechanisms that incentivise or otherwise compel production companies to be more proactive in tackling abuse.** (Many noted the great disparity in different "shops" – there are wonderful companies to work for, and terrible ones.)

- **We should also note that the frequency of bullying, sexual harassment and other abuses of power suggest a special industry risk factor for PTSD and other psychological injury.** Literature on trauma-facing professions indicates that hostile workplace environments contribute significantly to overall trauma-related mental risk for staff.[iv]

SUPPORT AND PRODUCER TRAINING

- **The strong team culture of factual TV is a potential source of peer support and resilience.** However, our interviewees felt that both a sense of expendability for freelancers and a culture of silence limits the effectiveness of social support.

- **Producers at all levels wanted appropriate training in how to work effectively on difficult assignments, including working with vulnerable contributors; self-care; managing the impact of contributor distress on production teams; and supporting colleagues.** None of this training is routinely available. (The assumption that "people skills" are automatic and a product of common sense rather than appropriate staff development was thought to be unhelpful here.)

- **Producers also thought that training in how to "manage up" would help to prepare junior producers for the challenges of working with senior producers, commissioners and presenters.** (Presenters were identified as a high-risk group for abusive behaviour.)

- **None of the independent TV companies whose staff we interviewed had comprehensive trauma management policies in place (although one had started to provide training).** This contrasts sharply with the news industry, which over the last 15 years has adopted a wide range of trauma-awareness, manager-training and peer-support initiatives, including at such industry leaders as the BBC and Reuters.

- **We note particularly the absence of trauma training and support for current-affairs filmmakers, whose levels of exposure to violence and threat are high and who often work in relative isolation.** Again, this contrasts sharply with rapidly-evolving news-industry trauma-support standards for staff working in hostile environments, crises or high-risk assignments.

SUMMARY DISCUSSION POINTS:

All of the findings above are explored in greater detail later on in this report. But three consistent themes stand out:

- Among factual TV teams, **exposure to potentially traumatic incidents** – direct and vicarious – is high, as are additional PTSD risk factors including moral injury, bullying and sexual harassment.

- For factual TV and documentary filmmakers, the impact of direct and vicarious trauma exposure is distinctly intertwined with issues of **contributor care**.

- **Factual TV and documentary lag behind the news industry** in trauma awareness, manager training and peer support.

Key Recommendations

Interviewees identified diverse measures that could help to mitigate the areas of concern identified in this report. These fall into three consistent areas:

- **Ensuring accountability for the ethical treatment of contributors, safety of professionals and potential abuses of power (bullying, sexual harassment, etc.), through audits, reviews, risk assessments and other consistent, transparent mechanisms.**

- **Training in ethical engagement with contributors, self-care, and management of distress in peers, colleagues and team members.**

- **Specific changes to working practices that can enhance resilience.**

In addition, the Dart Centre makes several recommendations building on the findings from our interviews:

- **Establish cross-industry guidance on trauma management policy and mental-health awareness**

- **Review psych-testing arrangements and processes**

- **Develop trauma literacy in UK factual television**

Interviewees' suggestions and our recommendations are discussed in greater detail below.

Research Findings: Detail and Discussion

THE COSTS

Several key patterns and themes emerged from our interviews.

1. TV production staff come into contact with suffering both directly and indirectly, and for some it exacts a toll.

> *I used to feel with some stories I did absolutely physically and emotionally drained. And it wasn't that I lay down and cried. I just felt exhausted, I felt that I had absorbed all their pain and I didn't know what to do with this pain that lived all over my body. I could feel it in my body, I could feel it in my head... It suffused my whole being.*
>
> An experienced current affairs documentarian, discussing the impact of working with harrowing testimony

Discussion of trauma-related distress came up most frequently in connection with two different kinds of exposures. First, exposure through direct witnessing of medical emergencies, such as road accidents, hospital operations and the aftermath of violent crime. And second, through intense, often long-term involvements with vulnerable contributors who had had traumatic or adverse life experiences (bereavement, injury, sexual abuse, and so on).

The threat of direct attack was also an issue for a smaller set of filmmakers working in hostile environments or undercover. While it would take a different kind of quantitative research to assess the frequency at which staff in factual television develop psychological injury, it was clear from the interviews and comparative data on television journalists that TV documentarians are at risk of both vicarious and direct traumatisation. Interviews also suggested the potential for moral injury – trauma linked to an explicit sense of either complicity in moral violation, or betrayal of ethical norms by bosses – as a risk factor for PTSD and other difficulties.

> *I've been on projects where I felt like people haven't been treated correctly or they're vulnerable contributors and I've worked with them and it's been really bad. And then afterwards, I felt like a massive amount of guilt that I used their experience to then put [that] on television. I walked away with a big pay cheque and the credit and they have walked away with nothing... And that's made me feel ashamed of the film... I don't tell people when it's on television. The only thing I want from it at that point is just to say to someone this is what I did, and so can you just give me another job?*

2. Vulnerable contributors are a universal source of conflict and distress.

We began all interviews by asking our sample of programme-makers, "What do you see as being the main drivers of occupational distress?" Some mentioned primary trauma exposure – directly witnessing horrific acts; others placed bullying, sexual harassment and other forms of intra-organisational aggression and betrayal high on their lists. *Everyone, however, mentioned at some stage the strains that result from close involvement with vulnerable contributors.*

The primary burden in these encounters is of course borne by contributors themselves. However, proximity to the distress of others can also lead to a number of significant difficulties. There is the risk of vicarious traumatisation; the challenges of over-identification, managing boundaries and feeling the need to rescue vulnerable individuals in situations beyond the interviewer's capability and responsibility; and the moral confusion of being torn between conflicting obligations to the film and the contributor.[v]

Many of our interviews reflected deeply-felt ethical dilemmas generated through close involvement with vulnerable contributors. The filmmakers in our sample who were most exposed described moments in their work that were akin to tight-rope walking, where it felt like one slip might plunge them into some kind of moral catastrophe. Here, a director with decades of experience describes what it was like to spend months documenting the adjustments a family had to make after the husband and father contracts a debilitating, life-shortening illness:

> *There is a massive, terrible weight in that of responsibility... What if I knock them over the edge? Do you know what I mean? Then suddenly, they unravel.... You're in an incredibly powerful position... If you get it right, you can tell a very important story that could be very helpful to other people in that situation. But if you get it wrong, you can really fuck up a family, like really badly fuck them up.*

The worry of being insensitive or exploitative in a way that might be adding to a subject's distress was something that had caused considerable anxiety for many of the programme-makers interviewed for this report. It was suggested that this was a contributing factor for many who leave the industry and for TV's notorious problem with mid-career churn.

What is most striking about these dilemmas is how rarely they are articulated in the industry, compared with how often they came up in these interviews. The possibility that a contributor's distress might also have an impact on the filmmaker is barely mentioned in the trade-press, the academic literature or in public presentations.[vi] Many programme-makers feel that the proper focus of their work should be on the contributors rather than on themselves; some also worry that expressing vulnerability and ethical doubt might shorten their careers. Whatever the combined factors, no industry-wide training structures exist to help TV workers engage more effectively with vulnerable contributors and mitigate the personal impacts of working with trauma.

Our interviewees also indicated that when appropriate training occurs, or when junior producers are mentored to interact with contributors ethically, it is down to the luck of the draw. The filmmaker quoted above saw it as his responsibility to head off any situations where his junior producers might lie "awake at

night, thinking, 'I'm a bad person'." To do that, he spent time scanning through situations he had been in in the past, locating where similar problems might come up for his colleagues, and then he would encourage them to pre-visualise what could go wrong – or traumatic events they might find distressing – and game-plan their various options for mitigating these dilemmas.

But for the most part, the impression from interviews was that junior researchers and producers are left in isolation to work these ethical challenges out for themselves. Indeed, they often feel unable to raise ethical and moral concern with those in senior roles.

The rigidity of television hierarchies can considerably constrain the space for building a protective sense of alliance and trust with contributors. In the following passage, a producer-director is discussing situations in which she has been pressured into bringing trauma survivors back to places that are likely to trigger painful visceral reactions:

> Out on the shoot… it's all that a bit intensified because you're in contact with your office back home and they're telling you do this thing, get this shot, bring this person to this place; and maybe you know actually they don't want to do that. I know I'm going to be pushing my contributor's boundaries to do that, but now you're in a conflict where you don't want to be a difficult freelancer, you don't want to get the reputation of being someone that won't do what is needed to be done. You're put in a position where you often have to compromise your own morals … what you know in your heart, your gut is not the right thing to do… That kind of conflict can cause quite a lot of distress.

3. The dilemmas surrounding contributor distress were not just confined to filmmakers working on current affairs or medically-orientated documentaries that deal with overtly harrowing or traumatic themes. Vulnerable contributors and distressing content can turn up in any genre.

> What we found a lot of the time is that we hold an incredible position of power without realising how powerful we are. So, when someone comes for an interview, a lot of the time, they feel that they have to talk about everything that you're asking them. They have to completely come clean, they have to unravel and open their souls, and that's a horrible thing.

Contributors on any kind of factual entertainment programme might disclose to staff – often relatively junior producers or make-up artists – a prior history of sexual abuse, self-harm or suicidality. Producers also reported feeling personally conflicted when working with contributors who were overly invested in the hope that their TV appearance would make a substantial difference to their lives. For some contributors, failure could be crushing if, for instance, their business idea was rejected, their singing act voted down, or their efforts to find love on a dating show rebuffed. The power of TV to encourage contributors to over-extend themselves or open up in high-risk ways was troubling to many of the producers we spoke to.

Nearly all of our production-based interviewees described situations where production teams had been blindsided by stories that started off seeming to be about one thing and then morphed into something else. One described feeling

at sea after coming across probable child abuse in a family. A sports production team that had set out to celebrate the physical resilience of amputees competing in the ParaOlympics found themselves unprepared for dealing with the mental health dimension of working with competitors who also had PTSD.

The difficulties of dealing with sudden disclosure came up most pertinently in the context of young, inexperienced associate producers and ancillary staff, such as interns and make-up artists. It was identified in all kinds of productions, from talent shows to cooking and gardening programmes. As one executive producer explained:

> *[As] an AP or researcher, you kind of go skipping up to people and going, "Oh, tell me about the flowers in your garden," and like, "Yeah, the flowers in my garden are lovely… and it's because my dad used to grow these. And he was abused as a child and…" And all this stuff comes out. So even when you think the subject is not going to expose these kinds of things… They do. They do…. For a lot of the contributors it's the first time anyone's ever said, "You're really interesting, I want to hear your story."*

People open up because there is someone there to listen to them. In many situations, the filmmaker's role is more active than that would suggest, leading to a feeling of responsibility for initiating a response or digging things up through questioning that might better remain unsaid:

> *You have such intense relationships with your contributors and your job is to kind of get to know them and get them to reveal themselves. And you are kind of like a therapist almost. And then people share all sorts of things with you because that's how you make it to the program, to be honest.*

Even light programming can generate situations that require significant emotional labour. Just as we have discussed in the previous section on human-impact filmmaking, producers need to know how to put healthy boundaries in place and to judge how far it is appropriate to go. We were told that in particular, junior producers often begin to feel obligated to help the people they are talking to beyond the limits of the programme. This can include pressure to act in a quasi-therapeutic role, which they are unlikely to have either the skills for or the time to do it responsibly.

The majority of factual TV programming does not fit into the high-impact sensitive-issues-driven end of the market, nor does it fit into the popular reality TV formats. In terms of its approach to working with contributors and the extent to which it seeks to shape their narratives, it lies somewhere in the middle. Although trauma exposure in this zone may seem limited or remote on the surface, one of the key findings that came up in our research is that vulnerable contributors and sensitive subject matter often do turn up on these shows, and production staff feel ill-equipped to manage the complex human-interaction issues that can arise.

In this middle ground, we also find a stronger ethic of control than in sensitive-issues-driven filmmaking. The structuring of reality is a device that programme-makers employ in a whole range of factual formats, from history documentaries in which members of the public might help explain what it was like to live in a previous century by simulating it, to lifestyle challenge-shows in which people bake cakes to impress the nation. Such formats are attractive for many

reasons: they build on past success and create predictable television offerings; they extend participation to the general public beyond a narrow caste of professional presenters; and crucially, they are cheaper to make because they allow for compressed shooting schedules. As one company director explained to us: "What would've been done in four months you can do in a week and still get all the dramatic points."

In middle-factual,[vii] working methods between genres blur. A true crime exposé can be made with the ethics of high-end sensitive-issues-driven filmmaking, or it can be packaged in an entertainment format and shot on a compressed schedule. In the latter scenario, there is less time to research and build non-extractive relationships with contributors, and consequently the dangers of moral injury in staff may be higher. One self-shooting producer-director with considerable experience in this genre told us:

> *There's very little freedom to just go out there and meet someone, let them be themselves and tell a truthful story, instead what we're doing now is we're going out there and we're telling someone what their story is and we're pushing it into that narrative which is also super harmful…*

> *We deal with so many vulnerable people in television, we want that vulnerability because it's so engaging for people. [But] we de-centre the person that we're making the story about, the most important person, and we centre the viewer or the commissioner as the primary source, and I personally find that really distressing because I feel like I'm constantly pushing back against people that have completely the wrong idea about what we're doing.*

4. In certain sub-genres of factual TV, we found senior producers who had a deep appreciation of what it takes to work sensitively and effectively with vulnerable contributors, but this skill is scattered, and is not prioritised across the board.

On certain kinds of trauma-exposing productions, we found a cadre of highly-skilled and experienced producers who play a crucial role in supporting and mentoring junior staff members. In factual TV, this expertise appeared to be largely confined within a group that specialises in social-justice oriented issues, films extensively in medical and emergency settings, or works with vulnerable children.

Several of the producers we interviewed suggested that the shock of finding oneself in unfamiliar and potentially traumatic situations can be greatly mitigated if a more experienced filmmaker sits down with a junior colleague and takes them through what it might be like, and described the situations they rued in their own careers.[viii] A good mentor might say: *this is what you are going to see, smell, hear; you may experience this reaction or that reaction; and these are the kind of craft problems you may need to solve in an instant. You may feel guilty for X or Y happening, but maybe that is you being too harsh on yourself because, perhaps, the other options are worse.* We talked to series producers working in the human impact genre who do this assiduously and coach junior producers in how to work sensitively with vulnerable contributors and manage

personal boundary issues – but this mentoring approach is not consistent across the board.

The expertise of these senior producers with such specialist experience doesn't appear to carry through automatically into the broader-middle ground of companies that have a less well-developed track-record of working on sensitive issues, but neverthelesss win commissions for a number of such projects each year. In the majority of TV roles, there is no relevant training in how to work with vulnerable people in terms of understanding trauma impact, developing appropriate interactional skills, practising self-care or learning how to support colleagues. Junior producers are often thrown into the deep end and left to work things out for themselves.

Perhaps more surprisingly, we also found no evidence that appropriate mentoring or skill development carried through into production houses that do specialise in current affairs programmes shot in hostile environments, one area that many in the industry assume would have a greater investment in making sure that these issues are covered.

5. Producers at all levels wanted appropriate training on how to work effectively on difficult assignments, something which they currently aren't exposed to in any meaningful way.

> *I don't really feel that we're given training in how to deal with people in difficult situations. So, I feel like it's just sort of assumed from looking at our CV, "oh you worked on programs about child psychology" or "you worked on programs about bereavement" or "you've worked on this, so you must be good at this."*

> A mid-career-TV producer working on a wide range of factual output

In particular, producers asked for training in:

- What to expect when covering traumatic stories. (How to understand their likely reactions)

- How to build appropriately-bounded relationships with contributors (How to enter people's lives – and leave them – without causing unrealistic expectations of friendship or psychological support)

- Sensitive filming and interviewing techniques that are less likely to exacerbate distress

- How to recognise signs of their own overload, and how to mitigate it through self-help steps

- How to navigate potentially morally-injurious craft and story-telling dilemmas

- Dealing with conflict in teams on difficult assignments. (How to manage up as well as how to manage down was mentioned here, especially in the context of working with presenters)

Most consistently, TV professionals wanted more guidance on what to expect, so that they could pre-visualise what they might be getting into:

I really strongly feel that if you're a researcher and an AP and someone tells you these are things that go on with contributors and these are the feelings you might get from it, these are the challenges you're going to get and these are the kind of benefits that you're going to get, if you kind of know that and you can expect the feelings that you're going to have, I don't think that they're going to be as bad and I think you're going to feel normal in like having them because it is normal when you're dealing with someone that's really upset and like has been through a shitty time and you hear a terrible story about them, it's normal that you're going to feel this complex weird things, right?

6. TV will always be a high-stress, high-demand environment. Staff find the good stress that comes from meeting production deadlines satisfying, but a culture of unreasonable demands can lead to corrosive varieties of bad stress.

TV production is full of deadlines and key moments affording only one chance to get it right. The financial consequences of making mistakes on a shoot or losing a key contributor can be high. Our interviewees found this aspect of the work stressful but at the same time felt it had also led them to discover new capacities and a greater sense of themselves.

I couldn't imagine getting the sort of satisfaction I get from this job in other jobs because I like the variety, I like deadlines, and I like the different teams and I like the different scenarios. They are all the things that kind of make it stressful, they're also the things that make it good. So, it depends which way you look at things in a way, doesn't it?

Nevertheless, work-related stress is a double-edged sword. For stress to be experienced as good rather than bad, challenges need to be achievable and commensurate with the resources and skills that people have, and to be properly backed with appropriate support. Often, we heard accounts of how staff were put in situations where the expectations placed on them were unrealistic. Producers talked about a culture of long working hours and situations where people were encouraged to aim for the stars, and then blamed when reaching for the impossible proved to be just that. Our interviewees felt this kind of bad stress to be plentiful in TV work, and believed it to be corrosive to their personal lives and potentially to their mental health. The quality of leadership in individual companies was seen as a determining factor here.

7. Bullying, sexual harassment and other abuses of power remain a persistent problem in the industry and a significant source of distress for those individuals who are targeted.

It's a really systematic problem associated with this industry. And high-profile people both on the screen and off screen… One or two, high profile people who are properly investigated for that would change the culture… I was sort of hoping that Jeremy Clarkson in some way would do that, but it hasn't. I can safely say it hasn't.

The individuals interviewed for this study were well aware that bullying and sexual coercion – use of a power imbalance to pressure a junior worker for

sex – are widespread in the industry at all levels.[ix] Junior producers recalled being bullied by series producers, and series producers recall being bullied by company directors. In our sample, one company director described what it was like to be on the end of abusive treatment from commissioning editors, and a commissioning editor described being the subject of serious bullying within the channel. Abusive power relations are maintained by a culture of impunity. Many felt that presenters – by virtue of the commercial premium their on-screen identity commanded – were given a degree or power that was both unwarranted and potentially unhealthy for all concerned.

Some described sexual harassment as an issue that had only been salient at the beginning of their careers; some thought that the situation had improved across the board and was less prevalent than it used to be.[x] However, one interviewee who had taken part in a confidential closed-door meeting with more junior producers thought that sexual coercion was still frequent in the industry but masked, typically taking place between work engagements rather than in full view of colleagues in the office or on location. It is most likely to happen at the end of a contract when a freelancer is taken out for a celebratory drink or meal, and the conversation turns to the possibility of future work.

Generally, junior workers and freelancers were thought to bear the brunt of abusive behaviour, be most vulnerable to its effects and be the least likely to use any kind of complaints procedure. But bullying was described to us as something that happens at all levels, even at just one or two rungs below the top. Indeed, it is possible that some of its most aversive aspects might be particularly prevalent in situations where exiting is not an option. (A freelancer can bide their time and sit out a short contract.)

On the surface, TV culture appears to be an egalitarian, dressed-down world in which the idea of autonomy and the right of the individual to have an independent voice is fully respected. But that is true only in part. Many producers – particularly those working in development – report having a great deal of flexibility in how they plan their time and how they get things done.[xi] But our respondents also described a world that is markedly hierarchal, even quasi-military in structure.

The hierarchical aspects of TV are most obvious on set or in live production environments, where commands may need to be followed instantly because of the tremendous time and money pressures involved in film work.

Our interviewees thought that this also carried over into other phases of the production chain. Seniors hold sway over juniors in a way that makes it hard to question instructions or raise issues of conscience. Producers may have a great deal of autonomy in how they achieve a task, but relatively little say in whether the specific task should be modified or carried out in the first place. This may generate significant moral injury risks in situations where juniors are mandated to do certain things with contributors which they feel are exploitative or abusive, but which they feel they cannot challenge.

Some of the producers we talked to described something that was tantamount to a culture of omertà around expressing either concern about the treatment of contributors or staff welfare issues. Again, this depends very much on the particular shop a producer finds themselves in. We also talked to producers who had worked at companies where thinking through the ethical dimensions

of their work and minimising adverse, unforeseen impacts on contributors was the starting point of their work, and where such discussion was very much encouraged.**xii**

Where accusations of bullying or sexual harassment surfaced in relationship to presenter-talent or powerful individuals in a hierarchy, the situation was brushed under the carpet more often than not. A manager might be reassigned to another production or given reduced responsibilities; or sent to an awareness course (sometimes, not for the first time). The preferred solution might be to move the victim; or to offer them an inducement to keep quiet and not rock the boat, such as a job on a future production far away from an alleged offender. To illustrate how the power dynamics worked, an experienced union official invited us to imagine the situation of a small independent TV company that is steadily growing its business:

> *[You are] building your name, building your own reputation, turnover, everything else, and you've got this bloody pandered bully on your payroll. However, he or she is fantastic and winning over commissions, bringing work in, everything else. The temptation is to find a way of either sweeping it under the carpet, restricting their powers. The one thing they're not doing is sacking them.*

Many of our interviewees thought that presenters had a degree of power by virtue of their market position that was both unwarranted and unhealthy for all those concerned. It was suggested that the media spotlight had the capacity to make some into "monsters". Presenters, who can be high-flying scientists, historians or business people, often have big demands on their time outside of their television contracts and can be resistant to taking instruction from junior producers, whose concerns are distant to theirs. "You can't tell them off," an executive producer told us, "because they are the thing the broadcaster wants." More generally, powerful people are afforded rights to certain kinds of behaviour that would never be extended to subordinates, as this comment illustrates:

> *There's that whole sense of which, "Oh they're under a load of pressure because they're being filmed", or because they're playing someone, or because they're somebody important on the team or there, and I feel, No! They're just another human being in distress and choosing to take it out on someone else.*

Social cohesion and informal peer support is an important source of resilience in the TV sector, but it is more fragile than it might otherwise be. Fear of losing work creates a culture of silence around abuses of power and people often feel alone in their concerns.

> *"There is a real like fear that you won't be employed again if you, you know, express too many negative thoughts I think and I think that does have an impact on the industry because people can be put in difficult situations or worked quite you know overly demanding hours. And it's very rare that anybody would ever speak up and sort of stand up for their rights because then they would get labelled as the troublemaker and kind of you know, it's an industry where you know your reputation is everything and a black mark against you means you might never work again…"*

TV staff work in teams, and those teams can often be cohesive and robustly

supportive. The quality of team work was a source of pride for many. However, structural features of the industry – such as working for separate technical sections, or short-term freelance assignments – cut against these instincts and reduced the opportunities for meaningful social support. Projecting positivity, however negative the reality, was seen as a safer strategy than raising moral concerns or sharing personal impacts. The repeated impression that emerged throughout our interviews is that staff often feel isolated and disempowered when it comes to questioning instructions from others higher in the command chain, and also only rarely discuss the personal impact dimension of working with traumatic material. A representative from an industry support organisation we spoke to suggested that people under strain of any kind were more likely to turn to family or friends outside of the industry for support rather than to their colleagues.

9. In terms of safeguarding staff wellbeing, none of the independent TV production companies we spoke to had comprehensive trauma management policies in place. All the managers we talked to were open to bringing in external psychological support for those who needed it, but the position was – with some exceptions – largely reactive rather than proactive.

Even companies that take contributor care seriously lacked precise knowledge on how to mitigate trauma exposure risks to staff. Although there were cases of people bringing in trauma trainers at the start of particularly trauma-intensive productions (in most instances, the Dart Centre), the dominant assumption was that trauma management was something that happened after somebody gets into trouble. The only companies that had comprehensive trauma management policies that looked at all the phases of exposure - before, during and after - were large production organisations with significant news operations, such as the BBC and the ABC in Australia. Given their small size, it would be unreasonable to expect most factual TV companies to generate the necessary policies and guidance internally. This is something that requires intervention on an industry-wide basis, steered by the major channels and other stake-holder organisations.

Interestingly, among the non-managers we talked to, it was the producers focussed on overseas current affairs work who were the most sceptical that they would get meaningful support from the companies that dominate production in that area. One said that she would rather go to a commissioner at Channel 4 to ask her if they would pay for counselling than say anything to the company she had worked at for many years. This filmmaker and others agreed that a lot comes down to the culture of individual production houses and who runs them. The sense that companies could be divided into good shops and bad shops to work for was starkly pronounced. (Indeed, several names were checked as examples of outstanding bosses to work for.)

Filmmakers coming back from high-pressure assignments abroad can be in a particularly vulnerable place. When the physical dangers subside, defences can come down, leaving the impact to bubble up. Unfortunately, the editing phase may sometimes be experienced as a particularly pressured and unsupportive place. One documentarian said:

There are two different issues, I think. There's working in a war zone, working in a difficult and hostile environment, and there's the edit and the pressure from your bosses which is often much harder than working in a war zone. … there's a lot of stress working in the edit. There's a lot of stress from the channel, from the production company. Yeah. That is where I see people [being] miserable.

When people are exposed to danger, the desire for safety and the expectation that one's employers have one's back run especially deep. Descriptions of betrayal by leaders, whether real or perceived, are often key markers in the accounts of breakdown and psychological injury. Bosses have pressures too, of course: concerns about ratings, budgets and deadlines, as well as managing physical and political risks and the threat of litigation.[xiii] But bosses' pressures are not necessarily at the forefront of filmmakers' concerns when they are dealing with highly traumatic content in the edit or in the field.

This association between psychological injury and the quality of leadership is extensively documented in the scientific literature on resilience.[xiv] But we did not always find that that was universally understood in all production companies undertaking current-affairs oriented work. During this research, we heard two accounts of significant duty-of-care breaches by companies producing current affairs programmes set in hostile environments. One involved a betrayal that had serious consequences for a team of filmmakers who were in a highly vulnerable and politically sensitive position.

10. The principal line of defence many TV companies have to prevent contributors coming to harm on their shows is "psych-testing." Psychological testing is often touted as a gold standard item in responsible programme-making, but our research indicated that the practice is open to abuse and requires review.

"Psych-testing" is the practice by which qualified psychologists pre-screen potential contributors to assess if they are mentally robust enough to weather the pressures of being on TV and being exposed to public scrutiny. However, there are no commonly agreed-upon standards on how psychological testing is carried out, whether or not it is required, and whether the psychologists in question have the relevant background and training to assess the vulnerability of contributors. Indeed, we found instances of abuse in which psychological profiling was used contrary to its ostensible purpose. In these instances, producers mined assessments to select individuals with underlying instabilities that make them self-aggrandising, impulsive and prone to conflict, despite having received explicit advice from the psychologists that these potential contributors should not be cast.

In our interviews, the two most widely-discussed lines of defence against contributor harm on middle-factual and reality TV genres were the need for fully informed consent – which, as we have already discussed is not always rigorously applied – and psych testing. Some producers lack confidence in the practice and worry that it too easily descends into a box-ticking exercise:

Where I would particularly worry is if you had contributors who you thought didn't understand what they were getting into, who were then going to be manipulated into,

which is the sort of Susan Boyle argument isn't it, about how emotionally robust and prepared for what happened when she went on to X Factor. Did she really understand what all that attention was going to do on her and her little house in Scotland? Arguably she did because she'd seen the format before, but did she have enough help and support? I don't know...

A diligent psych-tester will spend time trying to ensure that a potential contributor is clear about what they are signing up for and that they are not concealing issues that could make them unsuitable. A registered psychologist with years of experience working on big UK reality shows described her working practice as follows:

I think one of the things to look out for is people who are clever enough to manipulate a situation and basically aren't telling the truth... who may be a bit Machiavellian... it's not 100% rigorous. Things do happen. But at least you're sort of filtering out people that you feel are vulnerable, are likely to have issues either with themselves or towards other people.

Currently, however, there are no industry-wide guidelines on how psychological assessment should work; each psychologist draws up their own method and decides which measures to use. This may be a questionnaire and/or a face-to-face interview, in which the psychologist may or may not use evidence-based instruments. The psychologist may take contributors into an in-depth discussion of the potential downsides of screen exposure, or they may leave it to the production. A junior producer may do a pre-sort at the casting stage of a production and then only if there are doubts, will the question of whether a candidate needs to be "psyched" be referred up. As the same psychologist quoted above explains, this is a risky approach:

You know what it's like, they're young, they're working incredibly long hours, it's highly competitive, they're on short-term contracts... And they want to do well at it - so they'll find exciting, interesting, crazy, rebellious, people who have got some edge about them. And, really, I guess it's up to the more senior people to instruct them on how to do the original screening and... to look for vulnerability.

A number of experienced interviewees working in the sensitive-issues-driven filmmaking category, in which contributors are known to be vulnerable, felt that the practice was not appropriate for their work and sometimes have to push back against the channel's wish to implement it. "It's much easier to do a psych test," one filmmaker, who often works with vulnerable children, told us. "But it's not real and it doesn't make me feel comfortable."

In addition, some interviewees specifically asserted that psych-testing is, in some cases, abused to identify attractive sources of interpersonal conflict and drama, rather than to screen out fragile contributors. Interviewees described their concern that psych-reports provide a wealth of information that has the potential to be used in ways that are contrary to its ostensible purpose.

You end up with a graph. You'll see the spikes on narcissism, extroversion, risk taking, all the things that you think...an almost subclinical mental health issues, and of course, they're the people that the producers wanted on, and the kind of normal people or the introverts, they're the people who they didn't want on.

In addition, both of the registered psychologists we spoke to said that they had encountered what one described as "reverse psych-testing", situations which unambiguously crossed clear ethical lines. One described being pressured by a producer to doctor an original report which recommended that a young contributor not be cast for a reality TV challenge show. Another, who worked for an internationally-famous TV show, watched someone whom they recommended be barred cast for the programme - with predictable and negative consequences for that contributor.

Sources of Resilience

The previous sections have focused on the causes of occupational distress. However, it is important to note that our interviews suggested that factual TV and documentary makers also draw on significant sources of resilience – the ability to adapt, cope and recover from extraordinary stress – both as individuals and as a professional community.[xv]

Many of our interviewees located resilience and purpose among some of the same challenges that they identified as sources of stress and doubt. Intense deadline pressure, being asked to achieve something that one doubted was possible, working in unfamiliar situations and being exposed to the distress of people in traumatic situations, are all scenarios that also contain the seeds of growth. As one producer summarised: "If they go wrong, they can crush your confidence; but if they do go right, then they give you a sense of confidence and resilience - certainly."

Producer after producer described working with vulnerable contributors as being both a deep privilege as well as a source of vicarious distress and anxiety. One suggested that it contained the same "kind of richness" he felt that medical workers also benefit from. Seeing how contributors face adversity can inspire and deepen empathy. People who had not worked with vulnerable contributors, several producers thought, might not realise just how resilient and resourceful human beings can be in crisis.

More generally, in TV production, one meets people from all kinds of walks of life. Here, another producer discusses the capacity the work has to increase one's social range and adaptability:

> I think it's the range of people that you're coming to contact with from every part of the social, racial, religious, sexual strata, that then I think means people as individuals feel comfortable in talking to anybody and everybody, whether it's lord somebody or other, or the homeless person with mental health issues or anybody in between, you know… What you hope is the ability for people to see the truth in whatever is it they're filming or whoever they're meeting, and to find ways of sharing that with an audience.

> (Laughs) I should think of many more positives about working in television. I think a lot of it is also just learning on your feet, that it isn't sit down, learn how to be a researcher, an AP, a PD and all of that, okay out the door because you know it all. You don't. You know an nth of it, whatever training you might have, and you only ever learn when you're out on the streets about… And so individual resourcefulness, empathy, understanding, and… you have to learn the ability to communicate with anybody and everybody…

Coming together around a common cause and being creative as a team was another big theme:

> I think a lot of television manages to generate small, highly-effective teams very quickly where there's really a lot of creativity and rapport and a lot of mutual support. I think the toxic teams, certainly the ones that I've been part of, stand out as unusual and

horrifying because when it happens, it's just like, "What is this? Why would people be doing this?" In general, I think people are pretty amazing [at] being able to build something…a working structure very fast that's very capable of achieving a lot very quickly and that sense of wonder that you can get a group of strangers together who have an impossible task and not enough time and over and over and over again seem to manage to do it is a very sort of fulfilling thing.

Most interviewees took great pride in their creativity and their ability to use narrative to inform the public. But at the same time, they also thought that production stress and the added pressure that accrues from working with distressing material was a volatile combination that required careful handling and containment. For resilience to be maintained, it was essential that certain protective attitudes and measures were in place.

The following all came up as themes:

Support in facing one's fears. Big challenges needed to be supported with good leadership that nurtured talent gently by giving juniors incremental challenges that were beyond, but not too far beyond, their current abilities. In particular, it needed to take a positive, lessons-learned type approach and avoid the blame-culture and fault-finding that many saw as an endemic risk in an industry where so many people are in precarious employment situations. If teams were just left to their own devices without supportive leadership, the fear of losing future employment could pose a risk to team cohesion.

Optimism and positivity. Our interviewees all thought that having a positive, can-do attitude was important for TV production work. Some expressed concerns, however, that TV industry had a dangerous tendency to swing too far in that respect by insisting that people wore a false mask of positivity, stiffing more complicated and authentic emotions that needed to be explored. (And indeed, research does show that a positive mindset is important for resilience but that false or imposed positivity - rose-tinted optimism - is counter-productive. Ideally, in a crisis situation, the first stage involves acknowledging both the negatives and the positives, before building on the latter and moving forward. Skipping a full and realistic assessment of the predicament is associated with disappointment, as well as depression and burnout.[xvi])

Promoting agency and efficacy when working in distressing situations. Every producer we talked to who specialised in the high-impact genre of films that involve working on traumatic or otherwise sensitive themes, spoke about the need for producers to be adequately briefed on what they might experience, even down to smells and visceral imagery.

A producer in charge of a major police series told us that otherwise junior producer often were not able to:

… quite imagine how big an impact it was going to have on them until they got into the field. And then once they saw it and were around police picking up the pieces after extreme violence - whether that be domestic violence or gang violence or whatever - it just really fell apart… So, I would really try and find some of the worst examples and explain to people that that is what they would see, and try to get them to visualise what that situation would be like for them. How could they imagine themselves being in that position and would that…how would that impact on them personally?

In this kind of situation, it was quite likely for a producer to dissociate or become agitated. Rather than blame themselves for understandable human reactions, it was better if producers anticipated their responses and game planed how they might adapt. This way, they were less likely to forget to ask the police appropriate questions, or to take extra care to hold their shots for long enough, etc. Several senior producers saw this kind of briefing work as a fundamental duty of care responsibility. They had noted that making craft mistakes in traumatic situations often led to exaggerated feelings of shame and guilt, instances where staff members might beat themselves up unnecessarily. Having an awareness of different craft options - *do I need to get close or can I film from afar? what is ethically right in this situation?* - enhances resilience. Similarly, they believed that a key function of training was to make sure the trauma discussion did not become isolated from the practical ethical questions.

Moral Compass and a sense of mission. This was a big theme. Again, interviewees who worked in the high-impact category were clear that cutting corners ethically, being sloppy at obtaining fully-informed consent, or just more generally being cloudy about one's motivations for doing something eroded resilience.

Interviewee Recommendations: Detail and Discussion

ACCOUNTABILITY

Our interviewees did not believe that purely voluntary mechanisms would ensure good behaviour in all production companies. In particular, they felt that action was needed to amplify the voice of freelancers and to make it more likely that their concerns were taken seriously. This belief was expressed both by company managers as well as producers at every level we talked to. There was no single vision on how this might be achieved, but the following ideas came up:

A kite-mark scheme. Companies should be invited to register for a voluntary scheme that would indicate whether a company had appropriate training standards, training and policies in place with respect to working with vulnerable contributors. This could cover a range of interrelated issues: ethical treatment of vulnerable contributors, trauma and mental health preparedness, trauma polices for staff, a dignity at work policy and so forth. For it to work, it would need to be tied to the completion of objective training standards, and mustn't be "just a box-ticking exercise". Ideally, having this certification would influence whether or not a company was awarded certain kinds of production work.

> I would invest time and resources into getting some kind of kite-mark for a company that says, "We've done this," and hoping that other companies would follow. I don't know what that means, but some kind of training that we've done or support groups that we have, or every two weeks everyone can get together, you know, whatever it is, that's great, I just don't know what it is.
>
> A company manager

Broadcaster-mandated compliance training. Broadcasters should insist that all production staff carry out some kind of baseline training that covers the appropriate ethical treatment of vulnerable contributors. This could be a similar online product such as the ones currently used for legal, child safeguarding, and health and safety issues. The richer and more meaningful the content the better. Failure of staff to take these modules would lead to money being withheld from the production company.

Audit mechanisms. TV production companies are currently audited by an independent body to make sure that they meet diversity requirements under the Diamond Process. Many interviewees thought that the process should be extended to collect data on how companies treat freelancers. (Are there issues around bullying, sexual harassment, is there pressure to treat contributors, unethically, are they paid on time, etc.?) Two producers went further and felt that there needed to be some kind of semi-public list in circulation that named senior individuals known to be abusive. They thought this was needed despite the administrative and legal difficulties of creating such a list. Each year the Broadcast magazine runs a competition for "Best Places to Work in TV", which

is carried out through an anonymous survey of staff working in companies that have more than 15 permanent staff.[xvii] Some spoke approvingly of the initiative but nobody suggested that it was sufficient in itself to encourage or guarantee good practice. One company manger wondered if an Uber-style rating system in which freelancers got to mark out of 10 how they were treated along various indices could be made to work. Whatever style of audit scheme producers suggested, a common denominator was the belief that broadcasters needed to reach down through the value chain to ensure compliance.

> *I think if it comes from the channel, there's a sort of requirement of them getting the commission, I think things would change at the speed of light.*

> Company director

Independent adjudicator. Many of our interviewees noted that companies often failed to investigate complaints and that powerful individuals could "make them go away." Consequently, some thought that needed to be some kind of independent arbitration body that freelancers could bring concerns too that stood outside of the broadcasters, who it was feared may have an overly protective attitude towards leading talent.

Exit interviews. Several individuals thought that exit interviews could be a valuable tool if conducted in a spirit of openness and with genuine concern for both the growth of an individual freelancer and the company. Managers may need some guidance on best practice for conducting these: the focus should be on lessons learned and for the process to work, the expectations need to be set out clearly from the start. One producer we talked to had recently worked at a company that had such an innovative scheme in place:

> *You have a meeting with the MD of the company and they say to you really explicitly: "If you're having a problem with bullying here, then you can talk to me or if I'm bullying you, you can talk to this person. We don't want anything of this culture in our production company and we want to explicitly ask you to be part of the solution." And so, you felt like, oh okay, there's actually going to be no repercussions here. And then at the end of the contract, they send you a survey which is like tell us all the things you want to improve and all the things you don't want to improve. And then you have another meeting with the MD who then asks you all the same sort of stuff. I think that mechanism is actually fantastic… someone basically is explicitly saying to you I want to improve things and I need your help to do it.*

Psychological safety: better use of risk assessment and health and safety processes. Several interviewees thought that more effective use of the risk assessment process could help drive change. Some risk assessment forms do have a line on the need to consider psychological safety. These could be developed further to have more explicit requirements around what a production needs to do in order to protect and support contributors as well as staff working on it. It was suggested that these forms need to prompt for BDA sequenced risk mitigation planning (BDA stands for Before, During and After) and to interrogate whether or not production staff need additional training or support.

Interviewees gave the following suggestions for items that might appear on risk-assessment forms, depending on the nature of the production:

- Is there a likelihood of trauma exposure?

- Have casting producers checked to see if contributors are taking medication for mental health related conditions?

- Do any members of the production have prior-trauma exposure issues that may need to be taken into account in assignment planning?

One senior series producer noted that the health and safety framing was a good way of encouraging commissioners to take responsibly for decisions that could affect contributors. He would document any issues that he came across and email his commissioners so that they understood that pushing story lines in certain editorial directions at a later date would be inadvisable. One executive producer felt more need to be done to make sure that everybody on a production actually reads the risk assessment form and not just those that sign their name to the form. Generally, interviewees felt that the development of a health and safety mindset over the last twenty years had made a substantial difference to safety on productions. People may grumble about having to jump through various hoops but are nevertheless more likely to take the issues seriously. One series producer believed that health and safety was one natural frame that could be used to entrench good practice when it came to emotional safety:

> You know, so you set out these milestones yourself at the beginning of the production you kind of lay down the path of like "Here's how we are going to look after ourselves. Here's how we're going to look after our people. Here's how it's going to be" and no one can argue about it. In a weird kind of way, it gives you this great sense of freedom because especially when you endeavour on quite difficult subject areas because…it's so clear.

Budget lines for psychological safety. It was suggested that some productions in the human impact sector needed separate budget lines for paying for appropriate staff training and potential support. One executive producer and one mid-level producer noted that on occasion their attempts to include lines for psychological support for staff had been struck out by the channel as unnecessary expenses:

> When you quite often try and put in money for psychological support, people, you know, the broadcaster just kind of scribes it out and says why, what's that about?   For contributors, I've never had that happen. I've never heard people go or a broadcaster go, "that isn't a legitimate cost" but for the filmmakers, yeah.

It was also suggested that something approaching clinical supervision might be useful for documentarians working on high impact trauma related stories, such as child-abuse. Some interviewees called for an industry-wide levy that would fund psychological assistance for freelancers.

TRAINING

> The thing that I noticed about myself… was that I didn't know how to separate myself from the pain of people that I met. So, their pain became me. I couldn't distance myself from them. My sympathy and empathy for them, it flowed out to them, but I began to

realise that their feelings flowed back to me. I didn't want that to happen, but I just thought "Oh that's inevitable." But actually, now I know that isn't inevitable and that maybe everybody needs basic training on how to sympathise and empathise with people without it draining you.

A filmmaker with more than twenty years of experience working on current affairs films in conflict zones as well as domestically in the UK

All our interviewees who worked in TV production saw a role for additional training, with the majority thinking that there were real and pressing gaps in the provision of training that dealt with the interactional skills needed to work with both vulnerable contributors and in managing difficult situations (including working with difficult bosses / presenters.) In the high-impact category, all the producers we talked to thought that staff needed appropriate on-job training and mentoring to make sure that they understood trauma reactions which they or their contributors might experience and how to mitigate that potential impact. In all categories, producers wanted more structured guidance on how to handle mental health issues when they came up.

Our interviewees also identified a number of obstacles in encouraging take-up of training:

- Freelancers were unlikely to prioritise "soft-skills" training because training in such things as new camera or editing technology is believed to be more directly tied to securing employment. (Training needs to be provided for by the company, or, if outside a contract, provided at a vastly reduced rate on even standard discounted rates for freelancers.)

- Companies often assumed that producers would have the relevant people skills simply because they had worked on a previous production on which they would have been useful.

- Junior producers don't tend to be aware of the skills they are missing until they are exposed to new situations in which they discover they then discover they lack them.

- The problem identified above can also still apply when producers achieve greater seniority. One of our interviewees noted that producers are often promoted quite quickly, after having been "a small cog" working in a narrow stream of similar production scenarios. She worried that their skill sets were smaller than in previous cohorts, and that the increasing division of labour between specialist shooting producers and edit producers only exacerbates this trend.

- There is little incentive for a company to invest in training for freelancers who are not permanently tied to the company; and there is currently no mechanism that mandates them to pay for appropriate training. (Commissioners it was thought could play a role here.)

- In general, trauma awareness training has been neglected because companies have failed to appreciate that non-traumatic productions could always develop into one. When it comes to all kinds of trauma awareness the default position is reactive rather than proactive.

Several of our interviewees thought that good management training was lacking in the industry. Some spoke highly of the highly competitive Skillset Series

Producer Course and thought that gave its participants a variety of useful skills in managing people and handling conflict in the workplace.[xviii] But in general the producers we talked to thought that the majority of TV training concentrates on easily attainable superficial skills rather than the development of deeper capacities. One series producer made an analogy with camera training. There is not much value, he thought, in just teaching somebody to operate the technical controls. The more fundamental skill lies in knowing how to shoot a sequence. Similarly, managers need training in organising people more than organising schedules; and producers need more guidance on obtaining consent that is meaningful and fully informed, rather than just meeting the technical compliance requirements set by the channel.

Producers thought that training could operate on a number of different levels; for example, a basic product that dealt with ethical responsibilities towards vulnerable contributors that could apply to any production. It was also suggested that an enhanced level of training was necessary in any programme that dealt substantially with traumatic situations or vulnerable contributors. That should:

- Open up space for teams to talk openly about ethical dilemmas and the potential for personal impact.

- Provide people with more advanced boundary management skills so that they are better equipped to respond to developing situations, where boundary lines move and need to be redefined.

- Be based on realistic scenarios. There was a strong consensus that training needed to reflect real practical situations that filmmakers are likely to experience. For example, what does one need to think about when arriving on the scene of a stabbing or a car crash? Viscerally, what is such an experience likely to be like? What shooting options does one have in such a situation? What kind or post-incident reactions might one experience? How should a manager talk to staff afterwards; and so forth.

- Include edit staff, archive researchers and others exposed to vicarious trauma

- Be delivered by experienced documentary-makers, potentially alongside external subject area experts who know how to speak in a language which filmmakers will respond to (trauma specialists, child safeguarding experts and so forth.) One producer recalled a situation in which a psychologist who had little understanding of how television works gave a production unhelpful advice that could have unnecessarily compounded feelings of guilt and inappropriateness.

- Discuss what staff need to do to look after themselves, look out for colleagues and manage juniors in ways that would enhance individual and team resilience.

Several producers strongly expressed the feeling that training needed to be based on real, felt experience, rather than a more formulaic, going-through-the-motions kind of approach. Ideally, it should also be iterative and blended into the production cycle. One producer thought that a production company would organise an initial training session, and then reinforce the material with semi-structured mentoring sessions that would build on lessons learned during the

course of a shoot. He explained the process as follows:

There's a cycle of kind of learning where you have to have a standard theory, get exposed to it in real life, talk about it afterwards, go through the cycle again and then it gets a bit higher, more elevated.

Actual training sessions may work best if reinforced through online training components. One interviewee, working on training development at a major broadcaster, suggested that podcast series could be a mechanism for reinforcing material at regular stages.

Several producers mentioned how important informal **mentoring relationships** had been in their work. The industry tends to discuss mentoring in terms of its role in career development and tackling deficits in diversity, but it also plays a role in helping producers navigate ethical dilemmas. This aspect of mentoring could be accentuated.

Summary of elements that interviewees identified as training needs / components:

- Basic trauma literacy - understanding how trauma and mental health related issues affect contributors

- Recognising and normalising likely trauma reactions in staff

- Basic mental health first aid (including responding to unexpected disclosures of suicidality, self-harm, etc.)

- Boundary management

- Good practice in managing contact with contributors after transmission (for example, how to wind contact down, if it is unwanted)

- Advice on how to manage vicarious trauma impact (i.e. how to balance engagement and disengagement with emotionally toxic content.)

- Stress management and self-care

- Managing up. How to deal with potentially unethical instructions from seniors as well as challenging (or even abusive behaviour) from managers and presenters.

- Team building and management skills

Other training related points:

The assumption that people working in hostile environments receive adequate trauma training is highly questionable. In a study of 247 journalists who had participated in at least one safety training, less than half (46%) reported their training included an emotional trauma, stress, and self/care coping component, but several of those explicitly described the available training as cursory, dismissive or stigmatising. Only 15% of these products were led even in part by trainers with relevant mental health expertise.[xix]

RESILIENCE INITIATIVES

A presumption against solo-working. Several of our interviewees felt that producers should not be expected to work solo on emotionally arduous content. One put this more strongly, arguing that no producer or researcher should be allowed to work on mental-health related content by themselves, without a co-worker or close supervision by a more experienced producer, and that this should be codified in company policy, as it was in the company he worked for. But the issue of solo work was also identified as a more general strain. As one mid-level producer summarised:

> I think an awful lot is expected of freelancers. Like they're expected to sort of dedicate 100% of their life to the making of the program and sort of at the drop of a hat, jump in a car, drive by yourself from London to Manchester; film this contributor, while doing the filming, the sounds, the producing; zoom back again to get it into the edit. So, I think it's what's expected of them - the hours and the you can do it all alone sort of thing.

More effective monitoring of working hours. Considerable concern was expressed about the impact of extreme working hours on the wellbeing of filmmakers, with self-shooting producers, in particular, were identified as a high-risk group for exhaustion and burn-out. Our interviewees described situations in which producers had been expected to fly transcontinentally, drive a hired car for two hours, film a contributor and then come back, perhaps even without a single night in a hotel. This they believed was a dereliction of a company's duty to ensure a safe working environment, as exhaustion greatly increases the risks of driving accidents. In lighter entertainment formats, one interviewee reported working nine days continuously without it ever being commented on:

> I'm very staunchly in favour of the work-life balance and there seems to be a bit of a culture still where even the sets which I'm on now, I'd be like: "Oh yeah, no, I wasn't actually going to work late because I've got plans," and they're like, "Well, it's a production. I've had to miss all these fortieths, and I've had to miss my child's birthday." Well, that is not my problem mate. We work in a high-pressure industry, yeah, with a lot of time constraints, but I think that culture of the production comes first needs to go. It's possible to do it and still have everyone not running themselves into the ground.

He also felt that extreme working hours might explain why none of the senior producers he was working with had children. A company manger noted that long stretches working from home were often associated with relationship breakdown. This kind of sentiment was expressed by more than one producer:

> I think on the whole, I have always been quite good at not putting myself too much out there, I've seen a lot of people make themselves very ill for the sake of some shitty TV programme.

Adequate induction and briefing. This has already been covered to some extent in the training section above. Time and again, we were told how important it was that staff were adequately briefed on what they would be likely to experience on both a professional and a personal level when working with potentially traumatic material.

Mitigating unintended consequences from producer specialisation.
On multi-part documentary series, it is becoming standard practice to
allocate separate stages of the production process to different individuals.
Liaison producers manage contributor relationships; producer-directors film
contributors; and edit producers shepherd the resulting footage through
post-production. While efficient in budgetary terms, it was felt that this had a
number of adverse consequences, for self-shooting producers in particular.
First, restrictions from the edit stunted their ability to develop professionally by
learning from filming mistakes they might have made; secondly, it increased
the danger that contributors might be misrepresented in ways that could be
morally injurious for a producer who is concerned about their duty of care to
the people they were filming with; and lastly, it potentially deprived self-shooters
of adequate time to digest and process what they had been working on. Self-
shooting producers may be going back to back from one-intense situation to
the other; for instance, from filming a hospital series in the UK, straight onto
an assignment in a potentially hazardous environment. Our interviewees were
not sure how best to mitigate these pressures but felt something was needed.
One thought that at the very least, a company should schedule sessions in
which a producer-director gets to sit down with the editor (and potentially the
edit-producer) and discuss the coverage and any issues encountered during the
shoot.

Wider adoption of workshare arrangements. One of our interviewees was a
single parent in a workshare partnership. She felt that the arrangement not only
made it possible for her to work as a mother but also made her more effective,
resilient, and able to resist inappropriate pressure from seniors. Working in
partnership means that troubles are shared - there is a reliable source of ethical
counsel - and that the unit can offer more skills and strengths than a solo
worker would be likely to offer. Workshare appears to be growing in television
and appears to have benefits for both for individuals and the companies who
employ them. (Having to juggle childcare responsibilities can add to workplace
related strains, but in our research several parents said that having children
had improved their perspective on work and made them more efficient. Having
a "life to look after" made them see the work as just a job rather than what
primarily defines them.)

Strengthening social resources. As discussed above, the reliance on
freelances means that TV production is socially fragmented. Teams when they
come together can with great élan and synchronicity. Working with a team
that pulls together was described frequently as one of the great pleasures of
television production. But several of our interviewees thought that the bonds
between workers were nevertheless quite fragile and that more could be done
to deepen them and sustain them. Some discussed the need for enhanced
management and team building; others thought that more resources need to be
allocated to bringing people together after particularly arduous productions.

Dart Recommendations

The following recommendations, while drawing on interviewees' experiences and opinions, reflect the Dart Centre's external assessment.

Establish cross-industry guidance on trauma management policy, protecting vulnerable contributors and mental health awareness. When it comes to mental health awareness and trauma management, every company in a diverse industry needs to find its own way. Nevertheless, policy formulation in this area is highly complex, and it is unrealistic to expect every company, particularly smaller ones, to make all these determinations without adequate external guidance. This suggests the need for an in-depth practical guide that identifies standards of practice and duty of care in the protection of vulnerable contributors, staff support, and trauma literacy. Ideally, it should contain leading voices from the industry and be a product of wider consultation. Doc Society's *Safe and Secure* initiative for independent filmmakers could be one template for a resource that builds on the issues identified in this report.[xx]

Review psych-testing arrangements and processes. It is apparent from this study that contributor psychological testing in UK Television is a practice that may be open to significant abuse, and at the very least is often used as a fig-leaf to mask a lack of appropriate contributor care. However appropriately psych-testing is used by some companies, we don't believe that in its current non-codified and unmonitored form it provides that gold-standard defence touted by its industry champions against the exploitation of vulnerable contributors.

We recommend that a cross-industry working party be convened that consults widely and clarifies, in the form of written guidelines, the following:

- The role and limitations of pre-production psychological screening.

- Appropriate and inappropriate situations for use of such screening.

- Minimum assessment standards and review processes.

- How companies can use data collected on contributors and what safeguards need to be in place to prevent inappropriate use.

- Appropriate training and background / qualifications for external assessors.

Develop systematic trauma literacy and at-risk-contributor training in UK Factual Television. Our research reflected growing interest in what some of our respondents called "psychological safety" - the idea that filmmakers have a duty to minimise harm or distress to contributors; and that an ethic of care is also inextricably bound together with what makes for a healthy professional environment for TV workers themselves.

- We recommend development of industry-wide training to provide all producers with a basic skill set for responsible engagement with vulnerable or at-risk contributors, and for managing occupational distress, trauma and psychological injury within the factual TV sector.

- We recommend adapting successful models from health services, journalism, education and other trauma-facing fields, including basic literacy in trauma and the impact of adverse experiences in childhood and adulthood; the training of managers; dissemination of self-care and peer-support strategies; and establishing sector-wide standards of care for at-risk contributors and affected production staff.

- We agree with interviewees who emphasised that that commissioners of factual TV have a key role to play in making sure that producers further down the line are not unnecessarily placed in potentially morally injurious situations.

- And as our research suggested, the breadth of engagement with vulnerable contributors means the need for these skills goes far beyond those working on obviously trauma-intensive productions.

Finally, we recommend additional research within the factual TV sector, particularly regarding the prevalence of PTSD and other psychological injury; moral distress; and the interaction between workplace hierarchy, bullying culture, ethical violation and occupational distress.

Appendix: Interview Data and Sample Breakdown

INTERVIEW SAMPLE BREAKDOWN	Total sample (n=22)	Of whom programme makers (n=16)
Gender (M/F)	11/11	NA
Principle employment is in a staff / company support role	6	NA
Works or has worked as a TV producer	16	NA
Has worked as an executive producer	4	NA
Has worked as a commissioning editor	3	NA
Has had a significant management role	8	NA
Has worked as a psychological assessor	2	NA
Worked substantially in human impact	13	13
Has been bullied (volunteered)	6	6
Has been sexually harassed (volunteered)	3	3
Has been forced to act against their conscience (volunteered)	7	7
Sees sexual harassment as a potential danger	11	8
Sees bullying as a significant problem	14	10
Suggested that presenters are high-risk for power abuses	8	6
Has worked on blue-light style programming (human impact sub-genre)	8	8

Has worked on reality-TV	8	7
Believes that long-hours culture is a significant strain	20	14
Volunteered that mission is vital for resilience	10	9
Identified omertà around contributor care as being a significant issue	13	9
Expressed doubts around the psych-testing process	6	5
Felt that commissioning editors could exacerbate psychological stress	11	10
Believed TV work carried moral injury risks in relationship to contributors	17	15
Believed that contributor distress could impact on self or colleagues	21	16
Volunteered concerns about producer specialisation	5	5
Organisations consulted:		
National Film and Television School		
Channel 4		
BBC		
ABC Australia		
BECTU		
PACT		
Directors UK		

Appendix: Mapping distress in the TV landscape

The filmmakers we talked to identified the following as circumstances they believed were likely to cause distress. The examples below correspond to situations that they had either experienced directly themselves of witnessed happening to colleagues. They have been divided into three categories.

Potentially Traumatic Events / Situations:
(The codes at the end of each item correspond to whether the exposure is direct or vicarious, D or V.)

- Working on programmes that cover hospital procedures, medical emergencies, police work, etc. (D+V)

- Reportage that concerns war, conflict or terrorist attacks (D+V)

- Any editing or directing work that involves extensive exposure to traumatic imagery (V)

- Production research on archive-based programmes that reconstruct acts of violence, criminal investigations, war crimes, etc (V)

- Undercover work in threatening environments (D)

- Any close and prolonged contact with trauma-affected contributors (Here, cases where contributors had been sexually abused as children and/or had PTSD came up in particular) (V)

- Routine work simulating violence (specific to actors working in drama and reconstructions) (V)

- Being involved in traffic accidents or other industrial accidents (e.g. stunts on film sets that result in death or injury) (D)

- Being subject to sexual assault or sexual coercion (D)

- Being arrested, incarcerated or held hostage (D)

The following were not mentioned in the interviews, but have been issues for other journalists and filmmakers the Dart Centre has worked with:

- Investigations where production teams may come under surveillance (physical or digital) from organised crime groups or state-level actors

- Witnessing mass-casualty incidents at sporting events

Unexpected traumatic events can occur anywhere. The football disasters at Hillsborough and Heysel were mass-disasters that had significant impact on the sports production teams covering them.

Potentially Morally Injurious contexts:

- Witnessing injustice, poverty and other form of disadvantage and being unable to prevent it

- Feeling responsible for causing distress to contributors through asking questions that trigger recall of painful / traumatic situations

- Not knowing what to do in cases where a contributor discloses a past history / intention to self-harm or attempt on their own life.

- Being unable to safeguard younger contributors from parents / legal guardians who don't have their best interests at heart

- Betraying a contributor's trust (perhaps inadvertently) through pursuing story angles which, although truthful, portray the contributor in ways that person finds unflattering or believes to be untrue

- Being pressured by senior producers or commissioners to produce content that inappropriately sensationalised aspects of someone's life or which was essentially untrue

- Feeling morally compromised for making a film / money where the subjects of the film receive nothing in return

- Feeling embarrassed or ambivalent about experiencing personal distress in situations where the suffering of contributors is thought to be worse

- For filmmakers who film at the scenes of medical emergencies and road accidents - being accused by other members of the public of being inappropriately intrusive or voyeuristic

- Feeling unable to keep control over a keenly felt duty of care towards a contributor because of external factors. Three common situations mentioned here were:

  a) Being excluded from the edit and thus unable to ensure that the contributors' experience is not misrepresented through inappropriate editing

  b) Being unable to prevent presenters from pursuing insensitive lines of questioning

  c) Being forced by seniors to pressurise contributors to do things that they are unwilling to do (for example, being taken to a particular location, being filmed driving when doing so would raise their anxiety levels, etc.)

- As a manager feeling, responsible for employees' occupational distress

The following were all mentioned most frequently in the context of reality TV programming:

- Placing contributor-contestants in situations where they may be held up for public ridicule, and, related to that, selecting contributors who are not robust enough to weather that attention

- Manipulating contributor-contestants to do things that they otherwise would not do in ways that might illicit guilt, shame or regret, or generate

interpersonal conflict in a location

- Giving rise to false expectations, of fame, wealth, redemption which an appearance on television may not meet

- Working on a production that fails to provide appropriate aftercare

- Manipulating sequences in the edit to give a misleading impression of what happened in a scene.

Other work-related situations where stress was likely to tip into more active forms of distress:

- The threat of litigation and having to testify in court either to defend one's reporting or to give direct testimony against perpetrators

- Unreasonable demands from seniors (being requested to achieve things that anybody would be likely to fail at)

- Bullying and sexual harassment (of the belittling rather than the coercive kind, for the later see PTEs above.)

- Conflicts with uncooperative presenters whose importance for the programme meant that their behaviour was hard to check.

- Exhaustion, particularly in the context of travelling, perhaps driving long hours without adequate time to recover before the next working day

- Working on location and being separated from loved ones at key moments in their lives

- In the case of freelancers especially, financial precarity and stretches of unemployment, and a sense of being more powerless to resist authority than they would be if they had a more established position at a company

- In the case of company managers, having to obtain a sufficient volume of new commissions to keep the business afloat.

Putting all hazards and pressures together in three stark lists may make TV sound like an off-putting, morally aversive environment to work in. But that would be the wrong impression to take away: all of the programme-makers we spoke to believed the good outweighed the bad. Some of the challenges are commonplace, and others comparatively rare.

Appendix: Working with Vulnerable Contributors

Factual TV comes in a wide range each of formats, each with a myriad of subtle variations, where each programme has a different potential distress profile. To make it easier to analyse the different challenges that filmmakers face in different genres, we split the factual TV continuum into three areas, each being defined in part by the level of trauma exposure that programme-makers are likely to encounter and also crucially the kinds of relationships different genres have with contributors and the assumptions that underpin that contact.

Human-impact. This is any kind of factual TV programme in which human distress, disadvantage or suffering is clearly central to the subject matter. These programmes are likely to focus on trauma, violence and tragedy, and the expectation will be (or at least should be) that a significant number of contributors will be vulnerable and need to be treated with special care. This genre of programming requires journalistic skills and the content is expected to be truthful. This is a specialist, trauma-intensive genre.

Reality-TV. These are shows which offer up slices of real life in a quasi-documentary format. The action is constructed around a series of games or challenges, and the participants in these are viewed as contestants rather than contributors. Jeopardy is built into the format, but distress where it occurs is expected to be mild and transitory, part of a game played by adults who fully understand what they have signed up for. Reality-TV is an entertainment format, and these programmes depend on a high degree of artifice to work. They are governed more by a professional ethic of "*truthiness*" rather than truthfulness.

Middle-Factual. This is everything that exists between the two poles above. The content is neutral, and there is usually no prima-facie expectation that contributors are likely to be vulnerable. Basic accuracy is important, particularly in educational films, but these programmes are less wedded to journalistic mores than the first category of above. A degree of hyperbole and speculation is often integral to the story-telling. This genre includes everything from history and science documentaries to gardening and cooking programmes, daytime magazine shows and sports coverage. They are usually presenter-led.

Sectoring TV in this way allows us to make some important preliminary observations that will help guide discussion. First, trauma exposure both direct and vicarious is by definition most likely to occur in the *human-impact* category. Traumatic themes may appear occasionally in *middle-factual* and *reality-TV* - for example in humanitarian focussed pieces for Comic Relief or daytime discussion shows in such issues as abortion and bereavement - but traumatic content is not a staple of most formats that sit inside these two categories. Traumatic incidents, car crashes, stunts that go wrong, drownings

on tropical islands, etc. are always a possibility. More significantly, the chance that production staff will encounter vulnerable contributors in more run-of-the mill television production is much higher than one might generally suppose.

Without further detailed quantitative research, we lack sensible metrics for measuring how PMIEs are distributed across the three categories. The impression gained from our interviews was that they are fairly evenly distributed, with programme makers in all categories likely to find themselves in potentially morally injurious situations.

The danger of being in situations where ethical and moral dilemmas are also accompanied with intense distress is clearly most acute in *human-impact* programming, but at the same time the attention and energy that goes into mitigating those risks is greater. Filmmakers in this category had the most experience of working with vulnerable contributors and articulated a complex sense of responsibility in representing contributors' painful or traumatic experiences. They did not feel that obtaining signed consent conveys unlimited property rights that would allow them to use the material in any way they saw fit. (Ultimately it is not their story and their life, but the contributor's.) The filmmaker may need to relate a version of events that the subject feels uncomfortable with but that needs to be carefully weighed and done for appropriate reasons.

Nearly all the producers we talked to, both those with experience of working on reality-TV shows and those without, saw it as a sector which was mostly likely to commodify contributors and to sail close to the wind ethically in a variety of different ways. This comment was typical:

> In generating all these structured reality formats and things where they're guaranteeing conflict … one of the things that they're trying to do is to manipulate ordinary people into extremes of emotion and they do that by withholding information like Love Island. You watch it and you just think it's barbaric at some level but then on the other hand… there's a game that is also very obvious in the sense that people sign on for it and they get rewarded massively.

These issues are not confined to such shows as Big Brother and Love Island, where the participants are more clearly framed as contestants. Much of middle-factual TV production relies on structured formats that depend on certain narrative clichés and the artificial generation of conflict. These shows also inevitably sweep up vulnerable contributors, even where there is no intention to focus on them.

Our interviewees thought that formats were particularly problematic on shows that focused on people living in difficult circumstances. (Wife Swap, Benefits Street and daytime TV shows featuring bailiffs dispossessing poor people were mentioned in terms that were often scathing.) The potential issues in middle-factual may be more widely spread, if, as was suggested to us, filmmakers in this sector are more likely to think in term of a product being my "my film" rather than something that is more collaboratively owned and faithful to their subject's experience.

Our interviewees were more divided in terms of whether they thought working in such situations carried mental health risks for production staff. Some thought they encouraged either guilt or a cynicism likely to be corrosive for

personal wellbeing. But others thought one of three things. A) contestants knew what they were getting into on the big reality-tv formats and were playing "characters" rather than exposing their real selves to reputational danger, meaning that staff had little need to question their consciences. B) Personal impact would be a risk, if production staff dwelled on these issues but most should be able to compartmentalise and keep their personal value systems separate from issues thrown up at work. C) Staff working on these shows were "like tabloid journalists" and thus assumed to be immune to such considerations. (Analytically, establishing risk ratios for moral injury would require detailed quantitative research with large data sets and sophisticated statistical modelling.)

HUMAN IMPACT: CLOSE INVOLVEMENT WITH TRAUMA-AFFECTED SUBJECTS

> *Calls came in of people screaming… Our team in control are…filming this and hearing these calls, which sound, you know, the calls I think are the most kind of stressful thing to kind of stay in your head …they're filming there. But also knowing that their mate, their colleague is heading straight into God knows what situation … as they're rushing head first, and then they end up at this horrific, horrific, you know. There's just bodies and cars, and then some CPR going on. I mean, just devastation, you know. The paramedics who worked for 20 years, 30 years have never seen anything like it…*

Even within the human-impact sector, different kinds of programme-making mandate different kinds of involvement with subjects. In some production teams need to build relationships carefully over long-periods of time, and in others the contact, might be quite fleeting. The duration of the contact doesn't determine the level of potential impact that involvement might have on the filmmaker in any simple way. Filming somebody over many months dying from a painful illness may be no more or no less aversive than arriving on the scene to witness a young stranger bleed out in a stairwell after an altercation which resulted in them being stabbed. But different durations of contact do lead to the development of different kinds of inter-relational skills and perspectives on working with people, which is what this section focuses on.

The work of the filmmakers we talked to in the human-impact sector, fell into three main patterns, all of which were defined by different of rhythms of involvement with contributors:

Blue-light - films that feature the emergency services. Contact with individual contributors accessing police or hospital assistance might be quite brief, but the situations are often highly traumatic and require great sensitivity. (In terms of vicarious trauma impact, the aggregate volume of suffering witnessed can also be high.)

Contributor-centred - here filmmakers are spending considerable time following subjects who are facing emotionally challenging circumstances, often with a part history of trauma. Here the emotional labour demands are high and the ability to manage boundaries key, as filmmakers may get to know their subjects well over time and attachments can

become strong (in either direction) Filmmakers may be party to personal disclosures that the subject has not made to others before.

Current affairs (in hostile environments) - in these documentaries, filmmakers are often described as "parachuting in and out" of the lives of vulnerable communities. With the exception of certain projects, budgetary and safety considerations militate against prolonged contact. The situations documentarians are working in may be extremely personally threatening.

The quote at the beginning of this section gives some sense of how extreme working in the blue-light genre can be. TV staff maybe exposed to a similar density of visual trauma as one would imagine only conflict reporters would be likely to see. The size of today's camera technology allows camera operators to be present right at the scene of other people's tragedies in a way that was not possible before. These shows have their origin in the fly-on-the wall documentaries from the 1970s in which small filmmaking teams gained access to police stations and hospital wards and revealed the experience of victims in survivors in ways that the public had never seen before. Indeed, *Police* - a series produced by Roger Graef in 1982 - highlighted how poorly rape victims were interviewed by the police and broke new ground in signposting the need for more sensitive trauma-informed approaches in the media as well.[xxi]

Contemporary versions of the fly-on-the wall documentary have grown greatly in size and sophistication. The biggest shows - often eight-part series - are complex machines that marry handheld footage shot by one or two person teams with a "rig", a network of small cameras that are fixed unobtrusively in locations where key events will happen, hospital wards, operating theatres, custody rooms, the back of ambulances, police vehicles, lifeboats and so on.

On such show, the challenge of working with a high volume of contributors, each of whom needs to give informed consent, is considerable. In a major hospital series, more than a thousand identifiable contributors may appear in sequences that have been selected for probable inclusion in the final edited film. In the traditional pattern of contributor-focused film (discussed in more detail below) a single producer is likely to follow a vulnerable contributor from beginning to end, negotiating access, being present during filming and then guiding the edit. The industrial scale and fast turn-around pressures on these productions have led to a new and significantly different pattern, where separate producers cover each of the three phases: access, shooting-production, editing, all under the watch of a series producer (in itself, we would suggest, a uniquely demanding and responsible role).

As a pattern, our interviewees thought this division of labour had pros and cons. It means that shooting producers are less likely to shepherd the material all the way through to the edit. This may compromise their ability to ensure that the final representation is faithful to what happened on location and any promises made to contributors; and on a personal developmental level, it deprives them of the opportunity to understand more fully the shooting mistakes they have made in covering the scene. Several producers we talked worried that this alienation from the totality of the process added significantly on the pressure on self-shooting PDs (producer-directors).

The contributor's journey through the filming process is now often managed by a new highly-specialised category of production-worker, the patient-liaison producer. And on the plus side, this may lead to more attentive, in-person care of contributors. A patient liaison producer's sole responsibility is to identify appropriate contributors, negotiate access, get to know contributors' concerns and ensure that consent is properly informed throughout the production cycle. Along with a more senior producer, they may be party to pre-transmission screenings and a discussion / negotiation around whether certain material should appear in the final film. Patient liaison producers needn't be filmmakers, or indeed have ever picked up a camera. It is effectively a dedicated social-work role within a television production, and one that requires substantial emotional labour.

Our interview sample included producers who had worked on the first wave of hospital films and police series shot on small cameras 15 years ago. It was clear from what they said that there has been an evolution in how sensitive subjects are managed. We heard of instances in the early days where filmmakers had been in put situations where they needed to ask relatives permission to film their loved ones dying, without any previous preparation in how they might best be most sensitively done. Juniors often felt pressure from senior producers to film material they thought was inappropriate and would handle those dilemmas by denying they had not witnessed anything noteworthy.

Being a series producer on a multi-part series shot in a traumatic environment is a hugely complex and responsible role. It requires a deep appreciation of what it takes to work with trauma-affected subjects and an ability to hand-hold more junior colleagues through challenges that they are unlikely to be fully prepared for prior to exposure. The three producers we talked to who had led big blue-light series had all learnt their craft working in the next sub-genre, contributor-centred sensitive-issues driven filmmaking.

Many people outside of TV - and for that matter, many in TV who don't work in this particular area - might be surprised at the sophisticated and considered working methods of TV companies that specialise in this kind of work. The achievements of the BBC Natural History Unit are known around the world, but few know about the comparative excellence of a specific sub-set of the UK TV sector that focuses on sensitive social justice issues, even if many of its productions are garlanded with international festival awards. Staff on freelance contracts with expertise in this area of filmmaking rotate in and out of BBC productions and mega-indies, but often come back to a number of smaller production companies, which have a long track record in producing observational documentaries that centre on vulnerable contributors, often following them through long periods of time.

The subjects might include refugees fleeing from Syria, ex-offenders struggling with addiction, adult survivors of child abuse, children living in poverty, or families bereaved by knife crime. Sometimes the filmmakers who gravitate in this direction have a prior academic background in anthropology, clinical psychology, or practical experience as criminologists or social workers. It is a network that relies on word-of-mouth and informal mentoring. One filmmaker we talked to saw his work standing in opposition to an industry he believed to be inherently shallow and exploitative, but the majority described their work being at the end of an integrated continuum that reached into mainstream

television. They did not like everything they saw, but hoped that they could make a difference to a medium that allowed them to reach large audiences with films that dealt with social-justice orientated themes that they cared about.

The filmmakers we talked to in this area shared certain similar approaches to work. They thought that filmmakers needed to be clear about their motivations when they negotiated access with a vulnerable contributor or picked up a camera to film. Transparency is crucial. Harbouring ulterior motives, or even just a conflicted, cloudiness about the "why" around doing something could risk both the relationship and the film and spell emotional trouble further down the line for the filmmaker.

This group of filmmakers also had a seasoned appreciation of how trauma and deprivation act to disempower people, and how this puts an onus on the producer to find ways of giving a measure of power back. Here, a company director who works extensively on mental health related issues how he expects staff to carry themselves with contributors:

> *Any PDs [producer-directors] who come in are trained to always come out with the following line which, "Hi, we're going to do this film, with this interview. Now, if at any time you feel uncomfortable, then we could just stop right away. If there's anything you say which later you think you didn't want to have said, we're not going to use it. If there's any type of thing I'm making which is making you feel uncomfortable, we stop right away and move along, just tell me shut up if you want," which always makes them laugh because they'll think, "I'm in control," so it's reversing the idea that we're the powerful ones….*

Some proponents of more traditional approaches to current-affairs filmmaking may be uncomfortable about framing filmmaking as a collaborative enterprise that involves ceding some control to contributors. The filmmakers we talked to were well aware that vulnerable subjects can also be perpetrators and that documentarians needed to keep an eye out for the possibility that individuals might be seeking to game a situation in some way, perhaps to settle scores with family members or other associates. But still, that was unlikely to be a first order problem. The more pressing issue would be how to go about creating space for a productive conversation with somebody who may have a long history of not being listened to by those in authority. Producers coming into this area from other specialisms were not necessarily that switched on at understanding when their questioning might be becoming inappropriate, their behaviour controlling, or they might be betraying trust in other ways that added to people's hardship.

Filmmakers specialising in the contributor-focused genre thought the quality of consent was crucial. It had to be fully informed and more than just securing a signature on paper for compliance purposes. People who had not been on TV before needed to be prepared for the downsides exposure might have on their lives. A key part of the access process was the "the talk of doom" in which the risks of participation were spelled out early in the process. This was variously described; here is an excerpt from one:

> *I would want you to really think through what this is going to feel like. Your story being told however many years later, it's all going to be dug up again, people are going to write about it. Nowadays, people are going to tweet about it. … I'm sure most people*

will be nothing but supportive and encouraging and sympathetic. But there will be 10% lunatics who will write nasty things about you...

Consent also was not just a one-off consideration. Informal permissions many need to be sought for even seemingly trivial filming decisions, rather than assumed. In some productions, the whole question of whether a filmed contribution can be used at all might not be settled until right before final transmission. On programmes that feature vulnerable children and adolescents, participants and their guardians might have the right to withdraw their consent. (This could cost a production many thousands of pounds and so is not an offer that is undertaken lightly.) The filmmakers who have worked on programmes made on this basis, says that consent is rarely withdrawn. They felt that was because it put impetus on them to be attentive to what was really going on for their subjects. It also made them less likely to cut corners in the edit and rely on glib story-telling structures.

The money riding on this approach means it requires a close alliance with the commissioning editor at the channel. Ideally, there is an invisible chain of care that runs vertically down through the hierarchy, from the commissioner, to the series producer and then on to the filming team, before finally touching the subject. Filmmakers preferred working with commissioners who had been in their shoes before as programme-makers, and saw the world though similar optics. Other commissioners might exert pressure to force the story into a shape that could be deleterious for contributors (either inadvertently because they were too divorced from the situation on the ground to understand it properly or because they were driven by commercial imperatives).

In these situations, experienced producers had various strategies for maintaining a protective space around contributors, but the need to do this could add significantly to the strain. Often the pressure came not from the channels but from execs and company managers who may, as one series producer told us, want things "as raw and visceral and upfront as possible." He continued to say: "There are plenty of us who do our best in that way. But I don't think it is across the board. And I think it should be."

In management terms, being a series producer on a big trauma-related production may be a uniquely stressful position. Ultimately, they are responsible for the welfare of victims and families and that requires significant management both up and down the hierarchy.

The need for careful mentoring of juniors also emerged as a major theme in our conversations. In this sub-category of human-impact filmmaking, knowing how to manage boundaries is key. Relatively young filmmakers may be working closely with vulnerable contributors for long periods of time, and, understandably, people become often become attached to each other. There is a danger that a contributor might become dependent on a filmmaker who takes an interest in their lives, and that the filmmaker in turn might give the impression that they can offer more support than they can realistically deliver.

As another series producer explained, the processes of "care and aftercare", of "engagement, and then slow disengagement" create tremendous responsibilities and pressures for teams.

[It] is really difficult... what should we be filming what is appropriate when is it appropriate to be there when should we stop, when should we turn up, when should we leave them alone for days, weeks, months sometimes, when should we say this isn't in your best interests anymore, this isn't in anyone's best interests anymore.

And often these are painful decisions and they often go against what you and I want for the programme. They won't be aligned always. It's really hard.

Notes

i 31% of children will have experienced a traumatic event by the age of 18. See: Lewis, S. J., Arseneault, L., Caspi, A., Fisher, H. L., Matthews, T., Moffitt, T. E. et al. (2019). The epidemiology of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder in a representative cohort of young people in England and Wales. Lancet Psychiatry, 6(3), 247-256. The Scottish analysis includes figures from the NSPCC for 11-17-year old and can be found in the report: Transforming Psychological Trauma: A Knowledge and Skills Framework for the Scottish Workforce, NHS Education for Scotland, (2017) p9. Looking more broadly than just trauma impact, the NHS estimates 1 in 6 adults in England are currently likely to have a common mental disorder (such as anxiety, or depression). APMS. (2016). Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, England, 2014. NHS Digital, (2017).

ii For the most widely followed definition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) used in the UK see: American Psychiatric Association, A. P. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM-5®). PTSD is a debilitating clinical condition, but it is not the only potential negative outcome from trauma: depression, anxiety burnout and substance abuse disorder are all associated with exposure and tragedy, as are such collateral impacts as relationship breakdown and job loss. The sway PTSD holds over the popular discussion - as if the diagnosis per se is the main issue - may obscure the variety of sub-clinical impacts work-related trauma can have. Journalists, for example, may experience significant issues with hyperarousal, intrusive thoughts, disturbed sleep and emotional numbness without those difficulties between sufficiently severe to merit a formal diagnosis.

Moral injury (MI) is another matrix for crystallising the impact of distress. MI is not a mental health condition as such but rather a series of criteria that can be used to assess the harm that morally transgressive events may have on individuals. (These are called PMIEs, potential morally-injurious events.) It can occur when people learn about, witness, perpetrate or fail to prevent acts that run counter to their moral beliefs or expectations, and has been most comprehensively studied in the military. As it picks up on such high-valency emotions as shame, guilt and self-disgust it is an effective indicator of interpersonal distress and is thought to be a risk factor in the development of PTSD and depression. Moral injury is not a mental health condition in itself, but rather an index that measures the impact that morally transgression can have on individuals. See Williamson, V., Stevelink, S. A. M., & Greenberg, N. (2018). Occupational moral injury and mental health: systematic review and meta-analysis. The British Journal of Psychiatry, 212(6), 339-346.

iii Epidemiological research on occupational distress in factual television is currently lacking. The best analogue data can be found in research on humanitarian workers, emergency services and journalists (a category which may include filmmakers). With regard to the latter, studies have found PTSD rates ranging from 1-35%, with studies in the upper range corresponding to war correspondents and journalists living in situations of endemic threat. A reasonable extrapolation is that PTSD prevalence is likely to be 10-20% for journalists working on trauma-intensive beats, a category that would include current affairs documentarians working repeatedly on overseas assignments. For a breakdown of this research, see a Dart Centre review written by River Smith, Elana Newman and Susan Drevo, accessible at: https://dartcenter.org/content/covering-trauma-impact-on-journalists

Programme makers in domestic TV often work alongside the emergency services. Preliminary findings from an ongoing University of Cambridge study into the police has found that almost one in five officers have symptoms (recorded in the last four weeks) of probable PTSD or complex PTSD, a more entrenched version, with two-thirds of those being unaware that they may have a condition. https://www.cam.ac.uk/policeptsd

iv A study on journalists by the Dart Centre's research team at the University of Tulsa found that intra-organisational aggression and moral injury are stronger independent predictors of probable PTSD than the total volume of traumatic incidents journalists are exposed to. See Drevo, S. (2016). The war on journalists: Pathways to posttraumatic stress and occupational dysfunction among journalists. University of Tulsa, Oklahoma.

v One doesn't necessarily need to be directly involved in a traumatic situation – defined as one that involves actual/threatened injury, or sexual violence - in order to develop a psychological injury. Vicarious traumatisation happens when someone is so steeped in processing harrowing material, be it traumatic imagery or witness testimony, that they start to take aspects of that experience on board. Clinicians who have experienced this when working with trauma patients sometimes describe as if their clients pain starts to become there's, or their stories merge. For this to happen, the exposure needs to be repeated. Casual viewing is not a problem but working intensively with images (as a film editor might) can be. For a relevant study on journalists, see: Feinstein, A., Audet, B., & Waknine, E. (2014). Witnessing images of extreme violence: a psychological study of journalists in the newsroom. For a useful discussion of the potential impact of close proximity to trauma-affected contributors, see: Gartner, R. B. (2017). Introduction: An Evolution of Ideas. In R. B. Gartner (Ed.), Trauma and Counter Trauma, Resilience and Counterreselience: Insights from Psychoanalysts and Trauma Experts. New York: Routledge.

vi One exception is a recent academic article by Kym Melzer which discusses the considerable personal impact she experienced on a film that filming interviewing PTSD survivors, something she felt that the industry had totally underprepared her for. Melzer, K. (2018). Vicarious trauma and emotion work in documentary filmmaking. Studies in Documentary Film, 1-15.

vii Here, general factual TV production that relies on well-established formats and narrative conventions. For detailed explanation of the categories used in the research, see the appendix on working with vulnerable contributors on page 36.

viii In the military, this process of pre-visualising situations and normalising reactions is done as part of a graduated stress-inoculation process. A similar step-by-step induction to the impact of trauma also happens organically for doctors and paramedics in the course of their medical training.

ix In the wake of the MeToo scandal, stakeholder organisations came together to launch high-profile campaigns that target both abuses of power. The BFI and BAFTA in collaboration with ten other organisations began promoting an eight-point action plan in February 2018 designed to work across the entire film and television industry. See: https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/announcements/new-anti-bullying-harassment-principles. Call sheets on drama shoots now routinely include helpline numbers through which cast and crew members can obtain advice and psychological assistance from the Film and Television charity. Directors UK have also published a detailed and well-thought out manual that explains what their members can do to prevent abuse on productions that they have responsibility on. Bullying & Harassment: A Handbook for Screen Directors. https://directors.uk.com/campaigns/bullying-and-harassment. These efforts, although spurred by the Weinstein allegations, build substantially on previous work carried out by the Confederation of Entertainment Unions.

x Sexual harassment (SH) is a complicated concept that researchers have broken into different categories. Misogyny and sexual opportunism (even of a manipulative kind) are not necessarily the same things. Being more specific about the nature of the problem helps inform appropriate solutions. One commonly-used model posits four different sub-divisions: sexist hostility (insulting or demeaning gender-based behavior that is sexist in nature), sexual hostility (insulting or demeaning gender-based behavior that is sexual in nature), unwanted sexual attention (e.g. "Made unwanted attempts to stroke, fondle, or kiss you"), and sexual coercion (e.g. "implied faster promotions or better treatment if you were sexually cooperative"). See Fitzgerald, L. F., Magley, V. J., Drasgow, F., & Waldo, C. R. (1999). Measuring sexual harassment in the military: The sexual experiences questionnaire (SEQ-DoD_. Military Psychology, 11(3), 243-263.

xi This point is also developed in this ethnographic study: Hesmondhalgh, D., & Zoellner, A. (2013). Is Media Work Good Work? A Case Study of Television Documentary. The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies.

xii See the appendix on working with vulnerable contributors for detailed discussion of this.

xiii And these burdens are certainly not inconsiderable. There are instances where company managers and commissioning editors have developed PTSD as a result of having felt responsible for employees who were killed.

xiv For a brief survey of these issues in the military see: Brooks, S. K., & Greenberg, N. (2018). Non-deployment factors affecting psychological wellbeing in military personnel: literature review. Journal of Mental Health, 27(1), 80-90. And for a more general discussion of the role of management and environmental factors in promoting / compromising resilience in trauma-facing organisations, see: Bloom, S. L. (2013). Destroying Sanctuary: The Crisis In Human Service Delivery Systems. New York: Oxford University Press.

xv Different researchers have different ways of slicing up the various components of resilience. Stephen Southwick and Dennis Charney, in a body of research that is based on epidemiological data and detailed individual detail interviews with highly resilient individuals who have found ways to recover - and in some cases even flourish - after appalling adversity, they identified the following factors: the ability to face one's fears; optimism; investment in mission and meaning; self-efficacy and active coping; moral compass; perspective taking; identifying role models; the ability to access social support; training. These tally closely with the suggestions that filmmakers make in this section. Each of those dimensions also has an environmental twist: whether or not people can avail themselves of these strategies is not just down to the individual; it also depends on leadership and resources. For example, moral compass - the ability to stick to one's ethical inclinations - is something that can be supported or hindered by the working context an individual finds themselves in. In the case of freelancers, having adequate financial means is also likely to have a major bearing on emotional and psychological security, as well as the degree to which people can access training. See Southwick, S. M., & Charney, D. S. (2012). Resilience: The science of mastering life's greatest challenges. New York: Cambridge University Press.

xvi This is discussed in detail in Southwick, S. M., & Charney, D. S. (2012) cited above, especially chapter 2.

xvii https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/best-places-to-work See: https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/best-places-to-work

xviii https://www.screenskills.com/pitches/the-screenskills-series-producer-programme-2019/4fa601cf-7289-4502-8bdd-e7953ad6a87a/

xix Slaughter, A., Brummel, B., Drevo, S., & Newman, E. (2017). Journalists and Safety Training: Experiences and Opinions. https://dartcenter.org/resources/journalists-and-safety-training-experiences-and-opinions

xx https://safeandsecure.film

xxi Police 1982... https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Police_(TV_series).