

MENTAL HEALTH IN LATIN AMERICAN JOURNALISTS: PSYCHO-SOCIAL IMPACT AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

A PRELIMINARY OVERVIEW

OCTOBER 2025



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PRESS
UNLIMITED**

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Mental health in Latin American journalists: Psycho-social Impact and Protective Factors

A preliminary overview

Free Press Unlimited and Faculty of Psychology of the National Autonomous University of Mexico

October 2025

Research Team: Rogelio Flores Morales (UNAM), Adamantia Lampouka (FPU), Paloma Lainz (FPU) with the collaboration of Alejandra García Saisó (UNAM) for the insights on burn out and organizational support

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Design of the data collection survey and report:



Free Press Unlimited (FPU) is an international organization that promotes freedom of expression and freedom of the press, both of which are universally recognized human rights. Its mission is to ensure that people around the world have access to quality news and information, especially in countries where their press freedom is limited.

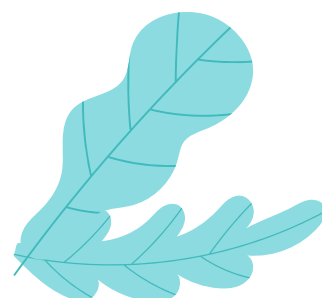
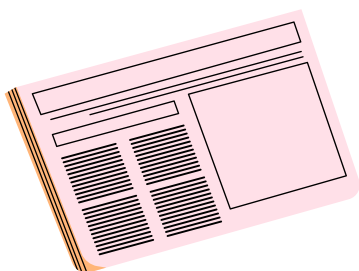
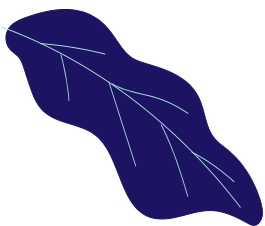
DEDICATION



This report is dedicated to the journalists of Latin America—those who continue reporting under challenging conditions, and also those who, whether by choice or circumstance, have had to step away from the profession. Their courage, resilience, and commitment to truth are the foundation of democratic societies. We wish to honor their work, their sacrifices, and the emotional toll this profession can carry.

This report is also from journalists, for journalists. It exists because of their willingness to share their stories, their time, and their experiences with us. We are deeply grateful to all who participated—their voices have shaped every page, and we hope this work reflects that truthfully and respectfully.

We also extend our deepest gratitude to Professor Rogelio Flores Morales, whose insight and generous spirit have shaped this project from the very beginning. What began as a shared idea in a meeting in Mexico has grown into a meaningful collaboration rooted in trust, empathy, and mutual respect. It has been a privilege to walk this path together.



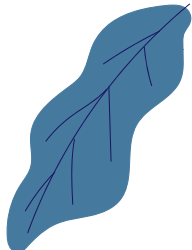
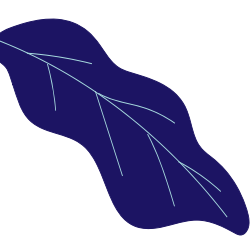
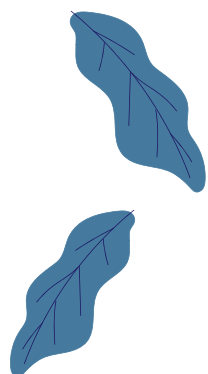


TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	5
LIST OF ACCRONYMS	7
SUMMARY	8
INTRODUCTION	10
METHODOLOGY	16
DEMOGRAPHICS	19
POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER, ANXIETY, AND DEPRESSION	24
INSIGHTS FROM EXILE	25
INSIGHTS ON BURN OUT & ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT	26
DISCUSSION & NEXT STEPS	29
REFERENCES	30
ANNEX 1 : METHODOLOGY	32



LIST OF ACCRONYMS

LATAM: Latin America

FPU: Free Press Unlimited

UNAM: Autonomous University of Mexico

PSS: Psycho-social Support

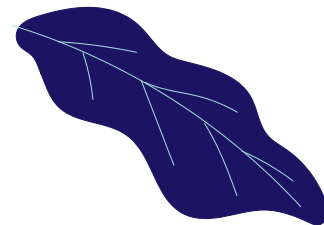
WHO: World Health Organization

PTSD: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

GAD: Generalized Anxiety Disorder

DSM-5: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition

SUMMARY



In recent years journalists in Latin America have faced increasing pressures—ranging from harassment and threats to precarious working conditions—that take a significant toll on their mental health. While more media organizations are recognizing the importance of mental health support, the real impact of journalistic work on psychosocial well-being remains little explored across the region. At the same time, there is limited understanding of the protective factors that help media workers continue their work despite these challenges.

To address this gap, Free Press Unlimited, together with researcher Rogelio Flores Morales from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), launched a mixed-methods study to better understand the psycho-social impact and protective factors affecting journalists in Latin America. This report presents preliminary results from an online survey of 282 journalists across 18 countries, with a qualitative phase planned to deepen these insights.

Our focus was on symptoms related to PTSD, anxiety, depression, and burnout, as well as organizational attitudes and protective factors like resilience and social support. Importantly, this study does not seek to pathologize journalists but aims to explore the mental health challenges of the profession through a holistic lens—considering structural and intersectional factors shaping well-being.

Key findings² include:

- 🧩 Over **70%** of respondents reported symptoms of moderate to severe **anxiety**
- 🧩 **43%** showed signs of moderate to severe **depression**
- 🧩 Around **40%** presented symptoms associated with **PTSD**, with **women** journalists reporting higher scores
- 🧩 **The highest PTSD rates** were found in **Central America** and the Caribbean (nearly 60%)
- 🧩 Journalists covering multiple beats reported higher levels of PTSD, intrusion, avoidance, and hyper-arousal
- 🧩 No significant difference was found between those exposed to direct versus indirect traumatic incidents
- 🧩 **14%** of the sample presented signs of a **total burnout**
- 🧩 Only **half of the journalists** surveyed have **social security**
- 🧩 **More than half have faced threats**, mainly from government bodies and armed groups, with few of them coming from within the profession
- 🧩 Despite this, **85% of the journalists** reported **high levels of resilience**

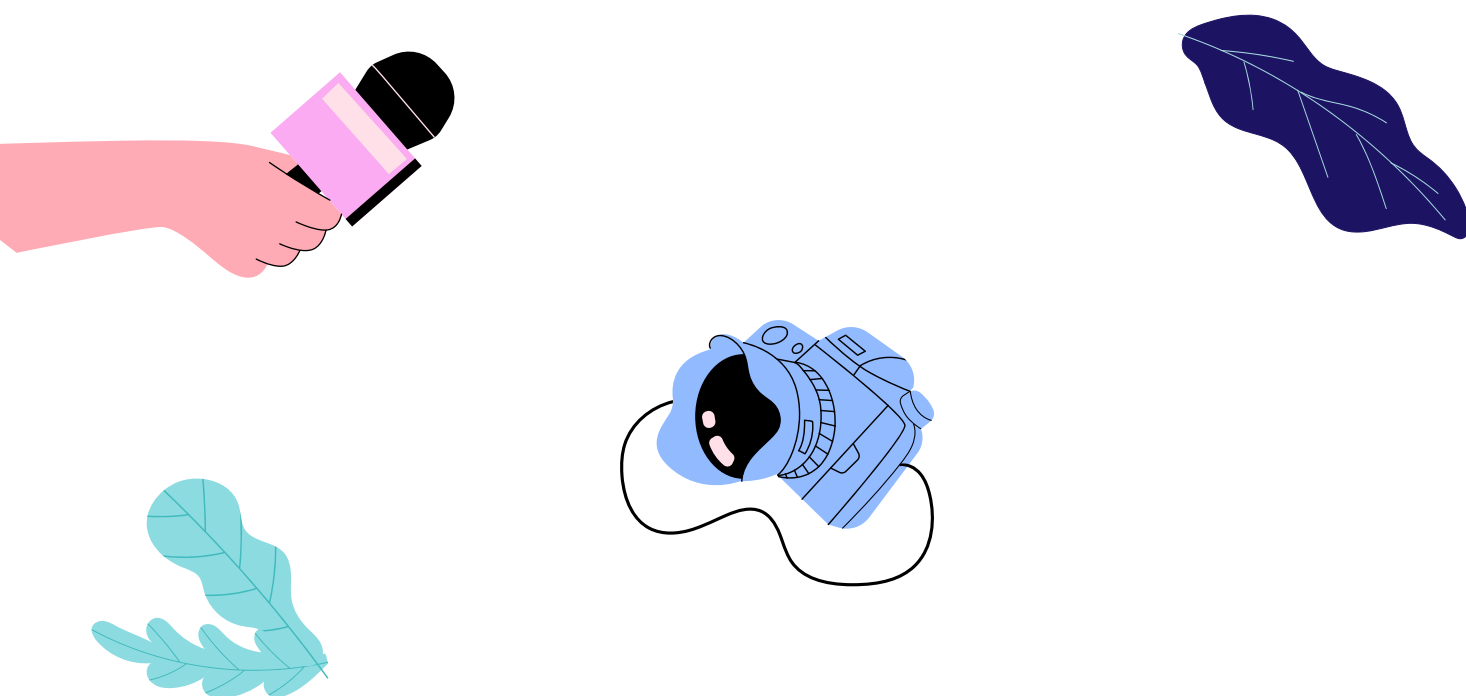
¹ This data is preliminary and based on a non-representative sample. More in-depth insights on social support, women journalists and resilience will follow after the completion of the qualitative part of the study.

These findings highlight notable mental health challenges among journalists in the region, while also pointing to the strategies many rely on to navigate adversity. They showcase the need for sustained, context-sensitive support, alongside structural changes that address the root causes of distress, instead of merely treating the symptoms. An industry suffering from economic fragility, political pressure and deadly threats presents an accumulation of stressors -beyond the individual level- that can possibly play a role in journalist's attrition, the quality of their work, and, eventually, to the public's access to reliable information.

This research aims to generate greater awareness of these challenges and to advocate for targeted funding, evidence-based and culturally appropriate interventions, as well as structural reforms that prioritize the well-being of journalists. It also calls for a cultural shift within the profession itself: for journalists to recognize that their emotional experiences are not personal weaknesses or isolated episodes, but rather a reflection of the broader conditions in which they work. At the same time, this study aims to highlight the knowledge and strengths within the journalistic community that help them navigate adversity in their specific contexts.

Donors are encouraged to invest in sustainable initiatives that go beyond emergency response, with particular attention to freelancers, women, and journalists in exile. Media support organizations and NGOs could integrate psycho-social care into existing safety frameworks and strengthen peer-led support systems across the region, with a focus on prevention. For mental health professionals this is an opportunity to better understand the specific pressures of journalistic work and develop accessible services that reflect them. Finally, media outlets themselves have a role to play by fostering supportive, inclusive environments where labor conditions improve -such as access to social security- and emotional well-being is seen as essential to professional sustainability. However, with severe funding cuts affecting the sector, media outlets in the region have found themselves in a critical financial situation that possibly further exacerbates the well-being of employees, without having the resources for safeguarding practices. This is one more reason why the continuation of financial and practical support for independent outlets in the region is crucial for the safety and sustainability of the sector.

The upcoming qualitative phase aims to provide deeper insight into how these issues affect specific groups—such as freelancers, women, and exiled journalists—helping inform more grounded and effective interventions.



INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

As the number of journalists seeking psychotherapeutic and/or psycho-social support increases, many media support organizations and outlets are gradually recognizing the importance of integrating mental health into their strategies and priorities. This shift reflects a growing awareness that journalists often face intense pressures, including harassment, threats, and direct attacks, while at the same time, structural factors, such as precarious labor conditions, can also lead to significant psychological distress.

In the media ecosystem of Latin America a growing interest in psycho-social issues from diverse stakeholders has also been observed. Free Press Unlimited (FPU) has been implementing psycho-social support (PSS) initiatives across the region alongside supporting related research for the past seven years. These initiatives included support hot-lines, group and individual sessions, team retreats and wellness activities – incorporating a focus on physical movement and dancing. A holistic approach to safety has been preserved throughout these initiatives viewing emotional and mental health as interrelated with physical, digital and legal security.

For the past years, new networks, collectives, and theorists have also emerged across the region, with many journalists themselves investing time and energy to seek accompaniment and to exchange their experiences with peers. In 2023, FPU convened its first regional psycho-social support meeting, bringing together more than twenty mental health professionals, academics and journalists from across Latin America. These professionals support journalists in diverse ways, with the journalists themselves also serving as pioneers on the topic by being advocates and supporters for their colleagues. The participation and voice of journalists in this meeting has been essential in providing the necessary knowledge and confirmation of the best practices that work for their field. Despite their varied approaches, all participants agreed on the pressing need for a more evidence-based framework to support journalists in the region as the demand for culturally and profession-appropriate care has been increasing in recent years.

Much of the foundational studies and protection mechanisms globally have focused, naturally, on the physical safety and psychological trauma resulting from high-risk contexts with systematic research on journalists' mental health remaining limited and uneven. More recently, broader attention has been paid to the mental health of media workers outside of high-risk zones and to the chronic and structural stressors of the profession, like the industry's economic fragility. The studies so far, bring valuable insights from different countries including Mexico, Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia Argentina and Peru², studying the impact of high risk coverage, the pandemic of Covid-19, the structural and labor issues of the profession and the existence of mental distress among the population. Regional insights into the impact, as well as potential protective and coping factors that help the media workers in the region continue their work despite adversity, remain underreported, with few exceptions³. Available support services and policies are also limited. Constraints in resources and the ethical and logistical challenges involved in protecting the participants' safety and well-being, while conducting research and setting up services might also be part of the reasons that these data remain scarce.

Driven by the momentum and inspired by our network of trusted partners in the region, Free Press Unlimited, in collaboration with researcher Rogelio Flores Morales from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, decided to conduct a comprehensive mixed-methods study on the psychosocial

2 Flores Morales et al.;(2016)Feinstein (2013);Bustamente et al.:(2023),Soto-Sanfiel & Salojärvi, (2024);De Frutos, R. & Sanjurjo, S. (2022)

3 Iesue, Hughes, Moreira, & Sousa, 2021

impact and protective factors affecting Latin American journalists. The aim is to bridge the gap between experience, evidence and practice. To better understand the psychological impact of practicing journalism in high-risk and under-resourced contexts, such as Latin America, this study began by examining the prevalence of mental distress⁴ among media workers across the region in our sample population. We focused, specifically, on symptoms associated with **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**⁵, **anxiety**⁶, and **depression**⁷—conditions that are commonly observed in high-risk professions and often occur together⁸. At the same time, the study sought to explore the levels of **Burnout**⁹ and **Organizational Attitude**¹⁰ in an attempt to better understand the role of labor and organizational structure to the well-being of journalists. Last but not least, this study looked into possible protective factors for mental health by measuring the **resilience**¹¹ and **social support systems** available to the participants.

The research aims to follow a mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative tools. The preliminary data presented in this report come from an online quantitative survey that was disseminated online and included all variables mentioned above. Furthermore, the online questionnaire covered some demographic data such as gender, age, type of contract, existence of threats and the possibility of displacement. To address the issue of safe participation a secure, anonymous, and voluntary survey system designed to minimize potential harm and ensure participants' privacy was developed. The support of trusted regional networks also played a key role in safely disseminating the survey, helping us reach journalists in diverse and often sensitive contexts through established, reliable channels.

Moving forward, our aim is to complement this initial quantitative research with a qualitative phase that will enable a more nuanced exploration of the psycho-social impacts and protective factors shaping journalists' lived experiences in Latin America. This would be necessary to gain a more contextualized understanding of the current data, as the region presents similarities, but also several differences when it comes to media workers and the issues they may face. The qualitative part will also allow for a closer look at certain groups of journalists that might present certain vulnerabilities, like freelancers, media workers in exile and female professionals.

It is important to clarify that the goal of this report is not to pathologize or diagnose journalists, but rather to explore the often-invisible mental health challenges of the profession through a holistic lens. We aim to be mindful of both intersectional dynamics and broader structural and contextual factors that impact well-being. Furthermore, exposure to risk does not inherently lead to a mental health condition. In fact, the majority of individuals exposed to traumatic events experience **temporary symptoms** and recover without long-term psychological consequences. However, in contexts of chronic and systemic exposure to violence and stress, especially when left unaddressed, the risk of lasting psychological distress can increase. A range of **personal and professional factors**—such as work conditions, gender, support system available and age—can influence these outcomes¹²

4 The following definitions are based on DSM-5 criteria and are intended for informational purposes only. **The presence of symptoms -as explored in the current study- does not imply a clinical diagnosis**

5 **PTSD:** A mental health condition that may develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event, characterized by symptoms such as intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in mood, and heightened arousal and occur for a prolonged period of time.

6 **Anxiety (GAD):** A condition marked by excessive, persistent worry or fear that is difficult to control and may interfere with daily functioning, often accompanied by physical symptoms like restlessness or difficulty concentrating occur for a prolonged period of time.

7 **Depression:** persistent feelings of sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, and other symptoms such as fatigue, sleep disturbances, or feelings of worthlessness, which affect day-to-day life occur for a prolonged period of time

8 MacDonald et al., 2022, Petereit-Haack et al., 2020 and Price, Legrand, Brier, & Hébert-Dufresne, 2022

9 **Burnout:** Recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as an occupational phenomenon that can significantly impact mental health and well-being, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or detachment, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, often resulting from prolonged stress or demanding work environments.

10 **Organizational Attitude:** According to Franco and Frías (2011), can be defined as the set of beliefs, values, and behaviors that characterize an entity and influence its organizational culture. This attitude is manifested in the way the organization interacts with its employees, customers, and the community at large.

11 **Resilience:** The ability to adapt and recover in the face of adversity, stress, or trauma. It involves psychological flexibility, coping skills, and support systems that help individuals maintain or regain well-being (Wagnild, 2009)

12 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/post-traumatic-stress-disorder>

WITH THIS OBJECTIVES IN MIND, THE STUDY AIMED TO INVESTIGATE THE FOLLOWING:



Prevalence of symptoms related to **PTSD, anxiety, and depression** among journalists in the sample.



Geographic differences in mental health symptoms across subregions: **South America, Central America and the Caribbean, and Mexico.**



Influence of **individual and professional factors**—such as **gender, type of journalistic work** (related or not to traumatic events), **number of sources covered, and type of trauma exposure** (direct or indirect)—on levels of psychological distress.



Psychological **impact of exile and forced displacement** on journalists



Effects of **burnout** and the role of **organizational environment and leadership attitudes** in shaping mental health outcomes.



Presence and influence of protective factors, such as resilience and social support system

Why in Latin America?

Latin America is one of the most dangerous non-conflict regions in the world for journalists. The high levels of violence¹³ that journalists are required to cover are compounded by the direct aggression they face themselves in reprisal for their reporting. In the past 25 years, more than 500 journalists¹⁴ have been murdered¹⁵ in the region, making it the deadliest non-war zone for media workers. Approximately 150 of those murders have been in Mexico¹⁶. In several countries, journalists are also at risk of enforced disappearance, with more than one third of missing journalists globally coming again from Mexico¹⁷. But the risks extend beyond physical violence: journalists are frequently subjected to threats, intimidation, and harassment. Psychological warfare and threats of family members are also a common tactic. In many countries, the effect of political and non-state pressure on media is exacerbated by economic fragility, creating immense pressure on journalists. For these attacks against journalists, high levels of impunity are also observed¹⁸, further affecting the feeling of injustice and possibly worsening the emotional toll for media workers and families alike. These conditions contribute to a climate of fear and widespread self-censorship¹⁹, with media workers in several countries being forced to continue their work in exile or leave the profession all together.



13 Bustamante & Relly, 2015; Díaz-Cerveró et al., 2022; Rebolledo, 2021; "Threats That Silence: Trends in the Safety of Journalists" 2022; Tusa et al., 2025.

14 <https://latamjournalismreview.org/articles/end-impunity-crimes-against-journalists-2023/>

15 Violence against journalists is on many occasions challenging to categorise and count due to the difficulties in evaluating whether it is a direct retaliation for the victims' journalistic activity, or other factors are at play.

Different organizations often possess different methodologies on how this is counted, thus different numbers are circulated each year.

16 <https://cpj.org/>

17 RSF 2024 Round-up: Journalists killed, detained, held hostage & missing

18 <https://latamjournalismreview.org/articles/end-impunity-crimes-against-journalists-2023/>

19 Gomis et al., 2020; Maldonado, 2024; Reporters Without Borders, 2025

Although the region presents similarities, there are several contextual differences at play. Mexico is the deadliest country in the region, with journalists facing physical and other attacks, often accompanied with threats against their family members. In 2024 the media ecosystem was also further hit by economic challenges, straining outlets and journalists. Other countries in Central America, like El Salvador, are experiencing a steady decline since 2020 with governmental propaganda and retaliation against outlets that are critical against authorities²⁰. Media workers in Guatemala²¹ also face challenges, including physical attacks, harassment and judicial persecution with some of them forced into exile or arbitrarily detained. According to the World Press Freedom Index²², Nicaragua is the worst ranking country in the whole region with systemic attacks, legal persecution – including on the basis of foreign agent laws – against independent press. Dissidents of the state – and often their family members – are forced into exile, while also suffering a retaliation tactic that strips them away from their citizenship²³ forcing them to live in limbo.

In the Caribbean, Cuba²⁴ continues to rank low in press freedom indexes, with all state media tightly controlled by the government and virtually no space for independent journalism. Threats, harassment, and arbitrary detentions remain common tactics used to silence dissent, forcing some journalists into exile. In Haiti²⁵ escalating gang violence has made journalism an increasingly dangerous profession. Media workers face extreme risks with little to no institutional protection, operating in a context where support systems are severely lacking.

Moving South, press freedom conditions vary but remain concerning. In Venezuela, independent journalism faces systemic censorship, legal persecution, and heavy state control, with many journalists forced to exile. In Colombia, journalists—especially outside urban centers—are still threatened by armed groups, with the government providing mixed signals of both support and attacks against the press. Peru has seen a sharp decline, with judicial harassment and disinformation campaigns targeting the press. In Ecuador, rising insecurity and threats from organized crime have created dangerous conditions for reporters. Brazil shows some recovery in media freedom after the fall of Bolsonaro, though political polarization and intimidation persist. Argentina²⁶, is also presenting a quick decline in the past two years, with governmental defamation normalizing verbal online attacks, while media workers in the country can occasionally receive threats from organized crime. Chile ranks higher in the region, but journalists still face legal pressures and growing concerns about self-censorship.

Throughout the region the industry suffers from economic fragility²⁷ political pressure and deadly threats, providing a unique set of stressors that can possibly play a role in journalist attrition, the quality of their work, and, eventually, to the public's access to reliable information. The 2025 US funding cuts have been also devastating for independent outlets in the region²⁸. All of these factors create an environment in which the mental health of journalists can be severely affected—yet remains largely unaddressed by public policy and professional support mechanisms. Civil society and policy makers use mainly data on physical attacks²⁹ as a way to depict and address issues around the safety of journalists and press freedom. Although this approach highlights urgent and visible threats, it often overlooks the less tangible, but damaging psychological toll that journalists experience. Mental health struggles have only recently started to be treated as indicators of risk, and therefore research on their full impact remains limited, especially outside of Western countries. When viewing safety in a holistic manner we can start observing the interrelation between different types of risks as well as the direct and indirect impact these can have on journalists and the profession at large.

20 <https://rsf.org/en/region/americas>

21 <https://www.freepressunlimited.org/en/countries/guatemala>

22 <https://rsf.org/en/country/nicaragua>

23 <https://www.pen-international.org/news/nicaragua-authorities-arbitrarily-strip-nationality-and-properties-of-pen-members>

24 <https://rsf.org/en/country/cuba>

25 <https://www.ap.org/news-highlights/spotlights/2025/journalists-in-haiti-defy-bullets-and-censorship-to-cover-unprecedented-violence/>

26 <https://rsf.org/en/country/argentina>

27 <https://rsf.org/en/region/americas>

28 <https://latamjournalismreview.org/news/withdrawal-of-us-funds-hits-latin-american-journalism-hard/>

29 <https://cpj.org/2024/10/cpj-2024-impunity-index-haiti-and-israel-top-list-of-countries-where-journalist-murders-go-unpunished/>; <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-s-2024-round-journalism-suffers-exorbitant-human-cost-due-to-conflicts-and-repressive-regimes>

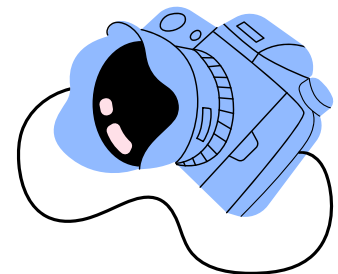
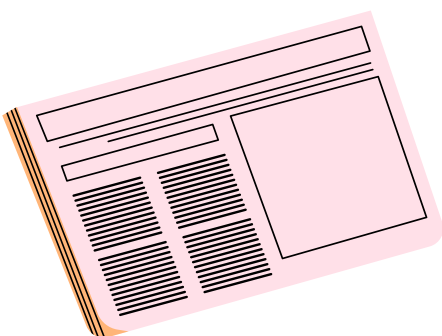
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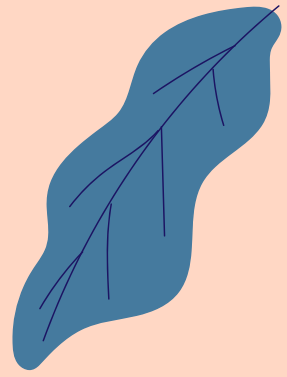
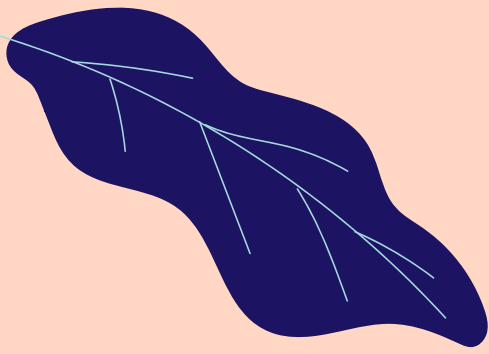
In a region marked by economic precarity, political pressure, and deadly threats, the accumulation of stressors—many of which lie beyond the individual level—can impact journalists' health, increase attrition, diminish the quality of reporting, and ultimately affect the public's access to reliable information. To fully understand and address the challenges journalists face in Latin America, it is essential to invest in research that examines not only psychological distress, but also the risk and protective factors that shape it. Without this evidence base, responses to threats against journalists remain partial, failing to account for a critical dimension of their well-being and long-term sustainability in the profession.

At its core, this study seeks to increase visibility around mental health in journalism in a nonstigmatizing way and to open space for a broader, more inclusive conversation. We invite donors, mental health professionals, media leaders, journalists, and protection actors to engage in dialogue on holistic, intersectional approaches to care. Beyond individual support, we emphasize that physical, emotional, digital, financial, and legal safety are not only essential for preventing psychological harm—but also for supporting recovery and healing when distress occurs. These layers of safety must be present at every stage of the process, including the ethical collection of data.

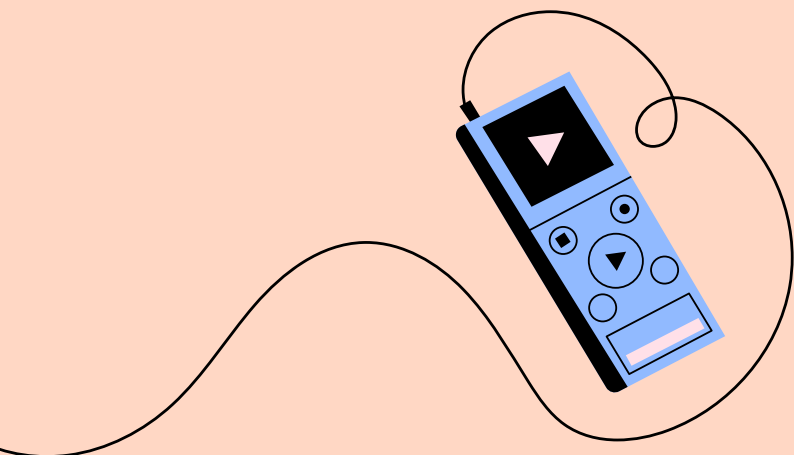
This report aims to build greater awareness of the complex mental health challenges in journalism and to advocate for evidence-based, culturally sensitive responses—including targeted funding, accessible psycho-social care, and structural reforms. It also calls for a cultural shift within the profession itself: for journalists to recognize that emotional struggles are not signs of personal weakness, but valid responses to systemic pressures. At the same time, this research seeks to highlight the resilience, solidarity, and informal support systems that many journalists already draw on to navigate adversity in their environments.

We are humbled to undertake what we believe to be the first research of its kind in Latin America, in terms of regional scope and digital security sensitivity. This report seeks to contribute to the growing efforts to understand and support journalists' psycho-social well-being by centering their lived experiences across diverse contexts and realities. We hope this paves the way for further research in the region with the aim that the findings will help inform more effective strategies to improve journalists working conditions and strengthen their ability to continue their essential role as watchdogs in society.





METHODOLOGY



METHODOLOGY.

For this study, we collaboratively designed a questionnaire tailored to the Latin American context, with two academics from the Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in the lead. A quantitative approach was followed with a descriptive, non-experimental, cross-sectional, and comparative design. The final selection of the variables studied was informed by focus group discussions with journalists in Latin America. This process allowed us to validate and enrich our initial assumptions through triangulation, helping us identify the most relevant variables to assess the psycho-emotional impact of the profession. The variables of PTSD, depression, anxiety, burn out, organization attitude and resilience were measured via instruments³⁰ standardized to the context of Latin America.

The data collection took place online via a website designed exclusively for the research³¹. The questionnaire and platform were carefully designed to ensure the safety of journalists. To guarantee the confidentiality and security of the data collected, robust security measures were taken with all data collected being anonymized and hosted in our own server, using open source and secure software. This approach ensured that the process was not only efficient and accurate, but above all, safe and trustworthy for participants—particularly in a context as sensitive as the Latin American press.

Journalists that participated in the survey received a preliminary evaluation³² of their responses, and were given the option of direct psycho-social accompaniment by using the emergency support mechanism - [Reporters Respond](#) - of Free Press Unlimited if needed. All respondents were informed about the confidentiality of their data and their right to drop the survey at any point, if they wished to. In order to reach a broad and diverse audience, we activated the professional networks of both Free Press Unlimited and of the academic lead at UNAM, in order to enable wider dissemination. The statistical analysis³³ was carried out by prof. Flores Morales, as well as García Saisó. All journalists were informed about the objectives and scope of the research, and signed an informed consent form before answering the survey.



* Additional and detailed information on the methodology can be found in the annex.

30 Generalized Anxiety Scale (GAD-7), The Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9), PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5), Escala Mexicana de Desgaste Ocupacional (EMEDO) (Scale for Occupational burn out conceptually aligning with the dimensions of the Maslach Burnout Inventory), Actitud de la organización y Comunicación de la escala de clima (Franco y Frías, 2011), Resilience Scale (RS-14). More detailed information on the methodology can be found in the Annex 1.

31 <https://encuestaperiodistas.org/>

32 It was clearly communicated that the preliminary evaluation of their responses was just an indication of distress and not an official diagnosis. Participants were encouraged to reach suitable mental health professionals when in doubt or in need of direct assistance.

33 Statistical tools & tests used: IBM SPSS Statistics (version 25), U de Mann-Whitney & Kruskal-Wallis

Limitations

This methodology aligns with the ambitions of our research, which were to bring a holistic perception and response to mental health in the profession by looking into different factors at play. Outside of these objectives, one of the limitations of this approach concerns the non-representative nature of the current dataset, as the total amount of respondents is considered small to cover the whole region. Latin America is a vast and diverse region, home to many journalists and media workers, whose number cannot – at the moment – be accurately calculated.

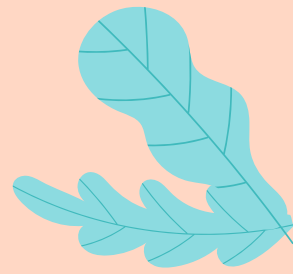
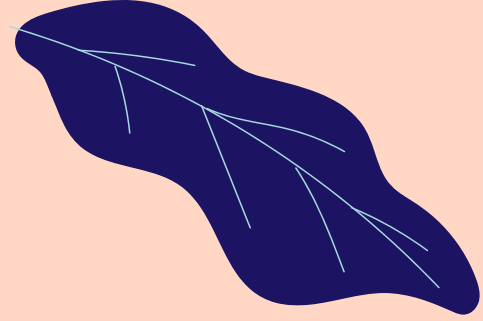
Part of the reason is that the nature of journalists' work complicates the clear definition of who qualifies as a journalist. While some journalists receive formal training and are registered with journalists' associations, this is not feasible in many Latin American countries. For instance, in Nicaragua, currently no universities offer journalism training, and registering as a journalist can expose individuals to significant risks. Journalists may be formal employees, freelancers working for various media outlets, or individuals who engage in journalism after a full day in a different profession. This latter scenario is common among many exiled journalists who struggle to sustain their media outlets. Additionally, not all media organizations are formally registered; some journalists report news using their phones or by posting news updates on bus stops to evade censorship. This diversity complicates research efforts, but without acknowledging it, the findings of such research cannot be fully understood and put into perspective.

Another reason our sample is not representative is that we have worked with a non-random sample from this population and thus our results could not be generalized. As the distribution of the research took place mainly through FPU's network, the representation of countries might be affected by the presence and visibility of the organization in the region. This means that certain countries like Mexico and Venezuela, might be over-represented over others. Although an equally distributed and wider sample would provide more statistically accurate information, this was not the goal of the research team, as we were aware of the difficulties and ambiguities this may pose. Instead, the goal of the team was to shed some light, start a conversation and, hopefully, trigger a series of more research on the topic and region.

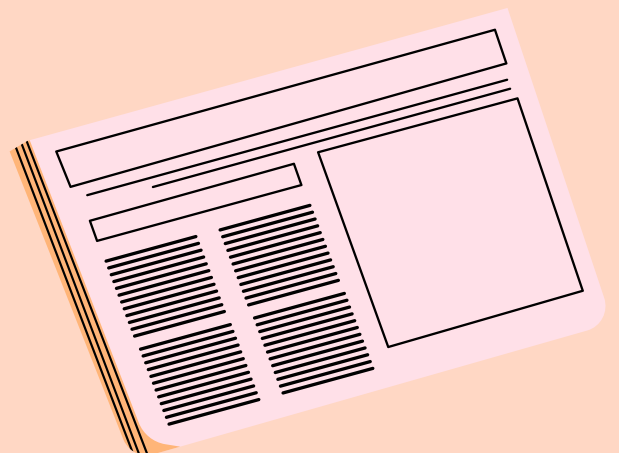
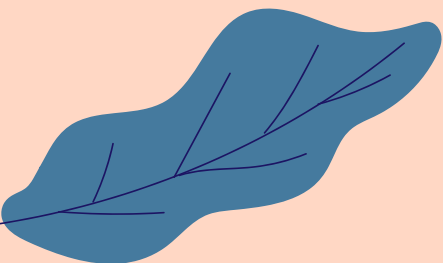
Last but not least, data collection was carried out from November 2024 to March 2025, as we wanted to leave the survey open for an extended period of time to allow for more participation. Unexpectedly, this timeframe overlapped with the announce of the US funding freeze and the domino effect³⁴ this created across the sector. Media in Latin America were amongst the ones more hardly hit, with more than 60 outlets directly affected³⁵. As this may have influenced our collected responses, we cannot unfortunately directly study the possible impact as this parameter was not anticipated and thus not involved in the study's design.

³⁴ <https://www.freepressunlimited.org/en/current/trumps-foreign-aid-freeze-disastrous-independent-mediaworldwide>

³⁵ <https://latamjournalismreview.org/news/withdrawal-of-us-funds-hits-latin-american-journalism-hard/>



DEMOGRAPHICS



DEMOGRAPHICS OF SAMPLE

**WE REACHED 282 JOURNALISTS
FROM 18 COUNTRIES IN LATIN AMERICA:**

Grouped into three sub-regions:



51.5%

From South America (n=144)

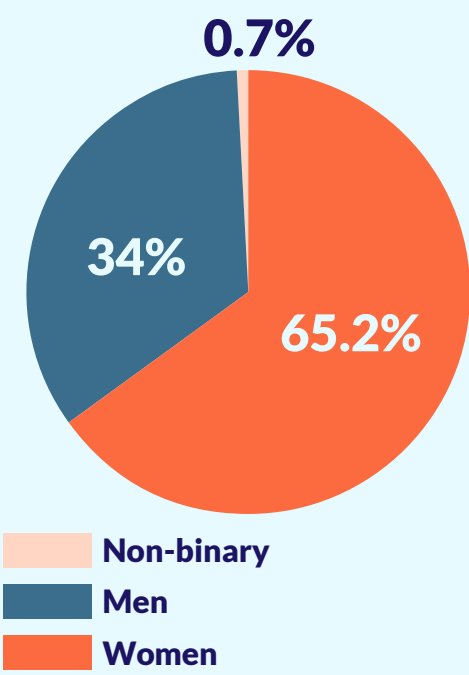
22%

From Central America
and the Caribbean (n=62)

26.5%

From Mexico (n=76), representing the
northern subregion of Latin America

GENDER, AGE, LABOR CONDITIONS AND EXPERIENCE WITH ADVERSE EVENTS:



Youngest Participant:

22 years old



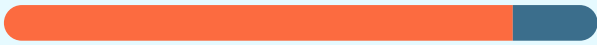
Average Age:

40 years old



Oldest Participant:

73 years old



- Non-binary
- Men
- Women

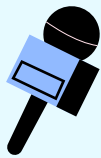
PROFESSIONAL COVERAGE

SOURCES COVERED



One Source: 31.2% Two or More Sources: 68.8%

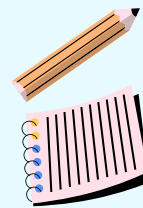
ROLES IN THE WORKPLACE



61%
Reporters

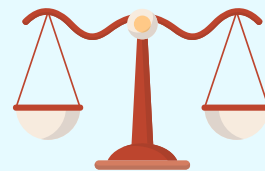
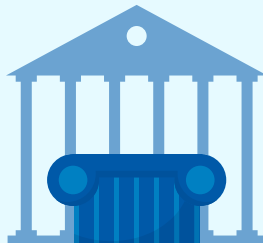


34%
Editors



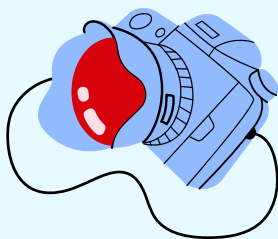
Many journalists perform
multiple roles

FIELDS OF COVERAGE



Most covered areas include
human rights, politics, and justice.

RED NEWS COVERAGE*



38 participants frequently
cover this type of news

ACCESS TO SOCIAL SECURITY

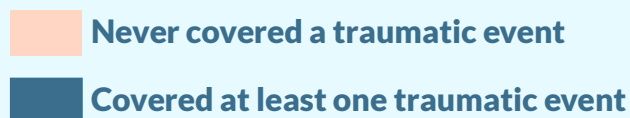
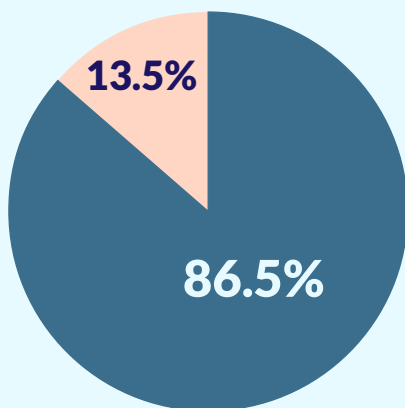


No Access: 50% of
the sample

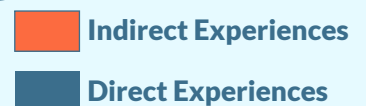
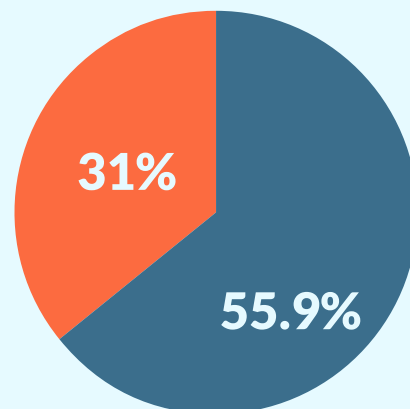
*Red News refers to a type of news coverage that focuses on violent or sensational events, such as crimes, accidents, or natural disasters. It is often graphic and emotionally charged.

EXPERIENCES WITH ADVERSE EVENTS

TRAUMATIC EVENTS COVERED



MOST INTENSE EXPOSURE



TIMING OF EXPERIENCES



52.5%

On average, of these experiences occurred about a year prior.

THREATS FACED

70%
Of journalists

Threatened at least once in their career



SOURCES OF THREATS



Government Agencies: 52.8%



Civilians: 27.7%



Irregular Armed Groups: 9.6%



Organized Crime: 9.2%



Inside the Media Industry: 3.5%

Overview of results

Of the 282 journalists surveyed across 18 Latin American countries, more than 40% showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while over 70% presented symptoms of moderate or severe anxiety. Additionally, 43.3% reported symptoms connected with high or severe depression. The highest PTSD prevalence appeared in Central America and the Caribbean (59.7%). Interestingly, no significant differences were found between journalists exposed to trauma directly and those exposed indirectly. Only half of our sample reported having social security, and over half said they had received threats—most commonly from government bodies. Despite these risks, 85% of respondents showed high or very high levels of resilience.



40.1%

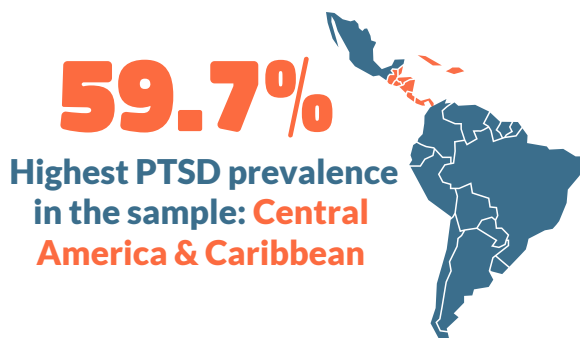
Of the sample presented symptoms of **PTSD**

70.6%

Of the sample presented symptoms of **moderate or severe anxiety**

43.3%

Of the sample presented symptoms of **high or severe depression**



No significant differences were found between journalists who experienced **direct** exposure to trauma and journalists who experienced **indirect** trauma in the variables of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression



85%

Of participants reported high or very high levels of **resilience**

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER, ANXIETY, AND DEPRESSION

The results of this study - although not representative - reflect a high level of psychological distress among participant journalists from Latin America. Across the entire sample, 40.1% of journalists exhibited symptoms affiliated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)³⁶. Across regional samples we found a significant difference in PTSD scores between the groups, with **Central America & the Caribbean presenting higher scores** compared to those in **South America** and **Mexico**³⁷.

The data on anxiety also paints a stark picture. Only a small fraction of surveyed journalists across the region (8.2%) reported the absence of any symptom of anxiety. Meanwhile, 21.3% of the participants experienced mild symptoms, 33.3% reported moderate anxiety, and a significant part (37.2%) experienced severe anxiety. Regionally, the highest rates of moderate to severe anxiety were again found in Central America and the Caribbean (77.4%), followed by South America (71.5%), and Mexico (63.2%). Similarly, when looking at symptoms related to depression, almost half of the journalists (43.3%) reported symptoms classified as high or severe. These journalists that seem to present severe symptoms are found equally across the region of South, Central and North America.

The data on **anxiety** also paints a stark picture. Only a small fraction of surveyed journalists across the region (**8.2%**) reported the absence of any symptom of anxiety. Meanwhile, **21.3% of the participants** experienced mild symptoms, **33.3%** reported moderate anxiety, and a significant part (**37.2%**) experienced severe anxiety. Regionally, the highest rates of moderate to severe anxiety were again found in **Central America and the Caribbean (77.4%)**, followed by **South America (71.5%)**, and **Mexico (63.2%)**. Similarly, when looking at symptoms related to **depression**, almost half of the journalists (**43.3%**) reported symptoms classified as high or severe. These journalists that seem to present severe symptoms are found equally across the region of South, Central and North America.

Findings related to gender are consistent with previous research showing that women—regardless of their profession—tend to report higher levels of trauma-related symptoms such as PTSD, intrusion, avoidance and anxiety³⁸. In this study, women journalists presented significantly higher overall PTSD scores. However, no significant gender differences were found in depression, suggesting that other contextual or individual factors may be mediating these effects. Another relevant finding is the association between workload and psychological distress. Journalists covering multiple beats reported higher levels in all variables, except depression (this is PTSD, intrusion, avoidance, cognitive alterations, hyper-arousal and anxiety) which may reflect the impact of increased work pressure and exposure to varied stressors. This aligns with prior studies linking occupational stress and information overload to heightened trauma responses in high-risk professions³⁹.

As expected, journalists who had experienced traumatic events reported significantly higher scores in PTSD-related dimensions than those who had not. This is consistent with existing literature on trauma exposure in crisis-affected professions⁴⁰. Finally, while direct exposure to trauma was associated with higher intrusive symptoms⁴¹- including flashbacks and nightmares- no other significant differences

36 Again the research explores symptoms affiliated with the mental health condition, as measured by the appropriate questionnaire. The prevalence of symptoms does not imply a diagnosis

37 Mexico is counted here separately due to over-representation in the sample.

38 Breslau et al., 1997; Tolin & Foa, 2006

39 McFarlane & Van Hoof, 2007

40 Figley, 1995

41 Intrusive symptoms in PTSD are unwanted and distressing thoughts, memories, or flashbacks of the traumatic event that repeatedly invade a person's mind. These can also include nightmares and intense emotional or physical reactions to reminders of the trauma.

emerged between **direct** and **indirect** exposure groups. This suggests that the relationship between type of exposure and psychological outcomes may be more complex and shaped by factors such as the characteristics of the trauma, coping strategies, and levels of social support.

Importantly, despite these high levels of psychological distress, 85% of participants (n=240) reported high or very high levels of resilience. This suggests that many journalists possess strong coping mechanisms, which may buffer the negative impact of trauma and stress. Understanding these resilience factors is crucial for designing interventions that not only address mental health challenges but also build on the adaptive capacities of journalists facing difficult work environments.

These findings indicate an urgent need for targeted psycho-social interventions to address the mental health crisis affecting journalists across Latin America, particularly in regions experiencing extreme levels of violence and impunity.

INSIGHTS FROM EXILE

Beyond documenting the overall prevalence of mental distress in our sample, the research team deepened the analysis by examining specific journalistic groups and contextual variables that extend beyond individual symptomatology. Independent journalism in the region, as elsewhere, serves the public interest by holding governments and authorities accountable. In many contexts, however, this role is met with repression, violent attacks, and various forms of persecution. With national protection mechanisms often absent or ineffective, media workers are sometimes forced into exile to protect their lives, families, and profession. For this reason, the research placed special focus on exiled and displaced journalists. By exploring the connections between political repression, forced migration, and mental health, we aim to reveal how contextual factors shape the experience of mental distress. In doing so, we approach distress not as an individual weakness, but as a social and political phenomenon rooted in broader historical and cultural realities—an understanding that can open space for more meaningful forms of prevention and mitigation.

As in other regions, authoritarianism has been on the rise in Latin America, leading to heightened repression and shrinking civic space. This situation has driven a growing number of journalists into exile. According to UNESCO's Voces Desplazadas⁴² research, the main drivers of displacement are political persecution, state repression, and threats from organized crime and other non-state actors. Since 2018, approximately 913 journalists are estimated to have fled abroad to protect their lives and families, with Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba among the primary countries of origin. In our study, nearly one-third of surveyed journalists reported being in exile or internally displaced⁴³.

For displaced journalists, the emotional toll of forced migration often ranks as one of the most significant consequences. Voces Desplazadas found that 83 out of 98 surveyed journalists reported experiencing emotional impacts from exile. Economic hardship (73 cases) and family-related challenges (72 cases) were also prominent, often intertwining as contributors to mental distress. In our data, displaced journalists exhibited notably higher prevalence of anxiety, depression, and PTSD compared to the overall sample: 60.3% reported PTSD symptoms, 79.9% moderate or severe anxiety, and 50% high or severe depressive symptoms. These findings underscore how socio-political pressures—family separation, loss of long-term life projects, a state of permanent transience, and exposure to discrimination and xenophobia—directly shape journalists' well-being.

⁴² Jiménez Alvarado, O.M., et al (2025)

⁴³ Jiménez Alvarado, O.M., et al (2025)

Family separation emerged as a recurring theme. More than half of the exiled journalists reported fleeing alone, while 38.5% left with family members. Whether family stays behind or migrates together, persecution often extends beyond the individual, exposing relatives to direct or indirect risks. Ensuring that emergency assistance and psychosocial support are accessible to family members is therefore essential for a holistic approach to the safety and well-being of displaced professionals.

A more detailed analysis of the exiled community—its struggles, resilience, and strategies of resistance—will be presented in a forthcoming dedicated report.

INSIGHTS ON BURN OUT & ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

In order to deepen our understanding of the contextual factors that affect journalists' mental health, we turned our focus to **burnout**⁴⁴ and the **role of organizational and labor dynamics**, both independently and in conjunction with external threats and risks. Throughout our preliminary expert consultations and in the focus groups conducted with journalists during the study design phase, labor conditions repeatedly surfaced as a major concern — not just individual symptomatology, but how the work environment itself contributes to chronic stress.

Journalists in Latin America consistently report being under pressure: high workloads, unstable employment, hyper-connectivity (being “always on”), and job precarity. For example, a recent Worlds of Journalism Study finds that in 11 Latin American countries nearly half of journalists lack full-time contracts, many work for multiple outlets simultaneously⁴⁵. This is also supported by our data, 61% of the surveyed journalists do not have a formal salary contract (they are freelancers, have temporary contracts by service or other). In addition, 36.2% have reported to accumulate two or more roles within the news room (editor, photographer, reporter etc.) and 28% work for more than one media outlet. Similarly, LatAm Journalism Review reports that low salaries, lack of social benefits, and erratic contracts are common even in larger urban newsrooms, while local or regional media face even steeper odds⁴⁶.

To avoid framing burnout purely as an issue of personal weakness or resilience, we examined structural factors in the labor environment that might either worsen or mitigate distress. Financial instability plays a central role: many Latin American outlets are reeling from budget cuts, forcing remaining staff to stretch themselves thin, take on fundraising tasks, or work without adequate resources. The precarity of contracts and lack of benefits (including health coverage and rest) further compound the strain⁴⁷.

By probing the labor conditions more closely, we can gain better insight into how burnout arises from combinations of excessive workloads, unclear role expectations, poor organizational support, unstable compensation, and continuous exposure to external risks. These insights can help us identify prevention and mitigation strategies — for instance, promoting clearer contracts, ensuring reasonable workloads, instituting rest periods, creating organizational support structures, and addressing compensation and job security as critical factors in supporting journalists' well-being.

44 Burnout: Workers experiencing occupational burnout lack the resources and capabilities to efficiently manage work and human interaction, leading to a sense of unfulfillment or personal dissatisfaction (Donald & Siu, 2001). The deterioration of relational skills also affects work environments and results in a downward spiral that must be broken, allowing for the renewal of resources during the workday.

45 <https://latamjournalismreview.org/articles/survey-finds-surveillance-and-job-insecurity-commonplace-for-journalists-across-latin-america/>

46 <https://latamjournalismreview.org/articles/latin-american-journalists-denounce-the-precarioussness-in-the-profession/>

47 <https://latamjournalismreview.org/articles/latin-american-journalists-denounce-the-precarioussness-in-the-profession/>

Burn Out

In this study, we examined burnout across its three core dimensions, **exhaustion, depersonalization, and dissatisfaction**, as reflected in the reported symptomatology⁴⁸. The first phase, exhaustion, is marked by a loss of enthusiasm for work and personal interactions, accompanied by a gradual depletion of energy that can culminate in extreme physical, emotional, and mental fatigue. In the second phase, depersonalization, individuals often report emotional detachment, cynicism, irritability, and impersonal or cold responses toward colleagues or audiences. Finally, the phase of dissatisfaction involves negative self-evaluation, feelings of inadequacy, demotivation, and discontent with professional performance and outcomes. It is important to note that these phases are not necessarily linear or sequential: individuals may experience them simultaneously or fluctuate between them with varying intensity.

Overall, **14% of the sample showed symptoms consistent with full burnout**. Regionally, Central America and the Caribbean registered the highest frequencies across all three phases, while South America reported elevated levels specifically in dissatisfaction. Gender differences were also observed: women reported higher levels of burnout in every phase. A possible explanation lies in the multiple professional and domestic roles women are often expected to balance, which complicates the maintenance of work–life equilibrium. Moreover, women journalists face additional gender-based risks and challenges both inside and outside the newsroom, compounding their vulnerability to stress and exhaustion⁴⁹.

Differences were also visible across labor conditions. Freelancers (n=105) registered the lowest burnout scores, which may reflect lower expectations regarding workplace conditions or a perception of greater autonomy and flexibility in their work. In contrast, journalists on temporary contracts reported the highest burnout scores, possibly due to the tension between professional commitment and contractual uncertainty. Across roles, dissatisfaction emerged as the most frequent phase, with editors showing the highest scores—likely linked to heavy workloads, long office hours, and the dual mental and administrative demands of their positions.

Patterns also emerged around displacement and exposure to threats. Exiled journalists reported higher levels of exhaustion and depersonalization, while non-displaced journalists registered slightly higher levels of dissatisfaction. Journalists who had experienced threats (n=197) scored higher across all phases compared to those who had not (n=85). Interestingly, those reporting on traumatic events (n=244) showed lower burnout scores than peers who did not cover such events (n=38)—a finding that warrants further exploration.



48 Donald & Siu, 2001

49 https://latamjournalismreview.org/articles/women-press-workers-in-latin-america-face-high-levels-of-genderviolence-online-and-in-the-workplace-if/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Organizational Environment

In an exploratory approach, we also analyzed the variables of Organization's Attitude⁵⁰ and Communication within the outlets, categorized as *Good*, *Medium*, and *Bad*. According to Franco and Frías (2011), the attitude of an organization can be defined as the set of beliefs, values, and behaviors that characterize an entity and shape its organizational culture. Understanding this variable allows us to examine the role of the organization in supporting journalists' well-being. Although a more detailed analysis will be presented in forthcoming articles, some preliminary results are worth highlighting to shed light on factors that influence journalists' experiences.

Organizational attitude is reflected in how an outlet interacts with its employees, audiences, and the broader community. In our sample, the perception of the organization's attitude as "*Bad*" was most commonly reported by journalists with stable contracts (72%), compared to only 20% of those with temporary contracts. Among freelancers, one-third perceived the organization's attitude toward collaborators as "*Bad*". Differences also emerged by type of outlet: television scored the highest negative perception (57%), while newspapers, online outlets, and radio reported lower rates, around 20–30%. Finally, the quality of internal communication was perceived as "*Bad*" by nearly half of the editors (47%), whereas bosses received the lowest negative perception (23%).

Table on organizational attitude

ORGANIZATIONAL ATTITUDE		
	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Good	103	36.5%
Medium	87	30.8%
Bad	92	32.6%

In the overall sample, both variables had an almost equal distribution between the three categories (of approximately 30% on each).

⁵⁰ Franco and Frías (2011)

DISCUSSION & NEXT STEPS

This study represents a crucial step in understanding the psycho-social impact of practicing journalism in Latin America, particularly within a context of increasing hostility, violence, and authoritarianism in several countries. The findings underscore a complex reality: while many journalists are experiencing significant mental health challenges, they also demonstrate remarkable resilience in the face of adversity.

One of the most striking findings is that **85% (n=240) of participants reported high or very high levels of resilience**. This suggests that, despite the structural and emotional toll of their profession, journalists are actively engaging in coping strategies and drawing on personal and collective resources to sustain their work. Social support systems—whether in the form of colleagues, family, peers, or professional networks—seem to play a critical role in this process, which is worth exploring further in the future. However, resilience should not be romanticized or mistaken for immunity. High levels of resilience may, in fact, mask underlying vulnerabilities when not supported by appropriate institutional and psychological frameworks.

These findings reinforce the urgent need to move beyond an individualistic framing of mental health and to examine the systemic conditions that compromise journalists' well-being. Poor working conditions, impunity for violence, financial instability, and the normalization of trauma within newsrooms are not only barriers to mental health, but they can possibly threaten the sustainability of journalism as a profession.

This research aims to generate greater awareness of these challenges and to advocate for targeted funding, evidence-based interventions, and structural reforms that prioritize the psychological wellbeing of journalists. It also calls for a cultural shift within the profession itself: for journalists to recognize that their emotional experiences are not personal weaknesses or isolated episodes, but rather a reflection of the broader conditions in which they work.

Ultimately, we hope this report contributes to the development of healthier, more supportive environments for journalists across the region—environments where mental health is protected, and where journalists can continue their vital role of providing quality, timely, and independent information. This is not only a matter of occupational health—it is a matter of preserving journalism in Latin America. In the coming months, we will continue to publish deeper analyses and insights from this data collection, with the goal of supporting ongoing dialogue, practical interventions, and change.

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ANNEX 1 : METHODOLOGY

The research employed a quantitative method with a descriptive, non-experimental, cross-sectional, and comparative design (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza, 2020).

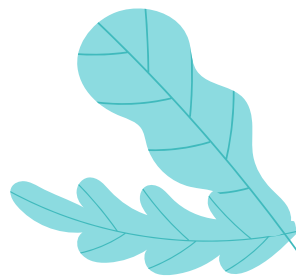
The sample for this study was non-representative and intentionally selected by invitation (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza, 2020), meaning that its results cannot be generalized to the general population of journalists.

The following instruments and scales were applied:

- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7):** The GAD-7 is a Likert scale instrument that assesses the severity of anxiety symptoms and the presence of a possible case of generalized anxiety disorder. It has a unidimensional structure of 7 items that explain 63% of the variance, with an overall internal reliability of .92. Scores range from 0 to 21 (higher scores indicate higher levels of anxiety) (Spitzer et al., 2006). In studies with different populations and groups, Cronbach's alpha values have ranged from .88 to .93. According to Galindo-Vázquez et al. (2023), the scale also demonstrates excellent psychometric properties in various Spanish-speaking samples ($\alpha > .85$).
- **Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9):** The PHQ-9 is an instrument that identifies symptoms of depression and the possible presence of major depressive disorder. It has a unidimensional structure and consists of 9 items with a 4-option Likert scale. Its internal consistency presents a Cronbach's alpha of .89 (Kroenke et al., 2001). Different studies have reported internal consistency ranging from .81 to .89 (Galindo-Vázquez et al., 2023).
- **PCL-5 - PTSD Checklist for DSM-5:** The PCL-5 includes 20 items that collectively assess symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder according to DSM-5 criteria. It is divided into four factors or dimensions: intrusive re-experiencing, avoidance, cognitive/affective alterations, and arousal. Responses are recorded on a 5-point scale (0= "not at all" to 4= "extremely"), with total scores ranging from 0 to 80. The internal consistency has an α of .94 (Blevins et al., 2015). The checklist has been widely used in various populations and languages (Ashbaugh et al., 2016). For example, a systematic review of 51 different studies worldwide found acceptable internal consistency, ranging from .83 to .97 for the total scale, and .57 to .93, .69 to .91, .74 to .94, and .71 to .90 for their respective dimensions (Forkus et al., 2023).
- **Resilience Scale (RS-14):** The RS-14 is a scale that measures the degree of individual resilience that allows adaptation to adverse situations (Wagnild, 2009). Unlike the original version, which identifies two factors (personal competence and acceptance of oneself and life), the Spanish version identifies only one, with an internal consistency of 0.79 (Sánchez-Teruel & Robles-Bello, 2015). The original scale identifies the following levels of resilience: 14-30 very low resilience; 31-48 low; 49-63 normal; 64-81 high; and 82-98 very high.
- **Occupational Burnout Scale (EDO-30):** The EDO questionnaire identifies occupational burnout and consists of 30 items grouped into three factors: exhaustion (9 items), depersonalization (9 items), and achievement dissatisfaction (12 items) (Uribe-Prado & García, 2010). All items are answered on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

The instruments and scales were administered through a website that met all necessary security standards to ensure the safety and anonymity of the participants.

The data were analyzed using SPSS software (version 25). To identify prevalences, frequencies and percentages, arithmetic means, and standard deviations were examined. Since the variables of interest (PTSD, anxiety, and depression) did not meet the normality assumption according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p < .05$), non-parametric tests were used. Depending on the type of comparison, the following statistics were calculated: Mann-Whitney U or Kruskal-Wallis H, the Z statistic, the p-value (two-tailed significance), and the effect size (r). Effect sizes were interpreted according to Cohen's criteria (1988): small ($r = .10$), medium ($r = .30$), and large ($r \geq .50$). A statistical significance level of .05 was established, with p-values below this threshold considered indicative of statistically significant differences between groups. Finally, post hoc tests to identify comparisons between groups included Bonferroni.



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