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A CASE STUDY OF THE RESPONSE OF NEWSROOM MANAGERS TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AFFECTS ON NEWSROOM EMPLOYEES OF THE COVERAGE OF A TRAUMATIC NEWS STORY

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A CASE STUDY OF THE RESPONSE OF NEWSROOM MANAGERS TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AFFECTS ON NEWSROOM EMPLOYEES OF THE COVERAGE OF A TRAUMATIC NEWS STORY

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Forward

On Monday, October 2, 2006, Charles Carl Roberts IV walked into an Amish schoolhouse in rural Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. He made all the boys leave the school, but kept the 10 girls with him. He then bound the girls' legs together, lined them up against the chalkboard and shot them, eventually killing five of them.

It was a crime that shocked the quiet community, and the country. For the dozens of first responders, it would be a trying day. Before the week was over, they would have debriefing sessions and would receive counseling. But for the journalists covering the story, some of them arriving on scene just minutes after the first emergency workers, help would not come for weeks. They would have to deal with the raw emotion and haunting images on their own. A reporter and photographer crew with WGAL, the NBC affiliate in Lancaster, Pennsylvania was among the first on the scene, followed shortly afterward by several more reporting teams from the same television station.

This is just one example of why managers of television newsrooms across the country need to be more prepared for the lasting psychological effects of some news stories. The reality of the business is that journalists cover crimes and disasters. Sometimes though, those situations can leave journalists with symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) and may prevent them from doing their jobs and from living their lives.

The purpose of this study is to help television newsroom managers better prepare themselves for the lasting psychological effects on employees covering traumatic news

stories. They will see through the example of employees from WGAL how the television station properly handled the situation and some ways that may have been handled more appropriately, through the recommendations of the employees themselves.

Abstract

Journalists are exposed to traumatic situations every day. Some studies have been done on the lasting effects of the trauma caused by large scale events, such as 9/11 or Hurricane Katrina, but few studies have been conducted on the effects of everyday trauma, such as murder or any other violent crime. Therefore, little is done from a newsroom management standpoint to help address any psychological needs journalists may have following the coverage of a traumatic event.

This study examines the Amish school shooting in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, on October 2, 2006 and the effect it had on employees in the WGAL-TV newsroom. In that shooting, five little girls were killed and another five were wounded. WGAL is the NBC affiliate for the market and is the only station in the market to be based in Lancaster County, where the shooting happened. Because of that, WGAL was first on the air with the story and was the first media outlet on the scene to begin coverage, arriving just moments after emergency personnel.

WGAL is known in the broadcast news industry and in the community for its skilled ability to cover breaking news well. The coverage of the Amish school shooting was no different, except that it seemed to impact employees differently from the coverage of most stories.

Newsroom employees participated in the study by responding to a questionnaire, describing their feelings during the coverage and following the coverage. They also were asked to discuss how they felt their emotional needs during the coverage and afterward were

addressed by managers in the newsroom. For the most part, employees felt managers were sensitive to the fact that employees might be struggling emotionally with the story. However, many made suggestions about how managers, both in the WGAL newsroom and in newsrooms around the country, could better address the emotional needs of newsroom employees during coverage of a traumatic event.

This study focuses primarily on Acute Stress Disorder, as distinct from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (a disorder which is usually associated with exposure to a long-term stressful situation such as a war, and the symptoms of which tend to develop over a relatively longer period of time than those of ASD), mainly because of the length of time employees indicated their feelings lasted. Again, very little study has been done on Acute Stress Disorder in journalists. Continued exposure to one traumatic story, or a series of traumatic stories can lead to Acute Stress Disorder and it's important for newsroom managers to be able to recognize the warning signs and be able to help the employees address the problem.

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Third, to my advisor, Dr. David Kintsfather. He encouraged me right from the start, helping me see my own potential as a graduate student and as a journalist. His patience, especially through my thesis process, is most appreciated. This thesis would not have been complete without his knowledge and guidance.

Fourth, to the experts at the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, in particular, Dr. Meg Spratt. Your guidance and wisdom throughout my research process was most appreciated.

Finally, to my co-workers at WGAL. Thank you for allowing me to study you, for being open and honest with your feelings. Emotion is not something many journalists are open to sharing, but your willingness to share your experiences will, hopefully, someday help other journalists when they are faced with similar situations. Thank you, especially, to Dan O'Donnell, WGAL News Director. He not only allowed me to conduct the study of employees, but also shared his own emotions and viewpoints on how things were handled the day of the Amish school shooting and in the days that followed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Problem Statement

How did covering the Amish school shooting impact newsroom employees at WGAL-TV and what strategies did news managers at WGAL-TV employ to address the psychological effects of covering such a violent and traumatic event?

Definition of Terms

1. strategies: a careful plan or method utilizing counselors and debriefing sessions
2. news managers: news personnel at WGAL; reporters, photographers, assignment managers, producers, editors and anchors
3. psychological effects: measurable mental and behavioral changes experienced by television news journalists directly caused by coverage of a traumatic story
4. newsroom employees: producers, anchors, reporters, photographers, video editors, and assignment managers who work in the television broadcast newsrooms of WGAL in the Harrisburg/York/Lancaster, PA market
5. violent and traumatic event: the Amish school shooting which took place in Bart Township, Lancaster County, October 2, 2006

Significance of the Study

Because television broadcast journalists are often among the first on the scene of a crime or a disaster, the situation may greatly impact their ability to do their job. They are not only forced to deal with emotional witnesses on the scene, but also television broadcast journalists may have to work as first responders themselves and still cover the story under added deadline pressure (Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, 2006).

The information that seems to be lacking in past studies is how managers are helping employees cope with difficult situations. Managers in broadcast television news stations need to be more aware of the impact of stories on the lives of their employees. While some offer counseling after the coverage of a traumatic story, there are still too many broadcast television news employees whose suffering goes unnoticed and untreated (Bolton, 2006). This study is needed to help managers find useful resources for employees and also to help managers recognize some of the early warning signs that an employee may have a lingering psychological problem after covering a particular story.

Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma is one of the leading sources for journalists who have experienced trauma in their jobs, whether it's covering a tragic story or preparing for that coverage. However, Dart has primarily focused on the long term effects of large scale events, such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, on journalists. Dr. Meg Spratt, Associate Director for Academic Programs with Dart Center says there is a need for more research when it comes to journalists who cover every day traumas.

> "A relatively new and expanding dialogue involving journalists and exposure to trauma has been fueled over the past decade by a series of high profile human-caused and natural disasters. Personal accounts from journalists who have covered trauma, as well as a small but growing body of empirical research, indicate that trauma exposure can have profound effects on news workers. Adrienne Garvey's research has the potential to add important

information to this field of research. A case study examining trauma and stress effects on news workers helps move beyond the usual ethical questions about trauma coverage to practical management and occupational health issues. Her work will help document actual effects of trauma exposure -- both short and long term -- and will serve to evaluate newsroom management responses after a large scale community tragedy."
(personal communication, March 11, 2009)

Limitations of the Study

1. Participation was lacking because not everyone asked to complete a survey did so.
2. The researcher was directly involved in the happenings of the WGAL newsroom on the day of the Amish school shooting and for the purposes of this study was both an observer and a participant.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The public often does not think about how stories may affect those who are covering them for the local news. If reporters, photographers, and producers continue to be sent out on what are commonly known as "hard news" stories without an outlet for emotions that may be stirred by the stories, the public will suffer as the journalists will be unable to do the job to the best of their ability.

After members of a newsroom have been exposed to a traumatic situation, there's a limited amount of time to address what one psychologist, Dr. Martin Cohen, labels as "poison." Dr. Cohen recommends journalists utilize a method of debriefing within 24 to 72 hours after the coverage of the event. He also says photojournalists seem to follow a more distinct pattern after a traumatic event. They tend not to see the impact of a story for at least 24 hours, resembling first responders (Steele, 2006).

Photojournalists are frequently more exposed to traumatic situations than anyone else in the newsroom, as they are often sent to cover stories alone. In a study published in 2003, of the 875 photojournalists who were surveyed, 98% reported being exposed to a traumatic event as part of their everyday jobs (Covering trauma and disaster, 2006).

A recent study focused on photojournalists covering traumatic events. About six percent of them showed some symptoms which related to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, about the same percentage as the general population. Despite that number, the study found

that only 25% of the journalists' employers offered any type of counseling or other method in which to cope with the lingering effects of the story (Bolton, 2006).

Another study supported Dr. Cohen's statements that many journalists who may be suffering from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder may not see symptoms for a day or more. This is because the journalists may be so involved in doing their jobs that they don't allow the information or images to register in their own minds until they're no longer covering the story. Some of the symptoms journalists may notice following the coverage of a traumatic event include insomnia and emotional numbness (Kalter, 2006). Other warning signs for the disorder are: nightmares, headaches, anxiety, and a quicker temper than usual (Colon, 2006).

Both crews in the field and those in the newsroom often find themselves surrounded by haunting images of crime and death for extended hours at a time. During breaking news, which is frequently a traumatic event, everyone in the newsroom is expected to work long hours without many breaks (Colon, 2006).

The reaction in journalists is much the same as that of first responders. The difference is first responders often have "debriefing" sessions quickly following a traumatic incident (Kalter, 2006).

For producers and directors, typically not in the field during the coverage of a traumatic event, being part of the team's coverage of the event can have an impact. Producers and directors, however, may have a more difficult time understanding why they're experiencing some of the symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder since they are not on the "front lines" of the story like a reporter and photographer team. As author Al Tompkins pointed out in his article for *Poynteronline*, producers and directors sit for hours on end looking at an endless stream of videotape filled with disturbing images (Tompkins, 2006).

While research has been done to show the effects traumatic events may have on television newsroom employees, very little appears to be available to help newsroom managers help their staff deal with those situations. Fran Norris, a research professor at the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, suggests managers force employees to rest. Norris also suggests many journalists may not take care of themselves during coverage of a traumatic event, so if they're forced to take time off, they are more likely to be able to continue to cover the story without feeling as if they are weak and unable to compete (The psychological consequences, 2006).

Another way television newsroom managers can help their employees deal with the coverage of traumatic events is through education. If employees know the symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, they're more likely to see the warning signs in a fellow worker.

The executive director for the Dart Center in Washington state, Roger Simpson, recommends managers listen closely to their employees during coverage of a traumatic event. If the manager believes the employee may be having a hard time with the story, the manager should schedule some time for the employee to be removed from the situation. He also suggests keeping in touch with the employee's family by calling family members and keeping them updated as to how the employee is doing during coverage of the story and also by offering to help in any way possible (Colon, 2006).

Finally, Dr. Cohen, a psychologist, says the managers of journalists have the responsibility to watch for warning signs that the journalists may be having a difficult time doing their jobs. Cohen (2006) says: "Managers must themselves have compassion so they

can recognize it in others. Even experienced managers need to discern over time how their people handle stories."

In order to determine just what should be done, the difference between Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) must be understood. According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, "Acute Stress Disorder is a psychiatric diagnosis that can be given to individuals in the first month following a traumatic event. The symptoms that define ASD overlap with those for PTSD, although there are a great number of dissociative symptoms for ASD, such as now knowing where you are or feeling as if you are outside your body."

> "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can occur after you have been through a traumatic event. A traumatic event is something horrible and scary that you see or that happens to you. During this type of event, you think that your life or others' lives are in danger. You may feel afraid or feel that you have no control over what is happening." (United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, see Appendix D)

> "Acute stress disorder (ASD) is a psychiatric diagnosis that can be given to individuals in the first month following a traumatic event. The symptoms that define ASD overlap with those for PTSD, although there are a greater number of dissociative symptoms for ASD, such as not knowing where you are or feeling as if you are outside of your body. (United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, see Appendix E)

According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, ASD is a relatively new diagnosis. Because of that, research on the disorder is limited.

The researcher employed the assistance and knowledge of those working for Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma. During that communication, Olga Kravstova, a Moscow

psychologist and visiting Fulbright Fellow, made the recommendation to focus more heavily on Acute Stress Disorder.

> "We cannot talk about PTSD until at least a month passed after the event. What we can talk about here is Acute Stress Disorder - and maybe the range of choices could be broadened, including more symptoms of ASD (like startle response, and upsetting thoughts of the event...)" (personal communication, October 29, 2007)

While there have been several school shootings across the country, the one that is most familiar occurred at Columbine High School near Littleton, Colorado on April 20, 1999. During that shooting, students Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris shot and killed 12 students and a teacher before killing themselves. Twenty-three others were wounded.

For journalists covering the shooting, many say they arrived on the scene to witness chaos. Some arrived before the police tape was even around the school, allowing them to get closer than usual to cover the story.

In the days following the shooting, many said that they were forced into the position that was very uncomfortable for them. They had to be close to the grieving students and families, getting personal stories and taking pictures of crying children. For some of those journalists, Columbine became more than a story. It became a life-changing event. (Steele, 2000).

Research on how journalists were affected by covering Columbine is available, but it is limited. Much of it is personal stories about how journalists coped in the days following the shooting. Little of the research on journalists and Columbine studied how managers in newsrooms helped journalists who may be struggling emotionally or mentally with the story.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Preliminary Study

The Sample. The researcher attempted to choose news directors leading newsrooms from a variety of market sizes. Two of the three news directors selected responded, one from a small market and one from a medium market. The researcher selected these subjects because of convenience.

The Instrument. The instrument for the pilot study was a questionnaire consisting of three open-ended questions. Because of the vastness of the topic, the researcher decided to employ a questionnaire allowing essay-type answers. She used provided answers in a later study to help develop a more measurable questionnaire for participants (See Appendix A).

Procedures. The researcher contacted three news directors via e-mail. Each worked in a different market size, one major market (top 10), one medium market (top 50) and one small market (smaller than 100). Two of the three responded to the researcher's request for feedback: the news director in the medium market and the news director in the small market. The researcher e-mailed a survey to each news director which they, in turn, answered and e-mailed back to the researcher.

Data Analysis. The qualitative nature of the pilot study and the small sample precluded any sophisticated data analysis.

WGAL and the Amish School Shooting, 2006

The Sample. The researcher chose the specific sample of employees in the WGAL newsroom in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. These employees all worked during the week of coverage of the Amish school shooting, but may not have been working on the day of the shooting. The researcher handed out 35 surveys of which 27 were completed and returned.

The Instruments. The primary instrument used to collect data from the subjects in the main study was an anonymous survey (see Appendix B). This was developed and validated with the help of research and mental health professionals at Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma. While most of the questions called for forced choices, the majority of respondents answered in essay style. The questions were:

1. On October 2, 2006, what role did you play in WGAL's coverage of the Amish School Shooting (include where you were for live shots, etc.)? This question is what the researcher used to identify employees and their roles in the newsroom on the day of the shooting and in the days that followed. It allowed the researcher to further ensure anonymity for those who participated because she was able to make sure all jobs were represented more than once. It also made sure the study had representation from employees in all types of newsroom jobs, not just those in the field.
2. Did you feel any negative effects from working that day (check all that apply)? Nine options were offered as answers for this question. They are all things that

could be warning signs that someone may have Acute Stress Disorder, according to Dr. Phillip W. Long, a Canadian Psychiatrist who established the website www.mentalhealth.com. The answer options include temporary memory loss, irritability and emotional detachment. This question had a second part to it. It reads: If so, please describe what you experienced. By asking for additional information, the researcher was encouraging participants to share their personal stories. It also allowed for some of them to add the additional feeling of sadness.

3. Did you start to feel those effects: While you were working, later that night, the following week, immediately after work, the following day, more than two weeks later or not at all? This question was looking for how soon employees felt any impact from the coverage of the story. Knowing when they started to feel any emotional changes also helps determine whether they are experiencing Posttraumatic Stress Disorder or Acute Stress Disorder, as time is one of the major differences between the two disorders.
4. Did you feel at any point of the coverage that you could not continue to cover the story because of the emotional stress you were experiencing? Journalists are known for working in tough circumstances, often surrounded by crime. The researcher was trying to find out if anyone felt the Amish school shooting was taking any employees beyond what they felt were their limitations. This question had two possible answers, yes or no.
5. If so, did you voice that concern to a newsroom manager? This question ties in directly to the previous question. The researcher was trying to determine if anyone voiced concern about not being able to do their job. Journalists often do

not want to show weakness for fear of not getting the next big assignment, but being able to voice concern about their own well being while covering a traumatic story may be what is actually stopping the progression of newsroom managers addressing trauma in their employees because of the stories they are covering. This question had a second part which reads, If not, please explain why. The researcher was hoping to find out why employees did not express their concerns to management. Was it because the workers did not want to appear weak? Were they afraid of what response they would get from the management?

6. Does anything specifically trigger memories of the day of the shooting today? Being able to cope with the memories of a traumatic news story is essential in improving mental health in journalists. If a specific image or sound or smell triggers painful memories, the researcher wanted to know what that was. She was looking for any patterns that may have appeared in employees.
7. Was the newsroom debriefing helpful for you? The researcher offered two possible answers, yes or no, to this question. It also had two options for participants to elaborate their answers. The first option was, If so, in what ways was it helpful? The second option was, If not, why not? In developing the survey, the researcher spent quite a bit of time talking to those who would be participating and it seemed as if several of them did not remember the debriefing or did not feel it was helpful. However, debriefings are an effective tool in helping people cope mentally and emotionally with difficult situations, so the researcher assumed there had to be some employees who benefitted from the session.

8. Was the debriefing done appropriately (i.e.: in a timely manner)? Again, in conversation with newsroom employees during the development of this survey, the researcher noticed a pattern of employees saying it happened too late. Many of them talked about how they had moved on by the time the debriefing was held and that it was ineffective because it was held so late after the shooting coverage. The researcher wanted to see how many employees felt that way and how many of them felt it was done appropriately. Knowing how WGAL's employees reacted to it is crucial in helping other managers fine tune debriefings in newsrooms, as far as how and when they should be conducted.
9. Did you take advantage of any counseling offered by Hearst Argyle and WGAL or attend counseling sessions on your own? This question was simply to gauge how severe the emotional affects of the shooting were on the employees. The researcher wanted to get a feel for whether the emotions and feelings the employees were dealing with in the hours and days after the shooting were more than reaction to a difficult story.
10. What coping methods did you use to help you move past your continued exposure to the shooting? Research already conducted and published suggests a number of ways for anyone constantly surrounded by trauma ways in which they can cope with those situations. This was an open-ended question, as the researcher did not want to limit anyone's ideas on how they helped themselves through the Amish school shooting coverage. While suggestions are made by mental health professionals, sometimes people have different ideas than those of the

professionals, so the researcher was looking for anything participants wanted to offer.

11. What suggestions would you make to managers in the handling of the next story that may have a similar impact on those covering the story? This, too, was an open-ended question. It's easy for those making the decisions to think what they're doing is working, but sometimes those affected by the decisions need to make their own suggestions. The researcher was hoping employees would offer their own ideas about what would help them cope emotionally and mentally if another story of this significance and difficulty ever happens again.

A separate survey was developed for the news director, Dan O'Donnell, which could not be anonymous. It consisted of 11 primarily open-ended questions.

1. When you addressed the newsroom during our coverage that day, what was your goal? What were you hoping to accomplish? During the first day's coverage, O'Donnell told everyone in the newsroom that he understood it was a difficult day and a difficult story to cover. He encouraged anyone who may be having trouble with the coverage to talk to him. In asking these questions, the researcher wanted to know what made the news director realize some of the employees may be having trouble covering the story.
2. Do you feel that you accomplished your goal? The researcher wanted to know if making it known that the news director was sympathetic to the emotional and mental needs of the employees helped anyone continue to do their jobs.
3. When you addressed the newsroom, did anyone guide you to do so? O'Donnell has been through a number of management trainings through WGAL's parent

company, Hearst Argyle, and through a number of outside organizations, such as Poynter Institute. The researcher wanted to know if he had learned through any of those trainings to be watching employees during coverage of a difficult story or if O'Donnell spoke out on his own. One of the things being considered in this study is the lack of management attention to newsroom employees' emotional and mental needs during coverage of a difficult story. If O'Donnell learned at one of his prior trainings to be watching his employees during difficult news coverage, the researcher wanted to be able to note that in the findings.

4. Did you share the concern for employees with those in the field? While O'Donnell made it publicly known in the newsroom that help was available, the researcher was wondering if anyone did the same for those in the field. It's easy to see the needs of those right in front of you, but for those who are not within eyesight, it may be easy to forget about them. Yet they may be the ones with the most need as they are on the front lines of the story so many people are struggling with covering.
5. Did you feel the station/company policy is adequate? If not, what would you change? Hearst Argyle offers some free counseling to employees. The researcher was wondering if what Hearst Argyle offers is sufficient and if not, what O'Donnell, someone who had been in charge of dozens of newsroom employees who struggled while covering a difficult news story, would change about the policy to make it more affective.

6. Would you do anything differently today? If so, what? Often people look back on situations and consider what they may have done differently. This was no more than a question of reflection. What worked? What did not work?
7. Have you seen any long term effects on a. the newsroom or b. yourself? While many of the employees struggled with the Amish school shooting story, managers are easily overlooked. Coverage of stories like that often change the way people do things, the way they think and the way the act. The researchers was looking for two things with this question. First, how did the coverage change the newsroom dynamic and, second, how did it change the man who leads the newsroom?
8. What, if any, advice would you offer to other news directors who may find their newsrooms covering stories with similar impacts on employees? The whole point of this paper is to find meaningful ways to address the mental and emotional needs of newsroom employees who are covering difficult or violent stories. What better way to accomplish that than to ask someone who has led a newsroom through that situation?
9. Do you have new strategies for similar situations, should they happen in the future? If so, what are they? The researcher was looking again for reflection from O'Donnell. What did he feel were the problems or the successes throughout the coverage of the Amish school shooting? What would he change for future stories?
10. Do you feel the debriefing was done in a timely and appropriate manner? If not, why not? What would you change? The researcher here was looking at whether

the news director felt the same way as a majority of the newsroom employees. Most thought the debriefing was done in a timely manner and was effective, but a handful did not. Surely O'Donnell had heard both sides of that argument from employees. The researcher wanted to get O'Donnell's feelings once he had heard from employees about how the debriefing was conducted.

11. Did anyone mention to you that they were having emotional difficulty covering the story? If so, how many people? This was simply to get a feel for whether anyone confided in O'Donnell, even if they did not take advantage of any counseling services.

Procedures. The researcher handed out the survey during a news meeting, along with envelopes that were to be sealed when the surveys were returned, to ensure they remained private. Subjects were not to use their names, but were asked to identify their job title and location on the day of the shooting or on the days that followed. This was allowed because all jobs were done by more than one person, further ensuring the privacy of the subjects. The researcher also provided a separate survey (see Appendix C) to the news director at WGAL during the time of the Amish school shooting. His survey is not anonymous, as he is the only news director at the station and the researcher could not ensure his privacy.

Data Analysis. Much of the data collected were qualitative in nature and are presented in the form of quotations from subjects' responses. For some questions quantitative data were collected and are presented in graphic form.

Chapter 4

Findings

Preliminary Study

The news directors surveyed for this project had varying viewpoints on how to handle traumatic news stories and the impacts on their employees. While both news directors said they had methods in place to help employees address lasting psychological effects of news stories, only one had a formal plan.

Dan O'Donnell, News Director for WGAL in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, talked about how the station's corporate owner, Hearst-Argyle would arrange for counseling for employees. This counseling includes treating the effects of covering a traumatic news story (this topic is covered in greater detail in the next section of this thesis).

Jeff Phillips, News Director for KVEW in Kennewick, Washington, however, said his company did not have a formal plan for helping employees cope with the effects of traumatic news stories. He said if an employee needed counseling, the company would pay for the first three counseling sessions.

Another difference noted in the responses is that Hearst-Argyle had a toll-free phone number employees can call for counseling assistance, rather than sharing their feelings with superiors. Apple Valley Broadcasting, the parent company for KVEW, did not have such a resource. Phillips said he would need employees to tell him they wanted to pursue counseling before it could be made available.

Both news directors surveyed said they thought there was room for improvement when it comes to helping employees deal with traumatic news events. O'Donnell said while the company offered counseling following the Amish school shooting in Eastern Lancaster County in October of 2006, very few employees took advantage of it. He suggested that if a story of equal or greater magnitude were to happen in the future, he would invite counselors into the station to make them more accessible to employees.

Phillips said he feels employees can also benefit from peer-to-peer counseling. He suggested that if an employee is so deeply impacted by a news story, it's likely others in the newsroom are impacted in the same way and that the two groups can benefit from each other's feelings and experiences.

WGAL and the Amish School Shooting, 2006

On the day of the Amish school shooting, and in the days to followed, it quickly became apparent that the event was affecting everyone in the newsroom. Not everyone, however, was affected in the same way, nor did they handle the situation in the same manner. Many of the workers in the newsroom and on the scene of the shooting did share one common feeling, something several of them described as "overwhelming sadness."

Here are a few examples of how some employees felt emotionally about that day and about the station's coverage throughout the week:

> "I was just so sad that someone was capable of those actions. It stuck with me that people can be so brutal." Assignment Desk 2
>
> "I would identify my feelings as somewhere between emotional detachment and depersonalization. The best way I can describe my mental state during the coverage is to say that I 'turned off' the emotional portion of my brain. As we began to learn exactly what was going on, I switched into work mode. It

was not a conscious decision, but one that happened automatically." Reporter 1 (first on the scene that day, led coverage)

"I just felt an overwhelming sadness. When I thought about the actual shooting and the way the girls died, I felt nauseous. That was a tough feeling to cope with while covering one of the biggest stories I would ever cover." Reporter 2 (on the scene)

"I felt for the families, but forced myself to detach from any real feelings while on the job." Reporter 4 (at one of the hospitals)

"It was the worst story I've ever worked on, but I had a job to do. Detaching from the emotional part of the story was the only way I could focus on the demanding tasks at hand." Reporter 6 (on the scene)

"I had difficulty falling asleep. I kept thinking about just how awful the shooting was. I thought about getting out of the business." Reporter 7 (on the scene)

"I could not believe what we were covering. I reached a point that I was acting like it was just another story. The full impact hit me on the ride home when the reporter I was with asked to stop by her house. She needed/wanted to see her children." Photographer 3 (first to report to shooting scene)

"The Amish school shooting affected me more deeply and more personally than even September 11th. It was such a loss of innocence." Anchor 2 (on set for afternoon coverage)

"Actually, I felt very attached to the story. I couldn't stop thinking about the details of what happened and the sadness it brought to so many. It was one of the biggest tragedies I've seen here at WGAL." Anchor 4 (broke story on news desk)

"I just felt the whole experience was surreal. In a way, it was similar to September 11th, but certainly not a tragedy of that magnitude. When something tragic happens, it never really seems to hit me immediately, especially if I am working. I have a job to do and I do it. At the immediate time, I sometimes think that what happened was not real or that I am dreaming. It is more on my own time that I start to grasp what really happened, analyze it and reflect on it. Then I got really depressed." Video Editor 2

"When you cover a story that's so tragic you have to distance yourself. You almost pretend that it's not real for a while, just so you can get through it." Producer 1 (did not work day of the shooting, but did work on the days to follow)

> "I was in a zone of non-stop work, not fully processing the tragedy, almost like it wasn't real." Producer 4 (in control room for most of the day's coverage)

WGAL continued coverage through the week, as the shooting happened on a Monday morning. The Amish families held the funerals for the girls at the end of the week, most on Thursday, with one on Friday. While most people in the newsroom were glad when Friday came around and they could leave and not be forced to be covering the story anymore, there were still employees who had to continue coverage into the weekend. It was not a story that could just end on Friday when everyone else went home for the weekend. At least one employee voiced concern about feeling forgotten over the weekend.

> "It was a long week for everyone and the one thing that was hard was continuing coverage on the weekend when everyone else had off." Assignment Desk 1

Just about everyone had a way of coping with the shooting. For some people, it was religion, for others it was just talking to family and friends.

> "I think of the big scheme of things. There are so many people who were impacted far more deeply than I was that day. They are the ones who really had something to cope with. I was doing my job that day. While I didn't choose to be there, I didn't lose anyone I loved, I didn't hold one of the dying girls, I didn't bury my child, I didn't have to explain to my kids why their daddy isn't coming home. I got to go home and hold my babies. I'll never forget it and I pray it's the worst thing I ever have to cover." Reporter 1 (first on the scene that day, led coverage)

> "I concentrated on my own two daughters and I also reached out to two of the victims' families by writing letters. I still keep in touch with them." Reporter 2 (on the shooting scene)

> "I talked about it with family members, colleagues and even some of the competition." Reporter 3 (at Penn State Hershey Medical Center, where some of the victims were taken for treatment)

"I talked about it with others who experienced it in a similar way." Reporter 4 (at Penn State Hershey Medical Center, where some of the victims were taken for treatment)

"I talked about it with friends and family, prayed and kept working and moving forward." Reporter 6 (at police staging area at the shooting scene)

"I didn't do anything in particular. Having covered horrific news stories in the past helped." Photographer 3 (first to report to shooting scene)

"The constant coverage killed any feelings I had for it. I was ready to move on to other stories long before we were ready to let it go." Photographer 5 (at Lancaster General Hospital where some victims were taken for treatment)

"You just have to do your job, understanding that people are depending on you for information." Anchor 1 (field anchoring coverage the day of the shooting)

"I did things personally and spiritually." Anchor 2 (anchored most of the day's coverage)

"I compared it to other tragedies, i.e. 9/11, where my anchoring duties and responsibilities were paramount to our coverage." Anchor 3 (anchored some of the day's coverage)

"I focused on other stories, my job and let time pass." Anchor 4 (broke the story on the anchor desk)

"I called my uncle that night. He has a degree in psychology and works for one of the state hospitals. I explained that I just couldn't grasp why this happened. I told him that I could even understand, to some extent, why terrorists would crash airplanes into buildings. The answer is that they hate America and view us as a threat. But why would a man drive to a schoolhouse in a secluded spot with the intention of sexually abusing Amish girls? Then why would he decide to kill them? Also, why the Amish? A situation like this in a regular school is bad enough, but all of this must have been completely foreign and horrifying beyond all words or thoughts to this peaceful community. These were all thoughts going through my head, and my uncle did his best to answer them. His only real answer was that the situation only existed in the killer's mind and he was basically insane." Video Editor 2

"I'm lucky to have a family in law enforcement. Dinner with my family that evening was extremely helpful." Assignment Desk 1

"I talked with family and friends." Producer 1 (not there the day of the shooting, but worked the following day)

> "I went home and tried to leave work at work." Producer 2 (assisted line producer with coverage on day of shooting)
>
> "I just tried to 'put it away' when I got home instead of dealing with it 24 hours a day." Producer 3 (working day of shooting)
>
> "I didn't let my feelings take over. I kept working like a machine." Producer 4 (produced first on air coverage and in the early evening newscasts)
>
> "I talked about it with family and lots of prayer." Employee 3 (participant did not identify his or her job title, but indicated he/she was not working on day of shooting)

Continuing to cover a story of this magnitude for several days proved to be trying for just about everyone in the newsroom and in the field. While it's generally believed journalists will just continue to work for fear of looking weak and possibly losing out on being in front of the next big story, three of the employees who responded to the survey said they felt they may not be able to continue covering the story. Two of the three, both photographers, voiced that concern to a manager.

> "If I had to go back down for additional coverage for another day, I would have asked not to go. At some point, you need a break." Photographer 5 (at Lancaster General Hospital where some victims were taken for treatment)
>
> "There was a point where I feared I might cry on the air. I did not voice that concern because I didn't think it was appropriate." Anchor 2 (anchored most of the day's coverage)

A reporter in the field said while she was not concerned about continuing coverage on the air, she was worried when she became emotional during a live tease.

> "I got choked up on air. It was the day of the funerals and I was doing a standup tease. When I said, 'bury their daughters', my eyes filled up. Fortunately, it was just a five second tease and I had a chance to compose myself before my live shot." Reporter 2 (on the shooting scene)

Approximately two weeks after the Amish school shooting, the news director at WGAL, Dan O'Donnell, brought in a manager from the corporate level of the station's

parent company, Hearst Argyle. She was there to lead a debriefing session. Of the 27 employees who responded to the survey, 5 said the debriefing was not helpful, while 11 said it was helpful and 11 said they did not remember or attend the debriefing.

> "Unfortunately, after more than 20 years, I've covered a lot of terrible stories and you learn to handle it as part of the job." Anchor 1 (field anchoring coverage the day of the shooting)

> "I had put it behind me only to dredge it up again. I understand the reason to learn about coverage for the future but felt a little violated by the questions (from the person from corporate). I felt like a lab rat forced into sharing with someone who was not part of the coverage and she had no business being there." Photographer 5 (at Lancaster General Hospital where some victims were taken for treatment)

> "I don't feel I was affected as much since I was not on the scene, but just to hear how others were dealing with it, perhaps others who have more experience in this business than I do, was helpful." Reporter 4 (at Penn State Hershey Medical Center, where some of the victims were taken for treatment)

> "It was helpful to simply talk about the emotions involved in covering the story with colleagues. It was also reassuring to hear that colleagues clearly felt similar emotions.' Reporter 7 (worked both at the shooting scene and at the home of the shooter on the day of the shooting)

> "It was helpful just to recognize that it was a sad experience for others." Photographer 4 (at shooting scene for liveshots on day of shooting)

> "Just knowing that help was available, in itself, was comforting and reassuring." Anchor 3 (anchored some of the day's coverage)

> "It was interesting to hear how others were affected, but to me it's personal. I only talked to others who were with me when it happened. That helped the most." Anchor 4 (broke the story on the anchor desk)

> "I was not at the station a whole lot during the tragedy, but what I received from the debriefing was helpful. I think everyone else was just as stunned or felt similar feelings, so we all had the same questions and management did their best to answer them. I can remember the newsroom had a definite subdued tone that week and people seemed more understanding." Editor 2

> "I didn't actually realize the scope of what happened until then. The discussions with everyone were helpful." Assignment Desk 1

> "We got to hear how others felt that day and later that week. It happened too late though. It should have been done one week after the shooting." Assignment Desk 2

> "To learn what everyone was feeling was helpful. As a medium level manager, it helps me understand what others are feeling." Producer 2 (assisted line producer with coverage on day of shooting)

> "I'm not sure if I know if there is an appropriate way to have that kind of debriefing. It probably could have been done sooner. Mostly, I just wanted to move forward and continue to do my job." Reporter 1 (first on the scene that day, led coverage)

The news director at WGAL at the time of the shooting had 16 years of experience in the news industry. He had worked as a producer, director, executive producer, assistant news director and news director in the newsroom. He also worked for three years in another television station within the same market. The trial and appeal of Lisa Lambert, the Charlie Robertson murder trial, the 2008 Pennsylvania Primary and Pennsylvania's "Bonusgate" are among the big stories he's covered in his 17 year career. As the leader of the newsroom on the day of the shooting, he took the opportunity part way through the day to address those working. He made sure employees knew the company offered counseling and that if anyone was having trouble doing their job, his door was open.

> "It didn't occur to me until the end of the first day of coverage that this story might be taking an emotional toll on the people covering it. As we ended continuous coverage and started to plan for what was next, I ran through a check list of things in my head and making sure people knew it was okay to be bothered by what we were doing popped into my head. It's something I had thought about in training myself to cover something like this, but it wasn't until we had a moment to think that I did anything about it. I was really numb at that point, but knew it was something I should deal with for people on staff. The immediate reaction I got from most people was surprise. They were surprised anyone would think they might need someone to talk with about this. One person said to me, 'Nah, I'm a crusty, heartless bastard', almost joking about it. By the end of the first week, that person was one of the most obviously affected, emotionally." Dan O'Donnell

WGAL's news director also shared his concern for the emotional health of employees with those who were working outside of the newsroom. That included teams of reporters and photographers who were on the scene of the shooting and also at the numerous hospitals where the victims were taken.

> "Much of my discussion about the emotional impact of this was one-on-one. To this day I don't know if or who took advantage of the counseling options we made available. One of the things I read about this was that some people won't seek help or talk about it with managers because they fear it will make them appear weak, and possibly cost them the big story assignment in the future, so I didn't push it with anyone. It was there if they wanted it." Dan O'Donnell

After the shootings, the news director said some employees opened up naturally about things they experienced or saw during the week. He also noticed change in the newsroom as a whole.

> "It was obvious as the week went on that it was taking a toll. I could see it in individuals and monitored them specifically. No one ever came to me and said, 'I'm having a tough time'. A photographer who earlier in the week laughed at the suggestion that we were offering counseling was pitching stories everyday about other topics, even though everyone knew there was no other story in Lancaster County. I think it was his way of trying to avoid going back and facing it again. A reporter was very angry, which is very out of character, at anything and everything. There was a resentment about anything that had to do with the station from that reporter, again out of character. If I were a psychiatrist, I would guess they were projecting their anger about what their job caused them to see and do onto the job itself. That lasted for almost a year. There was one other reporter who had a more featured role in the coverage. He is a male, and the primary reporters on the story were women. At first I thought he was jealous of not being front and center in the coverage, which would have been out of character, but I suspect now he had some guilt about not being on the front line and not seeing some of the terrible stuff the others were seeing. Maybe especially because he was a man without children and the women were mothers. Kind of like survivors guilt, maybe. As time went on, he withdrew from anything having to do with the shootings. Maybe it was jealousy, maybe it was more. I guess I'll never know, but I was worried about him. As time went on, people told me things that happened or things they saw. It wasn't like a 'confession'. It's been

more like, when the opportunity arose, they have shared details with me that I didn't know before. I think that's been healthy. I think our newsroom has more compassion on some issues and, to be honest, less tolerance of some other things. It's very hard for me now to feel a great deal of sympathy for not-so-innocent victims of violence. That's probably not the most healthy outcome but, honestly, when someone gets killed by their drug dealer, I don't have the same sympathy for them or even their families anymore. I don't know why that is, but it's true." Dan O'Donnell

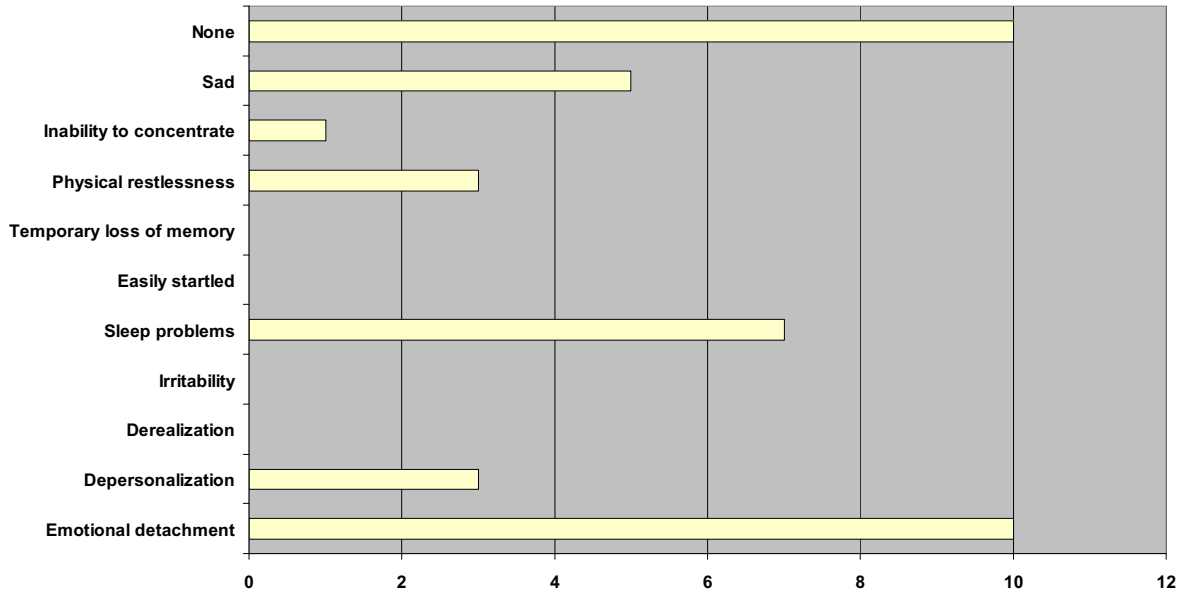
The shooting has also left lasting effects on the news director.

"I still do not relish talking about the school shooting. I still get very emotional when I talk about it. I still can't hear 'great job' without cringing. I've turned down most people who invite me to speak about it. I've only accepted a few requests, and those have only been ones where I thought talking about it would help prepare other journalists to face their own situation like this." Dan O'Donnell

On the first anniversary of the shooting, WGAL aired an hour-long special looking not back, but forward in the small community of Nickel Mines, something the news director thought was helpful to the staff.

"I think our anniversary documentary helped me a lot. And I think it helped some of the people I think were mot impacted emotionally. No matter how well we performed as journalists on October 2, 2006, there was a sense that it wasn't enough. We didn't have control over so many things. The following year we had total control. Nothing went on the air that we didn't feel good about. It helped me. In some ways, I think it's why our general manager allowed us to do the show, to let us work some of that out. There isn't going to be a second anniversary coverage of this, or a five year anniversary coverage. This was our chance to wrap it up and leave Nickel Mines, probably for good. Following the broadcast someone from the Bart Township Fire Company called us to say some of the Amish had watched the show there at the fire hall. They wanted us to know they felt it was a fitting tribute to their little girls. It's impossible not to be changed by something like that." Dan O'Donnell

Figure 1. Did you feel any negative effects from working that day (check all that apply)?

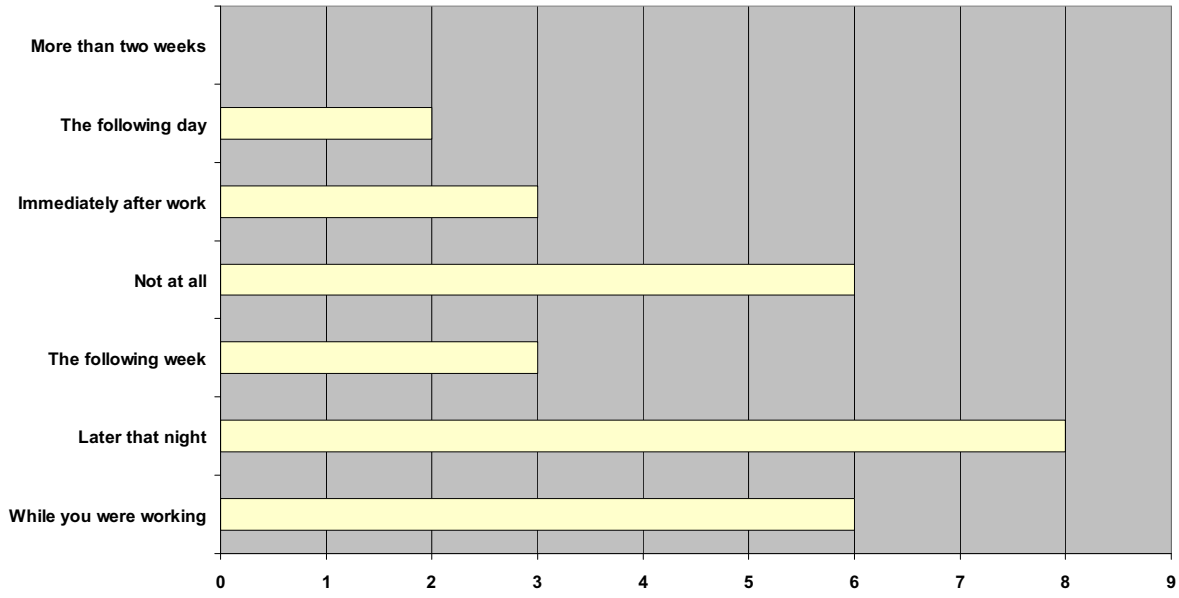


As shown in Figure 1, the options given for Question 2 are symptoms of Acute Stress Disorder (Long, 2005).

Of the response choices, three showed notable results. One of the largest responses was for feelings of emotional detachment. Ten of the 27 respondents said they felt emotional detachment (37%). Three (11%) felt some depersonalization, feeling detached from their own experience, with the self, the body and mind seeming alien. No one felt any irritability or derealization where the world around them feels unreal or unfamiliar. The second large response was those reporting sleeplessness. Of the 27 respondents, 7 (26%) said they had some problems sleeping during the week of the shooting coverage. No one reported being easily startled or any temporary loss of memory. Three respondents (11%) said they had physical restlessness. One (4%) had problems with concentration. While it was not an original option on the list of symptom choices for this question, five people (19%) said they had deep feelings of sadness throughout the week. The third large response for this question

was no ill feelings at all. Ten (37%) respondents said they did not have any problems during or following the coverage of the Amish school shooting.

Figure 2: Did you start to feel those effects?



As shown in Figure 2, the largest group of respondents to Question 3, 8 (30%) did not feel the effects of the Amish school shooting until later in the evening, after they were done working. A few, 15 (19%), chose not to mark anything and some respondents made more than one selection.

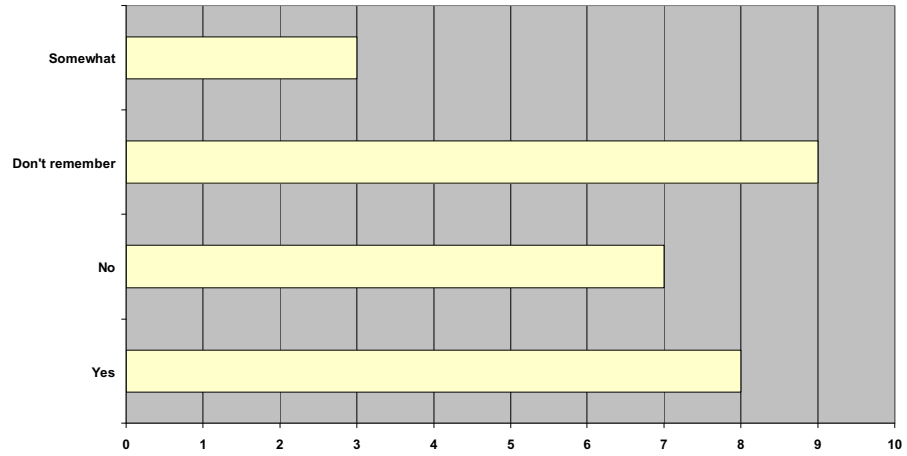
Question 4 asked, "Did you feel at any point of the coverage that you could not continue to cover the story because of the emotional stress you were experiencing?" An overwhelming number of respondents, 24 (89%) said they did not feel like they could not continue doing their jobs because of emotional stress. Three people (11%) said they did have a difficult time doing their jobs during the coverage. Of those three, one was an anchor on the news set who reported being afraid at one point he/she might start crying on air. This person did not take the concern to a manager though, because the anchor did not think it was

appropriate. The other two subjects who said they were concerned at some point during the coverage that they may not be able to do their jobs were both photographers. One was on the scene in Nickel Mines doing liveshots, and the other was stationed at Lancaster General Hospital, where some of the victims were initially taken. While both did voice their concern to managers, only one elaborated on his questionnaire, saying had he been sent to the scene one more day, he would have asked not to go.

Question 5 asked, "If so, did you voice that concern to a newsroom manager?" Of the respondents who answered this questions, 10 (37%), did not feel it necessary to report any concerns about not being able to do their jobs to newsroom managers. Two respondents (7%) did voice concern to a manager. A majority of respondents, 15 (56%) did not respond to this question.

Question 6 asked, "Does anything specifically trigger memories of the day of the shooting today?" The response to this question was split almost exactly in half. Fourteen (52%) people agreed something specific triggers memories of the shooting, while 13 (48%) said they do not experience anything that causes them to go back to memories of the Amish school shooting.

Figure 3: Was the newsroom debriefing helpful for you?



Of the respondents to Question 7, 9 (33%) do not remember the debriefing. They went on to explain they either did not attend or did not know there was a debriefing. A few of those who said they do not remember it either work a shift that's not the primary dayside 9-6 shift, or they work in bureaus outside of the main newsroom in Lancaster. The second highest response was from those who said the debriefing was helpful. Eight (30%) of the respondents said it was beneficial. Most of them appreciated being able to hear how others were feeling. Seven respondents (26%), however, said it was not helpful. Of those who said it was not helpful, most felt it was offered too late.

Question 8 asked, "Was the debriefing done appropriately (i.e. in a timely manner)?" A majority of those who responded to this question, 10 (37%), felt the debriefing was handled appropriately. Three (11%) said it was not handled appropriately. A producer was among those three who responded negatively. The producer reported no memory of the debriefing. The other two were a photographer and an assignment editor. Both said they felt the debriefing was held too late. Fourteen people (52%) chose not to answer this question.

Question 9 asked, "Did you take advantage of any counseling offered by Hearst Argyle and WGAL or attend counseling sessions on your own?" All of the respondents, (27, 100%) reported that they did not take advantage of any type of professional counseling following coverage of the Amish school shooting.

Question 10 asked, "What coping methods did you use to help you move past your continued exposure to the shooting?" Various responses are reported in greater detail in the following chapter.

Question 11 asked, "What suggestions would you make to managers in the handling of the next story that may have a similar impact on those covering the story? The responses were to be in essay format.

. Some of the responses include:

"Maintain open communication, recognizing an immediate or prolonged need to discuss and grieve." Unidentified employee 3

"I believe it was handled ok by management. It was just a hard story to deal with." Producer 4 (produced first on air coverage)

"Talk with the staff back in the newsroom. Even though we're not in the field, we can still feel the stress." Producer 1 (worked later in the week)

"The work is so demanding, but the scene is so terrible. I think managers need to make sure if the product isn't perfect, it's ok. It's real. Coming down heavy on an employee in a situation like that is harmful to performance and mental health." Reporter 6 (on the scene)

"It's difficult to say because this career has people that are so thick skinned. I think we need to realize early on when there is a story of this magnitude that we should offer the chance to talk early on even if it's just with each other." Reporter 2 (at Lancaster General Hospital)

"I appreciated the small acts of caring and concern. I felt awkward when people made a big deal out of the way we covered the event. I think we all did the best we could covering a story of this magnitude." Reporter 1 (first on the scene)

"That our air of calmness in the face of tragedy goes a long way toward helping everyone cope. It's become a hallmark of News 8 in recent years." Anchor 3

"I think once we 'moved past it', we should have kept going. To have to talk about it again weeks later with a paid consultant was cruel." Anchor 2 (on the set)

"I think our management did a stellar job." Anchor 1 (field anchored)

"Know when to call off the coverage. They get excited by liveshots and the book… I get burned out, bored and resentful of too much coverage. It makes me mad and I lose feeling for those actually affected." Photographer 5 (Lancaster General Hospital)

"Rotate the reporters and photographers whenever possible." Photographer 4 (on the scene)

"Not much could be done for those of us covering the story. Perhaps I missed it, but I think an interview or live talkback with a psychologist or mental health professional may have been useful, especially for youngsters who may have seen the coverage." Photographer 3 (first on scene)

"Rotate crews on/off the story for a little while (give small breaks)." Photographer 2 (on the scene)

"I can't really think of any suggestions. I thought management and everyone else in the newsroom did a wonderful job." Editor 2

Some of those suggestions can be expanded upon. Two photographers suggested rotating crews on the story. Photographers would certainly find the benefit in this option, as their job is to tell the story with pictures. If the same photographer is on the scene of the same crime for a week, it's easy to understand how he or she may become bored and resentful of the story. That certainly will cause mental health problems, especially in the case of a traumatic story like a school shooting. Allowing the photographers some freedom to be creative with another story may go a long way in helping them cope with a tragic story.

It may be more difficult to rotate reporters on a story as once they have established contacts and are gathering information, they often want to stay with the story. Pulling a reporter could have an obvious adverse affect in that some of the details of the story may be lost between crew changes.

Another photographer mentioned airing a live interview or talkback with a mental health expert. He was referring specifically to the benefit for the audience, but this could also be an option for helping to treat newsroom employees who are struggling with coverage of a difficult story. It could be beneficial to have a psychologist or mental health expert give a lecture of sorts, either in person or via video, to the employees. The meeting should be voluntary only, as to not force anyone to attend something they may not feel the need to

attend. Employees could submit anonymous questions a day or two ahead of the session so the person talking would know specifically what to talk about and how to help the people in the newsroom. That helps protect the employees, allowing them to not appear weak to their co-workers.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Preliminary Study

As previously mentioned, there was a pilot study with two respondents. While it is difficult to generalize from such a small sample, it is interesting to note the drastic differences in the answers collected.

While one television broadcasting station, WGAL, appears to be prepared to help employees deal with the psychological effects of particular news stories, the company's plan is not concrete.

This will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

The news director for KVEW appears to be totally unprepared to help employees covering traumatic events. News directors are often so preoccupied with covering the events and what the competition is doing, they forget about those on the front lines of the story.

Amish School Shooting, October, 2006

Research data collected from employees who participated in the coverage of the Amish school shooting showed most were affected by the events of that day. As cited in Chapter 2, there is a limited amount of time to address what psychologist Dr, Martin Cohen called "poison," after a journalist has been exposed to a traumatic story. He recommends journalists utilize a method of debriefing within 24 to 72 hours after the coverage of the event. In the specific case of WGAL news employees who participated in this study, a

majority of them felt help came too late or was so ineffective they don't even remember hearing about or attending a debriefing session in the weeks after the shooting. A suggestion about how to better handle a similar situation comes from the survey form completed by news director at WGAL, Dan O'Donnell:

> "I think if I had it to do over again I would have brought counselors into the station and just let them be here if people needed them. I'm not suggesting any formal 'group' sessions or talks, but I think people might have been more willing to just talk among themselves if there was someone here to listen – rather than have to make a call or take an action step to get the counseling. I think journalists are reluctant to take that step."

WGAL's news director also provided some advice for those stations that have yet to encounter such a story:

> "There's no advice I can offer for 'when' it happens. The advice I offer is to deal with this before you get there. Talk about how you would cover something terrible. What are your policies? What do you stand for? What would you do? It won't be a perfect 'rehearsal', but it will give you something to hang onto when all the normal stuff starts to fall away. I know that sounds a little melodramatic, but until you're been there, you can't understand. I don't remember their names, or I would gladly share them, but on the day of the shooting I received several e-mails from other journalists, some I had never met, wishing us well in the coverage. The first few I thought were very odd, but as the days went on, I understood. We had joined a, thankfully, small club. People who had to report on a terrible event that changed who we were. There is a bond. There's a look in the eye when I talk with someone who's been down this road, and a different look in the eye of people who have not. There's an understanding you can only have if you've done it. On the day of the Virginia Tech shootings, I e-mailed the news directors at stations around that market, wishing them well on the coverage. I never heard from any of them. Perhaps they found my e-mail as odd as I found the ones I got, but I'll bet the next time something terrible happens, they'll be sending out their own words of encouragement."

One thing that may have helped employees cope during and after the event though was the quick reaction on the part of O'Donnell to address the fact that some employees may be struggling with the continuous coverage

In hindsight, there are three more areas of study that could have been beneficial had they been included in the survey given to WGAL newsroom employees. First would have been to question how many of those surveyed grew up in Lancaster County. For those who did, the shooting seemed to hit particularly hard. The Amish have become a tourist attraction over the years and, for that reason, people who are native to the county may be more protective of them and may have been more adversely affected the shooting.

Second, would have been to find out how many of those surveyed are parents. Like the Lancaster County natives, parents are often more affected by stories involving harm to children.

Finally would be to question the employees maybe two years after the shooting about how stories involving violence affect them today, in particular, stories that involve violence against children. An example of this came on February 18, 2009, when a home in Lancaster City caught fire and a three year old boy was trapped inside. The reaction soundbites from neighbors were disturbing as they talked about hearing the child cry from inside the house. The child died in that fire. During a newscast that night, one of the anchors, Ron Martin, talked about how disturbing the soundbites were and talked about the Amish school shooting. When asked what he meant by that after the newscast, he explained that ever since the shooting, nothing really surprises him. It would be very interesting to see how many others feel that way or how many of them find themselves *more* affected by stories involving violence against children.

Personal Observations from the Researcher

Being in the newsroom the day of the shooting was a mark in my career I will never forget. I hesitate to call it a highlight because it's hard to think of such a tragedy as something positive on any front. The news team at WGAL covered the story exceptionally well and we were honored for it in the community, including the Amish community. However, for many of us, it was not an easy week. In fact, I think for many of us, it will always be looked at as one of the saddest weeks of our careers. I first learned of the shooting as I was at the park with my then 3 year-old daughter. That Monday was supposed to be a day off for me. I got a call on my cell phone from my mother, who was a teacher at the time. The school principal had notified the teachers about the shooting and told them not to turn on their television sets in the classrooms so the children would not see the coverage. I didn't believe her at first. I drove home right away, expecting to be called into work. My executive producer had left a message on our answering machine telling me to get into work as soon as I could. I found care for my daughter and left for work in the early afternoon. As soon as I walked into the newsroom I could feel the tension in the air. It was a different kind of tension though. WGAL has managed to nearly perfect the art of covering breaking news. We run like a well oiled machine when it happens. Often, that breaking news comes with stress and, sometimes, yelling, like most newsrooms. The stress that Monday was different in that it was unbelievably quiet in the newsroom. Few people talked. It wasn't chaotic at all. I was quickly assigned to the control room where raw tapes from a State Police press conference were coming in. We were on the air continuously at that point. It was my job to watch the news conference tapes and pick soundbites that could be aired during our coverage while we were waiting for reporters on the scene to get more details for liveshots. I did that

for several hours. I found myself feeling so sad and actually sickened by the details we were learning, how much planning and thought the killer had put into his plan. My thoughts quickly went to the surviving little boys and I wondered how they were coping. Late in the afternoon, I was told I would be producing the 11 pm newscast that night. For between 8 and 10 hours that day, I was surrounded by nothing more than Amish school shooting pictures and information. The best way to describe how that affected me was to say it made me very sad.

I'm a producer, so I'm not in the field on the front lines, so to speak, like the reporters and photographers. I imagine they had their own feelings about being so close to tragedy. I think though it's important to note how many people working in the newsroom were affected by the continuous coverage as well. We were all surrounded by it. We were all sad. By the next week, I noticed I was more touchy than normal. I caught myself snapping at my husband for things I normally wouldn't have snapped at him for. I had a hard time sleeping. As time passed, it was easier to deal with those haunting thoughts and, eventually, they faded. To this day though, I cannot pass a one room Amish school house without thinking about those little girls who died. When I see young Amish children out playing, my thoughts immediately go to the families of the children and I wonder how they're doing today.

I think by the time the newsroom held a formal debriefing, many of us had moved on. We did need to talk about it though. In hindsight, I believe had the debriefing been held earlier, we all would have been able to move on sooner. Those who did not have a support system would have found it sooner in their co-workers.

The news director, Dan O'Donnell, mentioned if he had to repeat the situation that he might bring in professional counselors to just be in the newsroom for anyone who needed to

talk. While it may be beneficial to have them there as observers to maybe point out to managers which employees may be struggling, I'm not sure anyone would actually open up to strangers. Journalists are typically guarded people when their emotions are involved. They don't want anyone to see them as weak or they may not be assigned to the big story next time. We're all told to get "thick skin" in order to survive in the media, so appearances of weakness would be doing just the opposite and allowing ourselves to be transparent. I think a more appropriate means of addressing the staff would be to just allow workers to talk among themselves, which is eventually what happened in the WGAL newsroom. Small groups of co-workers and friends would form here and there throughout the week, as people were comfortable opening up to each other. No one was forced to participate, no one was ignored. I do believe the formal debriefing was helpful, but it should have been done sooner.

Suggestions for Further Research

While researching other studies for this thesis, it was discovered very little research has been done on the way everyday stories may be affecting journalists psychologically. Researchers have spent endless hours researching the effects of big stories such as Hurricane Katrina and the Gulf Wars, but those stories don't happen every day.

Because of that, there is a need for someone with some psychology expertise to look at this situation more closely. Journalists are exposed to trauma every day they work, whether they are producing or reporting or shooting or editing video. Producers may not be on the actual crime scenes, but they are expected to find stories for their newscasts and that often involves going through stories that are happening across the country. Many of those stories are violent and have details producers would never dream of actually broadcasting,

yet producers are expected to read those details and screen video to make sure it is appropriate for air. It's arguable that producers may actually be exposed to even more trauma than the reporter/photographer teams, as they do not cover violent crimes every day in some markets. In other markets, the reporter/photographer teams are assigned to beats and may be expected to cover a crime beat everyday. In that case, the exposure to violence must seem overwhelming to them at times. Further research would help develop outlets for the journalists on such beats or for producers who may be struggling with exposure to so much violence. The big stories that may result in some form of PTSD, such as a natural disaster or war, are more rare than those we find coverage of every night on the evening news.

A suggestion for newsrooms which do encounter coverage of a traumatic news story is to hold more formal "debriefing" sessions before the event is over, if possible. One mistake many employees in the WGAL newsroom mentioned when responding to the survey, is that the debriefing was done too late. It was held two weeks after the shooting. Further study should include responses from television stations which have encountered such events and can offer some feedback as to what was successful and what was not.

Further research could also help develop higher education curricula to better prepare students studying to be journalists. Every journalist remembers seeing a dead body for the first time. Many of them will go into detail about how unprepared they were to see it. No amount of training can completely prepare anyone for some of the violent crimes they will encounter, but knowing how to handle it may result in not only creating better journalists, but also in creating better people who are more sensitive to the world around them and the effect it may be having on people. Teaching students before they become journalists how to not

only deal with continuous coverage of traumatic stories, but also how to treat the victims on the scene of those stories, will only make the news media a stronger entity.

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Appendix A

Pilot Study Survey Sheet

1.) Do you have methods in place to help your employees address lasting psychological effects of news stories?

2.) If so, what are those methods?

3.) If not, what do you think you could do that would be the most helpful for your employees who may need to address the lasting psychological effects of certain news stories? Of if you do have methods in place, which do you think are most beneficial?

Appendix B

WGAL Survey

Adrienne Garvey
Thesis Survey

1. On October 2, 2006, what role did you play in WGAL's coverage of the Amish School Shooting (include where you were for live shots, etc.)?

2. Did you feel any negative effects from working that day (check all that apply):
   ☐ Emotional detachment ☐ Temporary loss of memory
   ☐ Depersonalization (see below for definition)
   ☐ Derealization (see below for definition)
   ☐ Irritability ☐ Physical restlessness
   ☐ Sleep problems ☐ Inability to concentrate
   ☐ Easily startled

   If so, please describe what you experienced (may type answers onto separate sheet of paper and attach to survey):

3. Did you start to feel those effects:
   ☐ While you were working? ☐ Immediately after work?
   ☐ Later that night? ☐ The following day?
   ☐ The following week ☐ More than two weeks later
   ☐ Not at all?

4. Did you feel at any point of the coverage that you could not continue to cover the story because of the emotional stress you were experiencing?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. If so, did you voice that concern to a newsroom manager?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If not, please explain why.

6. Does anything specifically trigger memories of the day of the shooting today?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If so, what is that trigger?

7. Was the newsroom debriefing helpful for you?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If so, in what ways was it helpful?

   If not, why not?

8. Was the debriefing done appropriately (i.e: in a timely manner)?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

9. Did you take advantage of any counseling offered by Hearst Argyle and WGAL or attend counseling sessions on your own?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

10. What coping methods did you use to help you move past your continued exposure to the shooting?

11. What suggestions would you make to managers in the handling of the next story that may have a similar impact on those covering the story?

Definitions:

Derealization:
a change in a person's experience of their environment, where the world around him/her feels unreal and unfamiliar.

Depersonalization:
A change in a person's self-awareness, such that they feel detached from their own experience, with the self, the body and mind seeming alien.

Source: http://www.panic-anxiety.com/depersonalization-derealization/

Appendix C

Survey Questions for

Dan O'Donnell,

WGAL News Director

1.) When you addressed the newsroom during our coverage that day, what was your goal? What were you hoping to accomplish?

2.) Do you feel that you accomplished your goal?

3.) When you addressed the newsroom, did anyone guide you to do so?

4.) Did you share the concern for employees with those in the field?

5.) Did you feel the station/company policy is adequate? If not, what would you change?

6.) Would you do anything differently today? If so, what?

7.) Have you seen any long term effects on
   a. the newsroom
   b. yourself

8.) What, if any, advice would you offer to other news directors who may find their newsrooms covering stories with similar impacts on employees?

9.) Do you have new strategies for similar situations, should they happen in the future? If so, what are they?

10.) Do you feel the debriefing was done in a timely and appropriate manner? If not, why not? What would you change?

11.) Did anyone mention to you that they were having emotional difficulty covering the story? If so, how many people? (If you remember, their job titles would be great, too, ie – reporter, producer, editor, etc. No names for obvious reasons.)

Appendix D

Definition and Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

As Provided by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs

and the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

What is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can occur after you have been through a traumatic event. A traumatic event is something horrible and scary that you see or that happens to you. During this type of event, you think that your life or others' lives are in danger. You may feel afraid or feel that you have no control over what is happening.

Anyone who has gone through a life-threatening event can develop PTSD. These events can include:

- Combat or military exposure
- Child sexual or physical abuse
- Terrorist attacks
- Sexual or physical assault
- Serious accidents, such as a car wreck.
- Natural disasters, such as a fire, tornado, hurricane, flood, or earthquake.

After the event, you may feel scared, confused, or angry. If these feelings don't go away or they get worse, you may have PTSD. These symptoms may disrupt your life, making it hard to continue with your daily activities.

How does PTSD develop?

All people with PTSD have lived through a traumatic event that caused them to fear for their lives, see horrible things, and feel helpless. Strong emotions caused by the event create changes in the brain that may result in PTSD.

Most people who go through a traumatic event have some symptoms at the beginning. Yet only some will develop PTSD. It isn't clear why some people develop PTSD and others don't. How likely you are to get PTSD depends on many things. These include:

- How intense the trauma was or how long it lasted
- If you lost someone you were close to or were hurt
- How close you were to the event
- How strong your reaction was
- How much you felt in control of events
- How much help and support you got after the event

Many people who develop PTSD get better at some time. But about 1 out of 3 people with PTSD may continue to have some symptoms. Even if you continue to have symptoms, treatment can help you cope. Your symptoms don't have to interfere with your everyday activities, work, and relationships.

What are the symptoms of PTSD?

Symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be terrifying. They may disrupt your life and make it hard to continue with your daily activities. It may be hard just to get through the day.

PTSD symptoms usually start soon after the traumatic event, but they may not happen until months or years later. They also may come and go over many years. If the symptoms last longer than 4 weeks, cause you great distress, or interfere with your work or home life, you probably have PTSD.

There are four types of symptoms: reliving the event, avoidance, numbing, and feeling keyed up.

Reliving the event (also called re-experiencing symptoms):

Bad memories of the traumatic event can come back at any time. You may feel the same fear and horror you did when the event took place. You may have nightmares. You even may feel like you're going through the event again. This is called a flashback. Sometimes there is a trigger: a sound or sight that causes you to relive the event. Triggers might include:

- Hearing a car backfire, which can bring back memories of gunfire and war for a combat veteran
- Seeing a car accident, which can remind a crash survivor of his or her own accident
- Seeing a news report of a sexual assault, which may bring back memories of assault for a woman who was raped

Avoiding situations that remind you of the event:

You may try to avoid situations or people that trigger memories of the traumatic event. You may even avoid talking or thinking about the event.

- A person who was in an earthquake may avoid watching television shows or movies in which there are earthquakes
- A person who was robbed at gunpoint while ordering at a hamburger drive-in may avoid fast-food restaurants
- Some people may keep very busy or avoid seeking help. This keeps them from having to think or talk about the event.

Feeling numb:

You may find it hard to express your feelings. This is another way to avoid memories.

- You may not have positive or loving feelings toward other people and may stay away from relationships
- You may not be interested in activities you used to enjoy
- You may forget about parts of the traumatic event or not be able to talk about them.

Feeling keyed up (also called hyperarousal):

You may be jittery, or always alert and on the lookout for danger. This is known as hyperarousal. It can cause you to:

- Suddenly become angry or irritable
- Have a hard time sleeping
- Have trouble concentrating
- Fear for your safety and always feel on guard
- Be very startled when someone surprises you

What are other common problems?

People with PTSD may also have other problems. These include:

- Drinking or drug problems
- Feelings of hopelessness, shame, or despair
- Employment problems
- Relationships problems including divorce and violence
- Physical symptoms

Can children have PTSD?

Children can have PTSD too. They may have the symptoms described above or other symptoms depending on how old they are. As children get older their symptoms are more like those of adults.

- Young children may become upset if their parents are not close by, have trouble sleeping, or suddenly have trouble with toilet training or going to the bathroom
- Children who are in the first few years of elementary school (ages 6 to 9) may act out the trauma through play, drawings, or stories. They may complain of physical problems or become more irritable or aggressive. They also may develop fears and anxiety that don't seem to be caused by the traumatic event.

What treatments are available?

When you have PTSD, dealing with the past can be hard. Instead of telling others how you feel, you may keep your feelings bottled up. **But treatment can help you get better.**

There are good treatments available for PTSD. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is one type of counseling. It appears to be the most effective type of counseling for PTSD. There are different types of cognitive behavioral therapies such as cognitive therapy and exposure therapy. A similar kind of therapy called EMDR, or eye movement desensitization and reprocessing, is also used for PTSD. Medications can be effective too. A type of drug known as a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI), which is also used for depression, is effective for PTSD.

Appendix E

Definition and Symptoms of Acute Stress Disorder (ASD)

As Provided by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs

and the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Acute Stress Disorder: A Brief Description

Laura E. Gibson, Ph.D., The University of Vermont

What is acute stress disorder?

Acute stress disorder (ASD) is a psychiatric diagnosis that can be given to individuals in the first month following a traumatic event. The symptoms that define ASD overlap with those for PTSD, although there are a greater number of dissociative symptoms for ASD, such as not knowing where you are or feeling as if you are outside of your body.

How common is ASD?

Because ASD is a relatively new diagnosis, research on the disorder is in the early stages. Rates range from 6% to 33% depending on the type of trauma:

Motor vehicle accidents: Rates of ASD range from approximately 13% [1, 2] to 21% [3].

Typhoon: A study of survivors of a typhoon yielded an ASD rate of 7% [4].

Industrial accident: One study found a rate of 6% in survivors of an industrial accident [5].

Violent assault: A rate of 19% was found in survivors of violent assault [6], and a rate of 13% was found among a mixed group consisting of survivors of assaults, burns, and industrial accidents [7]. A recent study of victims of robbery and assault found that 25% met criteria for ASD [8], and a study of victims of a mass shooting found that 33% met criteria for ASD [9].

Who is at risk for ASD as a result of trauma?

A few studies have examined factors that place individuals at risk for developing ASD.

One study found that individuals who (1) had experienced other traumatic events, (2) had PTSD previously, and (3) had prior psychological problems were all more likely to develop ASD as the result of a new traumatic stressor [10].

A study of motor vehicle accident survivors found that those individuals (1) with depression symptoms, (2) who had previous mental heath treatment, and (3) who had been in other motor vehicle accidents were more likely to have more severe ASD [11].

A final study suggests that people who dissociate when confronted with traumatic stressors may be more likely to develop ASD [12].

How predictive of PTSD is ASD?

A diagnosis of ASD appears to be a strong predictor of subsequent PTSD. In one study, more than three quarters of the individuals who were in motor vehicle accidents and met criteria for ASD went on to develop PTSD [1]. This finding is consistent with other studies that found that over 80% of people with ASD developed PTSD by the time they were assessed six months later [6, 13].

Are there effective treatments for ASD?

Cognitive-behavioral interventions

At present, cognitive-behavioral interventions during the acute aftermath of trauma exposure have yielded the most consistently positive results in terms of preventing subsequent posttraumatic psychopathology [14, 15, 16, 17].

Psychological debriefing?

Psychological debriefing is an early intervention that was originally developed for rescue workers but has been widely applied in the acute aftermath of potentially traumatic events. It has received much attention in the wake of 9/11. However, there is little evidence to support the continued use of debriefing with acutely traumatized individuals.

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