



mdrnet
Media Resilience Network

MDRnet presents:

From Crisis to Care



A research paper and action framework based on
Stay Tuned: A U.S. Journalism Mental Health Survey.



The Media Resilience Network (MDRnet) is a new initiative by Vita Activa, funded by Press Forward, to strengthen the emotional and organizational resilience of journalists and newsroom leaders working in under-resourced and underserved communities across the United States.

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January 2026

MDRnet

Acknowledgements: Recognizing the Courage of Truth-Tellers

Journalism is an essential part of the U.S. democratic infrastructure, and as such it needs to be preserved, equipped and cared for. We are so very grateful to each and every person who risks stigmas, prejudice and lack of sympathy, and who opened their hearts and minds for this survey.

We are grateful for their testimonies about the state of mental health in the journalism industry. We are thankful to all the journalistic organizations that shared our survey in their communications, and to Press Forward and The Miami Foundation for their forward thinking investment in American journalism.

We invite journalists and media workers seeking resources to improve their mental health or looking for additional information to visit us at MDRnet.org. Stay tuned for the services we will start providing soon!

Media Resilience Network

January 2026



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A Blueprint for Resilience in American Journalism

The Media Resilience Network (MDRnet), an initiative of Vita-Activa funded by Press Forward, was created to strengthen journalists and newsroom leaders across the United States in response to growing mental health challenges within the industry.

To better understand the scope of these challenges, MDRnet launched Stay Tuned: A U.S. Journalism Mental Health Survey in 2025. The survey gathered in-depth responses from 80 journalists across 26 states—primarily mid-career and veteran professionals—and emphasized openness and trust while recognizing the stigma surrounding mental health discussions, particularly in marginalized communities.

The findings reveal a concerning reality: more than 80% of respondents experienced burnout or chronic stress in the past year. Economic insecurity and increasing workloads are major contributors. Nearly half report feeling stressed or burned out, and one in five describe their emotional well-being as poor and in need of immediate support.

These challenges are not individual shortcomings, but the result of systemic conditions in American journalism. Newsroom cultures often valorize stress as a marker of success; growing workloads leave little time for self-care; and when journalists do seek professional help, a lack of cultural competence and understanding of the profession limits the effectiveness of available care.

What emerged clearly from the survey is not only what journalists need, but what they no longer want. Respondents are not seeking generic resilience tips, self-care platitudes, or standard Employee Assistance Program referrals. They want access to affordable, culturally competent mental health providers—and the time to actually use that care.

Over the next three years, MDRnet will translate research into action through integrated initiatives that embed mental health into the workday, build culturally responsive support networks, and promote systemic accountability. These efforts include in-person task force visits, virtual resilience clinics, peer-to-peer healing circles, affinity spaces, tailored coaching and counseling pipelines, and support for small and independent outlets. MDRnet will also advance trauma-informed leadership training, confidential coaching for managers, and the integration of mental health literacy into journalism education.

Together, these actions aim to ensure that journalists are supported, resilient, and able to continue doing their essential work—today and in the years to come.

January 2026

RESUMEN EJECUTIVO:

Un plan para la resiliencia en el periodismo estadounidense

Media Resilience Network, una iniciativa de Vita-Activa financiada por Press Forward, nació de la necesidad de fortalecer a periodistas y líderes de medios de comunicación en Estados Unidos frente a los crecientes desafíos que afectan su salud mental y bienestar profesional.

Para evaluar la situación actual y definir líneas de acción, **MDRnet** lanzó en 2025 la encuesta *Stay Tuned: A U.S. Journalism Mental Health*. El objetivo fue recabar la perspectiva de periodistas de todo el país para comprender en qué medida la salud mental incide en su desempeño profesional y qué acciones consideran necesarias para afrontar la crisis sistémica que atraviesa el periodismo estadounidense.

La encuesta recopiló respuestas detalladas de 80 periodistas de 26 estados, en su mayoría profesionales de media carrera y periodistas veteranas. La investigación se basó en la apertura y la confianza, al tiempo que reconoció el estigma que persiste en torno a las conversaciones sobre salud mental en el sector, especialmente en comunidades marginadas o desfavorecidas.

Los resultados confirman una realidad preocupante: más del 80 % de las personas encuestadas experimentaron agotamiento o estrés crónico durante el último año. A muchas se les exige hacer más con menos, mientras que la inseguridad económica del sector contribuye de forma significativa a sus dificultades de salud mental. Casi la mitad afirma sentirse estresada o agotada, y un 20 % señala que su bienestar emocional es deficiente y que necesita apoyo inmediato.

Estos efectos no responden a fallos individuales, sino a condiciones sistémicas profundamente arraigadas. Entre ellas se encuentran la cultura de las redacciones, que suele normalizar el estrés como un rasgo del éxito profesional; el aumento sostenido de las cargas de trabajo, que relega el autocuidado; y la limitada eficacia de los servicios de salud mental disponibles, debido a la falta de conocimiento sobre los rigores del periodismo y a la escasa competencia cultural de muchos proveedores.

La encuesta también dejó claro qué enfoques ya no resultan útiles. Las personas encuestadas no buscan consejos genéricos sobre resiliencia ni discursos superficiales sobre autocuidado. En su lugar, demandan acceso a proveedores culturalmente competentes, atención en salud mental asequible y tiempo real dentro de la jornada laboral para poder utilizar estos recursos.

Durante los próximos tres años, **MDRnet** traducirá estos hallazgos en acciones mediante iniciativas integradas que incorporen la salud mental en el trabajo cotidiano, fortalezcan redes de apoyo culturalmente sensibles y promuevan la responsabilidad sistémica. Estas acciones incluyen visitas presenciales de grupos de trabajo y clínicas virtuales de resiliencia; círculos de cuidado entre pares y espacios de afinidad; programas de coaching y asesoramiento profesional para periodistas, freelancers y líderes de medios; y apoyo a medios pequeños e independientes. Estas acciones buscan garantizar acompañamiento y resiliencia para puedan seguir desempeñando su labor esencial, hoy y en los años venideros.

Enero 2026

1. INTRODUCTION:

Establishing a Baseline for Emotional and Organizational Support

The Media Resilience Network (MDRnet) is an initiative of Vita-Activa.org, funded by #PressForward, and dedicated to strengthening the emotional and organizational resilience of journalists and newsroom leaders across the United States. Our work centers on the people who produce the news every day, and whose well-being is essential to the survival of the industry and to democratic life more broadly.

While six years of committed work by Vita-Activa in the region have provided a broad understanding of the pressures journalists face globally, MDRnet began by establishing a clear baseline of the specific U.S. context—particularly for journalists from historically marginalized and underrepresented communities. The expansion of news deserts and severe media sustainability conditions frame our work to provide support to a broader U.S. media landscape while still keeping the focus on historically marginalized and underrepresented journalists.

To this end, we launched *Stay Tuned: A U.S. Journalism Mental Health Survey*, a national survey designed to better understand the needs and emotional well-being of media workers at a moment when journalists are routinely scorned by political leaders and trust in journalism is continuously undermined by waves of disinformation. We are deeply grateful for the candid responses we received, which will guide our support for journalists and media organizations beginning in February 2026.

The *Stay Tuned* findings confirm that journalists in the United States are experiencing widespread structural strain. Mental health challenges are rooted not in individual weakness, but in newsroom culture, economic scarcity, identity-based stress, and limited access to appropriate support. Only 2.5% of our 80 respondents describe their mental health as excellent, while nearly half (45%) report feeling stressed or depleted, and one in five (20%) say their emotional well-being is poor and that they need support.

Burnout and chronic stress emerge as the most prevalent work-related challenges, reported by four out of five respondents. These are followed by financial instability, stress or trauma within the newsroom, and trauma exposure through reporting. Many journalists report feeling isolated, lacking peer support, or unsafe discussing these challenges at work due to fear of stigma.

Affordability is the single greatest barrier to seeking or maintaining care (62%), followed by time constraints (56%) and the lack of culturally competent providers (26%) who understand both the profession and journalists' lived identities.

Journalists envision a future in which mental health care is not a privilege, but a professional necessity: accessible, culturally grounded, trauma-informed, and embedded within the fabric of journalism itself. Taken together, these findings make clear that supporting journalists' mental health requires systemic solutions: healthier newsroom cultures, supportive leadership, economic protections, culturally competent care, and community-based support structures.

Mental health must be treated not as an individual responsibility, but as critical infrastructure for sustaining journalism and democracy.

When asked about the one thing journalists would change about the mental health resources currently available to them, a Latina journalist between the ages of 29-44 gave an extensive answer that perfectly defines the services MDRnet needs to provide:

“[If I could change one thing about the mental health resources currently available to journalists like you, what would it be?] ... It would be to make them truly accessible and culturally relevant. Too often, the resources offered are generic or come with barriers, cost, lack of time, stigma, or simply not being in a language or context that feels safe. As a Latina journalist, I know many of us carry intergenerational pressures, immigration stress, and the weight of covering stories or supporting projects that hit very close to home. Or, due to the political context in the U.S., they are considered anti-American, hence, dangerous. Resources need to acknowledge that reality, rather than just offering a one-size-fits-all solution. I'd like to see mental health support embedded into our newsrooms and all types of journalism organizations, as part of our work, rather than being reactive. Features such as regular check-ins, designated spaces for collective care, and professionals who understand the intersection of journalism and cultural identity. That would move us from just ‘coping’ to actually sustaining ourselves in this work.”

2. METHODOLOGY:

Prioritizing Qualitative Depth and Semantic Insights

The *Stay Tuned: A U.S. Journalism Mental Health Survey* was conducted by MDRnet between September 3 and November 30, 2025. We gathered responses from journalists participating in industry networks and working groups, allied organizations, and media professionals through emails, newsletters, and personal references. MDRnet wanted to ensure the collection of valid data and avoid untruthful answers given the heightened risk of moral judgment related to mental health as a research topic, a personal concern, or an organizational practice, besides the increased stigmatization of the journalistic profession.

Our survey was designed to prioritize qualitative depth over statistical representativeness. Open-ended questions allowed participants to articulate how their working environments affect their mental health, producing nuanced, experience-driven insights. The gathered information have allowed us to corroborate the main assumptions we had when we started the Press Forward-funded project. Additionally, it provided us with the understanding needed to tailor the services MDRnet will begin offering to underserved journalists and marginalized communities.

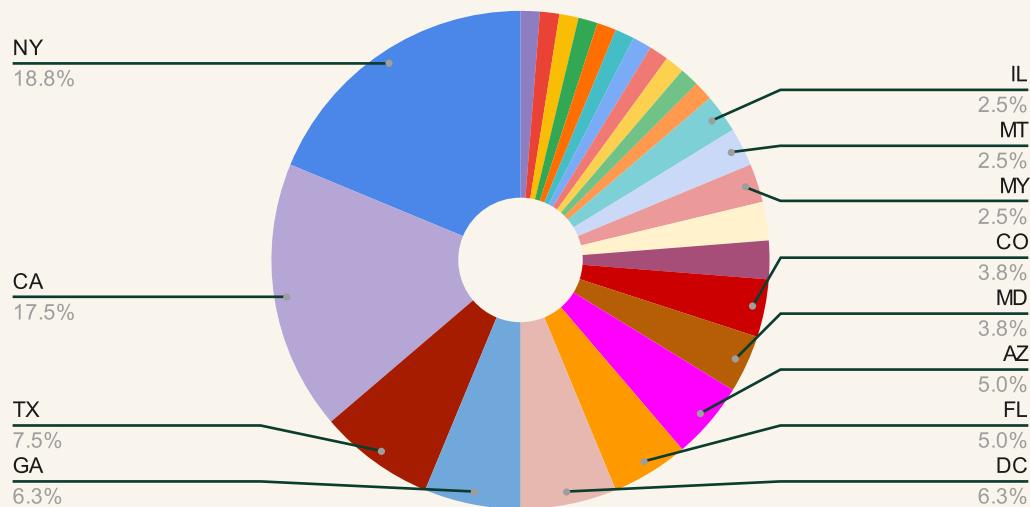
The survey consisted of 9 open-ended questions, 8 closed-ended questions, and 10 demographic and employment situation questions. For the closed responses, a statistical analysis was applied, using percentages, frequency counts, and variable cross-tabulations. The open-ended responses provided insight into diverse experiences, identified narrative trends, and analyzed testimonies while considering gender, ethnicity, work hierarchy, location, and years in journalism. Rather than simple data collection, we transformed semantic analysis (conducted via LIWC 22) into a deep diagnostic tool to decipher the invisible layers of trauma, isolation, and personality defining the current crisis. This methodology allows us to drive solutions that translate every expressed sentiment into strategic action, ensuring that journalist well-being is treated as the critical infrastructure that sustains our democracy.

Demographics

Stay Tuned gathered responses from journalists in 26 states. Of those who responded, 65% identified as female, 26% as male, and 7.5% as non-binary. Caucasians were the majority of the respondents with 42.5% of participants, followed by Latinx (26%), African American (11%), Asian American (7.5%), Middle Eastern American (3.8%), and 1% of Native Americans. The percentages of gathered answers are comparable to the communities' representation in the United States, except for Middle Eastern Americans, who are present in a smaller number in the country. 56.3% of the respondents are in their most productive work years between 29 and 44, and almost 75% have more than 10 years of experience in the job.

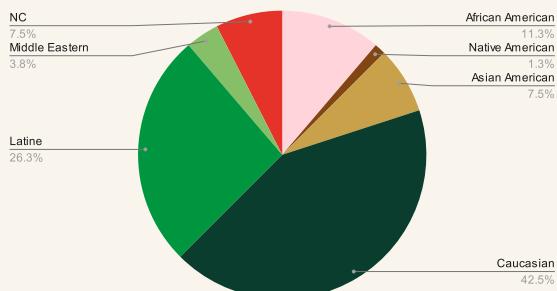
States where survey respondents live or work

(States with >1% are AR, IN, NE, OH, OR, PA, UT, VA, VT, WA & WI)



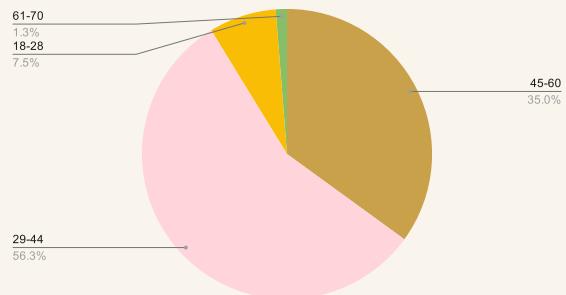
MDRnet Stay Tuned Survey 2025

What is your race?



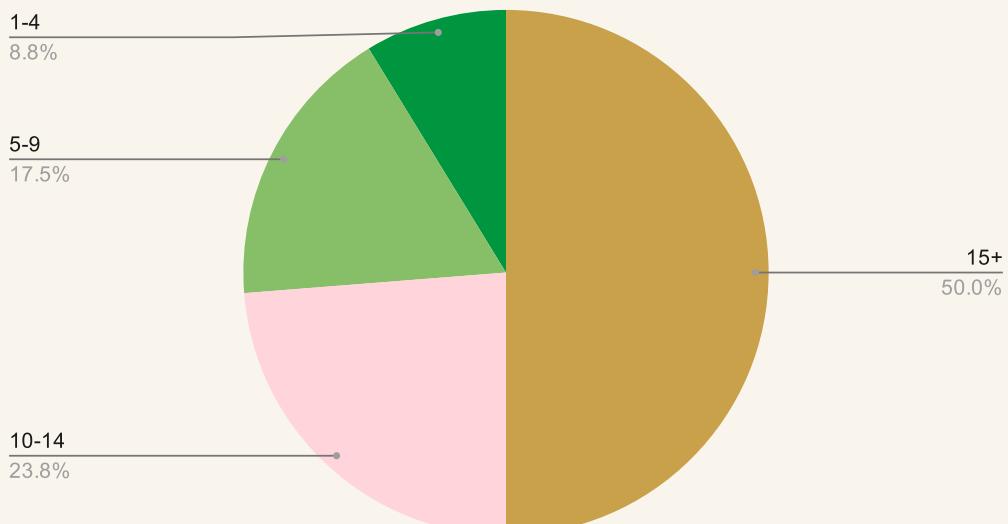
MDRnet Stay Tuned Survey 2025

What's your age range?



MDRnet Stay Tuned Survey 2025

How many years have you been working in journalism?



MDRnet Stay Tuned Survey 2025

3. CONTEXT:

Why Journalists are in Crisis — The Emotional Toll of Telling the Truth

Journalism has always been a calling grounded in purpose. Most reporters begin their careers driven by an unshakable belief in truth, justice, and service to their communities. They see their work as a moral commitment — to inform, to hold power accountable, and to give voice to those unheard. But today, that noble calling comes at a high psychological cost. Around the world — and increasingly within the United States — journalists are experiencing levels of stress, trauma, and burnout that threaten not only their well-being but also the future of the profession itself.

A profession under attack

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF, December 2025), globally, 67 journalists have been killed, 503 detained, and 135 have disappeared last year alone.¹ The United States, long considered a beacon of press freedom, is not exempt.

The U.S. Press Freedom Tracker (2025) counts a total of 311 reported incidents, among them 171 assaults on journalists and 32 arrests and/or criminal charges, making this the third-worst year since the pandemic. Equipment seizures, border interrogations, and physical aggression are now regular features of American reporting.² The RSF World Press Freedom Index 2025 scores the United States in place 57 out of 180, stating that “the country is experiencing its first significant and prolonged decline in press freedom in modern history.”³

Being told day after day that “the media lies” or that reporters are “the enemy of the people” erodes self-worth. Journalists absorb a steady message of hostility — and it takes a psychological toll.

Gendered violence and online harassment

For women journalists, the dangers multiply. A UNESCO-ICFJ global survey (2020) found that 73 percent of women reporters have suffered online violence, and 20 percent of those attacks crossed into the physical world.⁴

1 RSF, 2025 Round-Up, [2025, a deadly year for journalists: this is where hate and impunity lead](#)

2 U.S. Press Freedom Tracker, 2025, <https://pressfreedomtracker.us/>

3 RSF, RSF World Press Freedom Index 2025, [Index | RSF](#)

4 UNESCO / ICFJ, Global Survey on Online Violence Against Women Journalist, 2020, [UNESCO's Global Survey on Online Violence against Women Journalists](#)

These assaults are not abstract. They lead to self-censorship, withdrawal from digital spaces, and even abandonment of the profession. The result is a shrinking female presence in public discourse — silencing critical perspectives precisely when societies need them most.

Disinformation, distrust, and corporate neglect

The spread of disinformation compounds the problem. Falsehoods travel six times faster than verified facts, and powerful figures amplify them.⁵

In 2025 alone, Elon Musk published more than 1,000 anti-media posts, according to RSF, accusing “legacy media” of deceit — a campaign that earned him a place among RSF’s 35 Press Freedom Predators⁶. Meanwhile, Americans increasingly consume news via social media feeds dominated by such voices. The outcome is stark: only 31 percent of U.S. adults trust the press today — the lowest level in half a century (Gallup 2024).⁷

As credibility erodes, journalists face not only public hostility but also abandonment from within their own industry. Lawsuits and political intimidation are met by corporate settlements and silence. The Reuters Institute (2025) notes that this dynamic has contributed to journalism’s waning influence in American public life.⁸

The collapse of local newsrooms

The structural decline of local journalism deepens the emotional strain. Muck Rack’s 2025 Local Journalist Index reports a 75 percent drop in local reporters since 2000 — from 40 journalists per 100,000 citizens to just 8.2 today.⁹ Across the United States, “news deserts” have emerged — entire towns without a single reporter, and those who remain must cover politics, education, sports, and emergencies simultaneously, often on short-term contracts and with little support. Exhaustion becomes chronic; community connection, once journalism’s heart, now feels like isolation.

Shrinking diversity and autonomy

Muck Rack (2025) shows that most U.S. newsrooms remain predominantly white and male, despite modest diversity gains up to 2022.¹⁰ At the same time,

5 Silence, The spread of true and false news online, 2018, [The spread of true and false news online | Science](#)

6 RSF, 2025 Press Freedom Predators, 2025, [2025 Press Freedom Predators | RSF](#)

7 Gallup, Americans’ Trust in Media Remains at Trend Low, 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/651977/americans-trust-media-remains-trend-low.aspx>

8 Reuters Institute, Journalism Trends 2025,

<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/journalism-media-and-technology-trends-and-predictions-2025>

9 The Local Journalist Index, a collaboration between Muck Rack and Rebuild Local News (2025)

<https://muckrack.com/research/local-journalist-index>

10 The Local Journalist Index, a collaboration between Muck Rack and Rebuild Local News (2025)

journalists' editorial autonomy has sharply declined. In 1971, nearly 60 percent said they were free to decide their coverage; today, barely a third do.¹¹ Algorithms, audience metrics, and commercial pressures now dictate what is "newsworthy." For reporters motivated by purpose and independence, this loss of control feeds frustration, cynicism, and burnout.

The emotional aftermath

Behind every headline lies a body and a mind under strain. Journalists witness war, natural disasters, and violence; they endure harassment, financial instability, and social mistrust. Yet the culture of journalism still celebrates endurance over self-care. Ignoring hunger, skipping sleep, or minimizing trauma have become professional habits. Over time, these coping strategies collapse, manifesting as anxiety, panic, depression, or physical illness.

Rebuilding resilience

The mental health crisis in journalism is not inevitable. It stems from systemic pressures — violence, disinformation, economic scarcity, and organizational neglect — that can and must be addressed. Protecting journalists means confronting the causes of their distress: impunity, hate speech, disinformation economies, and shrinking editorial independence.

The erosion of journalists' mental health mirrors the erosion of democracy itself. When truth-tellers are silenced — by fear, exhaustion, or despair — entire societies lose their capacity to see reality clearly. Supporting journalists is not charity; it is civic defense.

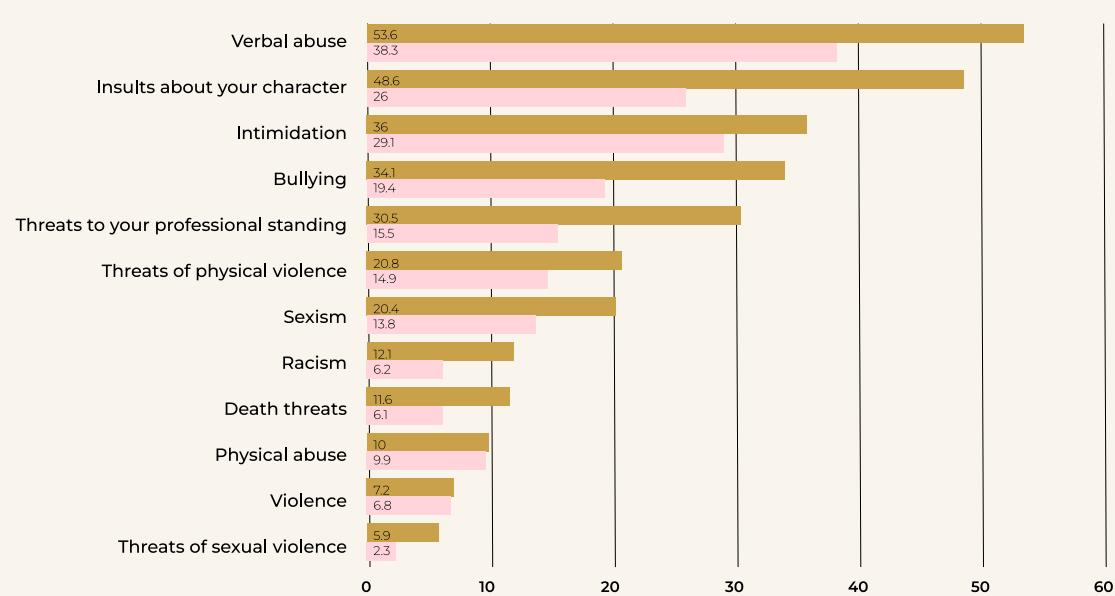
Governments must uphold press freedom laws. Media owners must prioritize safety and mental health care as much as ratings. And citizens must remember that behind every verified fact stands a person — vulnerable, human, and essential to democracy's survival.

<https://muckrack.com/research/local-journalist-index>

¹¹ The American Journalist, The American Journalist Under Attack: Media, Trust, and Democracy, 2023, https://www.theamericanjournalist.org/_files/ugd/46a507_4fe1c4d6ec6d4c229895282965258a7a.pdf

Types of Threats Journalists Experienced

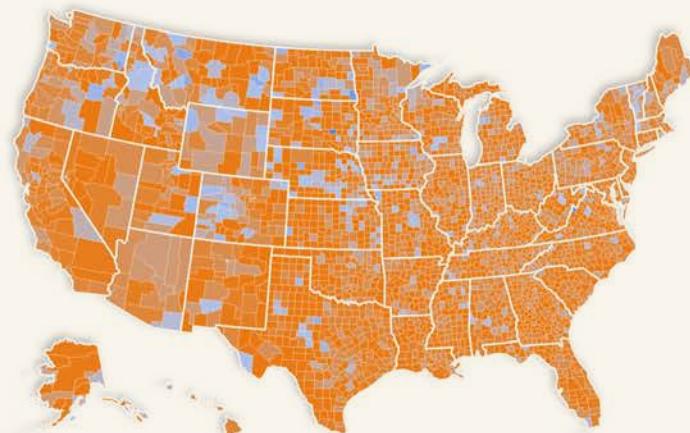
Percentage of all Journalists



Source: The American Journalist: The American Journalist Under Attack: Media, Trust, and Democracy, 2023

More than 75% drop in local journalists since 2002 on average

Local Journalist Equivalents (LJEs) per 100k people



2000 average of 42 journos per 100K people

2025 average of 8.2 journos per 100K people

MUCK RACK | REBUILD LOCAL NEWS

Source: Muck Rack & Rebuild Local News, Local Journalism Index, 2025¹²

12 <https://www.theamericanjournalist.org/post/media-trust-democracy>

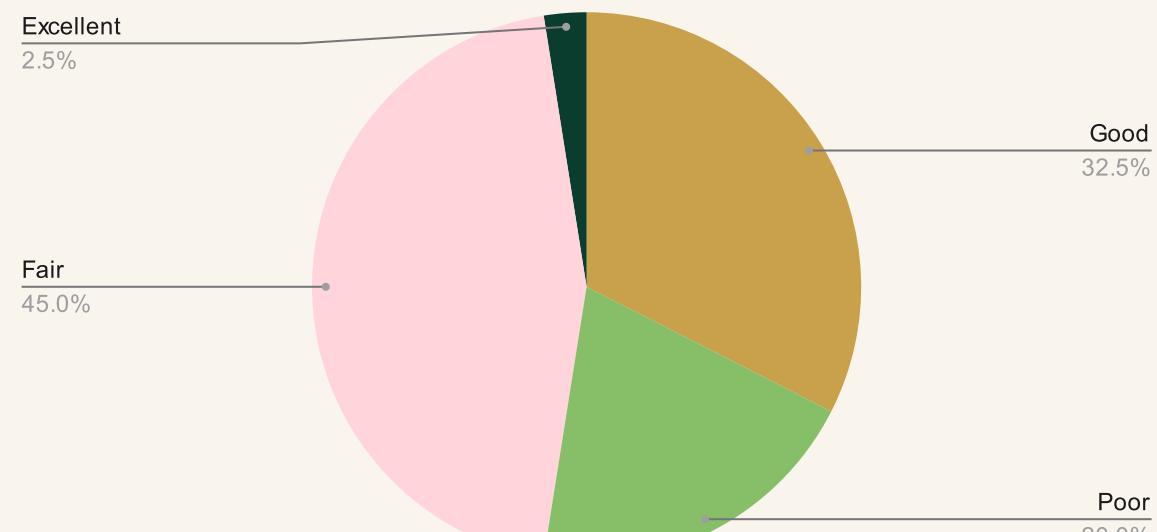
4. FINDINGS:

Themes and Trends — The High Cost of Structural Strain

4.1. Structural Strain & Newsroom Culture: Beyond Individual Burnout

Only 2.5% of respondents report excellent mental health. A massive 45% feel stressed or depleted, while 32.5% acknowledge they have challenges but can cope with them. However, 20% reported that their emotional well-being is poor and they need support.

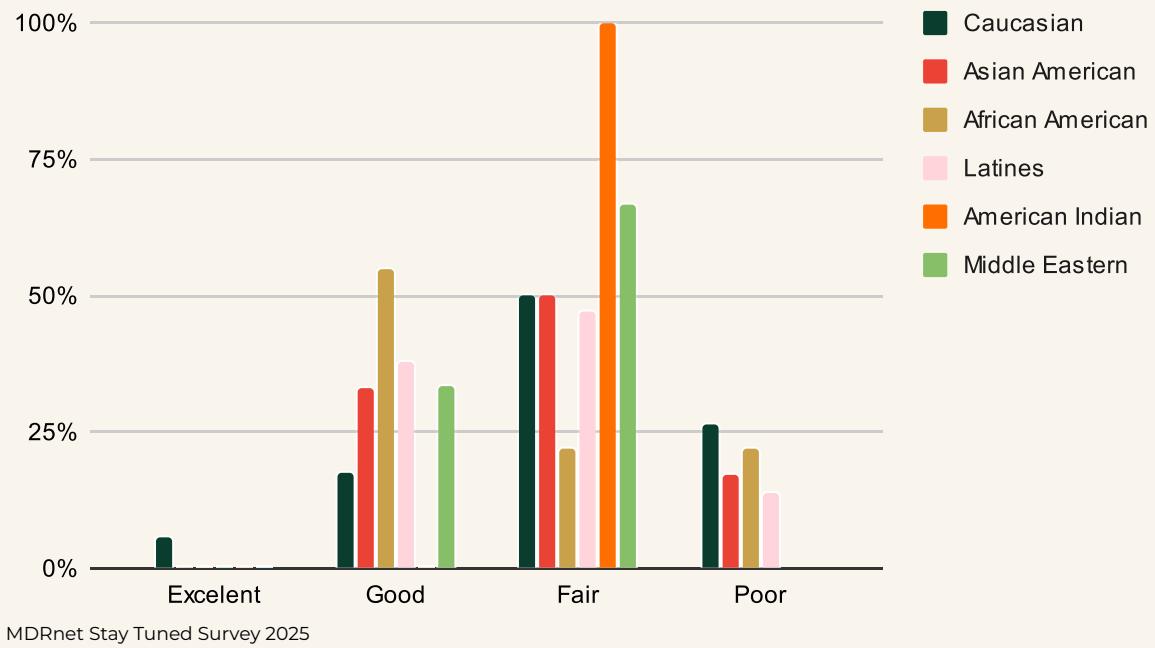
How would you describe your overall mental and emotional wellbeing right now?



MDRnet Stay Tuned Survey 2025

Of those who stated they are struggling and face a poor mental health condition at the moment of the survey: 56% identify as Caucasian, 18% as Latine, 12% as African American, 6% as Asian American, and 6% did not disclose ethnicity. 56% identify as female, 18% as male, and 25% as non-binary.

Emotional and Mental Health



Although only one in five say their mental health is in a poor condition, 4 in 5 respondents say they faced burnout or chronic stress in the last year. The following are the top 5 work-related challenges they have faced:

1. Burnout and chronic stress (81.3%)
2. Financial instability or income insecurity (62.5%)
3. Stress or trauma within the newsroom (60%)
4. Trauma exposure through reporting e.g., (violence, disaster, crisis coverage) (46.3%)
5. Isolation or lack of peer support (43.8%)

Gender composition and its relationship to emotional toll

The gender data shows a clear overrepresentation of women and gender-diverse journalists among respondents, with women (including cis women) forming a strong majority, men a smaller but significant share, and nonbinary, gender-expansive, and gender-nonconforming journalists meaningfully present relative to their proportion in the industry overall. This in itself is a finding: those experiencing the highest emotional and psychological toll are also the most likely to respond to a survey about mental health.

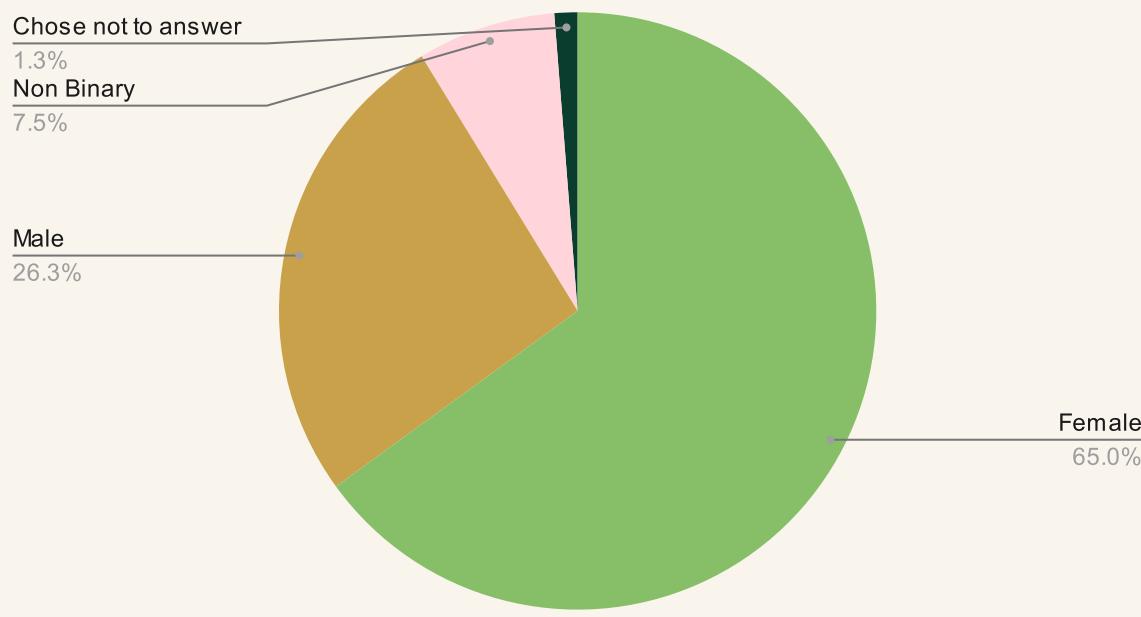
Across the broader survey, women and nonbinary respondents disproportionately described burnout, emotional exhaustion, lack of recognition, unsafe workplaces, and cumulative stress tied to workload, caregiving responsibilities, financial scarcity, harassment, and discrimination.

Gender-diverse journalists frequently connected the emotional toll to identity-based harm—including misgendering, fear of retaliation, lack of safety, and being forced to suppress or justify coverage related to their communities. Many explicitly linked mental health strain to structural inequities such as pay gaps, stalled advancement, and being overburdened with invisible labor.

Male respondents were more likely to describe the newsroom environment in organizational or operational terms (stress, workload, instability), and less frequently framed distress through identity or safety, though burnout and anxiety were still common. This contrast does not suggest lower impact, but different exposure and permission to name vulnerability—reinforcing how newsroom cultures still shape who can speak openly about emotional strain.

Overall, the gender breakdown underscores a core insight of the survey: The emotional toll of journalism is not evenly distributed. It is intensified for women and gender-diverse journalists by intersecting pressures of labor expectations, discrimination, safety concerns, and cultural stigma around mental health. Any effective mental health strategy for journalism—especially MDRnet's work—must therefore be gender-aware, trauma-informed, and structurally focused, not gender-neutral in name only.

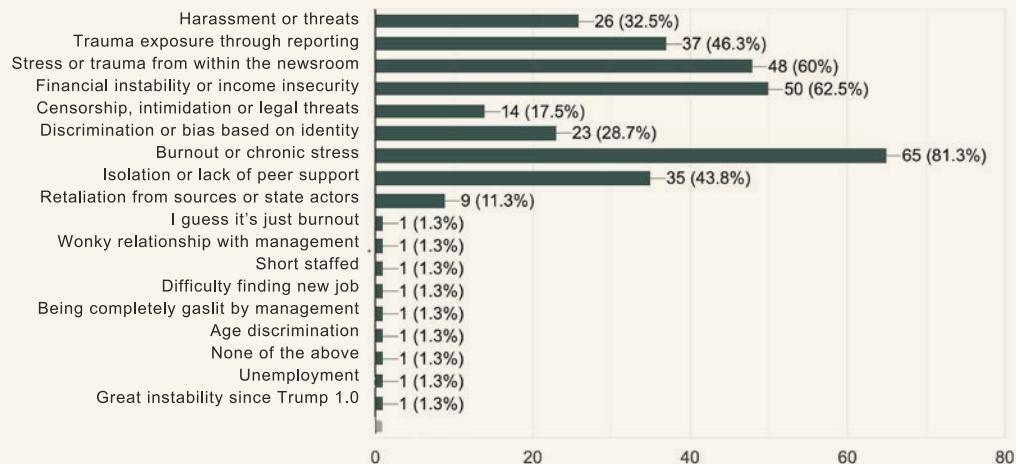
What is your gender?



MDRnet Stay Tuned Survey 2025

In the past 12 months, which of the following work-related challenges have you faced? (Select all that apply)

80 responses

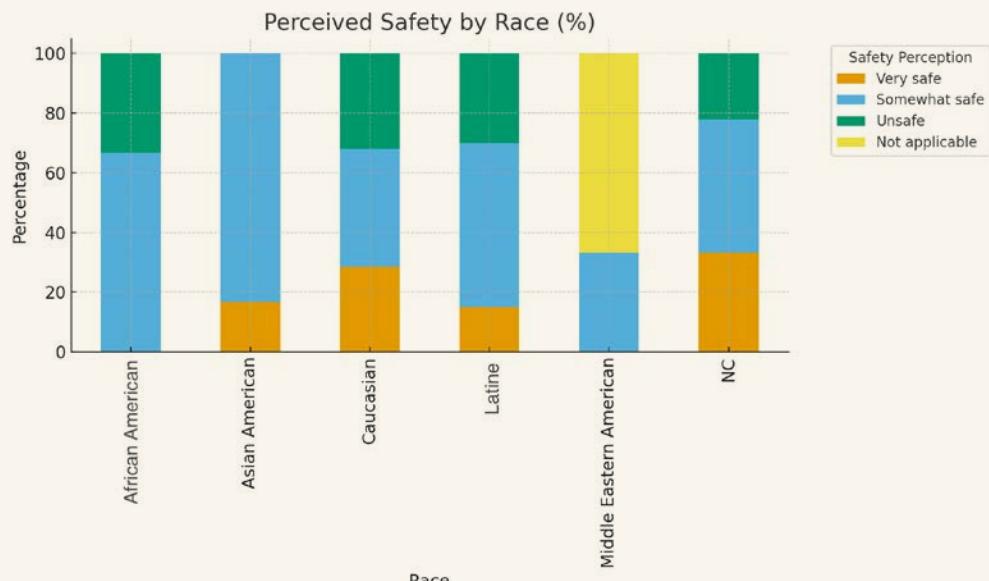


MDRnet Stay Tuned Survey 2025

More than a quarter of respondents (28.7%) don't feel safe to discuss mental health issues within their professional network and fear stigma, retaliation or judgment, while only 20% feel supported and heard. We decided to dig a little deeper in the survey responses to give contact to those assertions. Race and Ethnicity were chosen to this effect.

Story Vignettes:

Not every journalist in the U.S. has the same reasons to feel safe when speaking about mental health

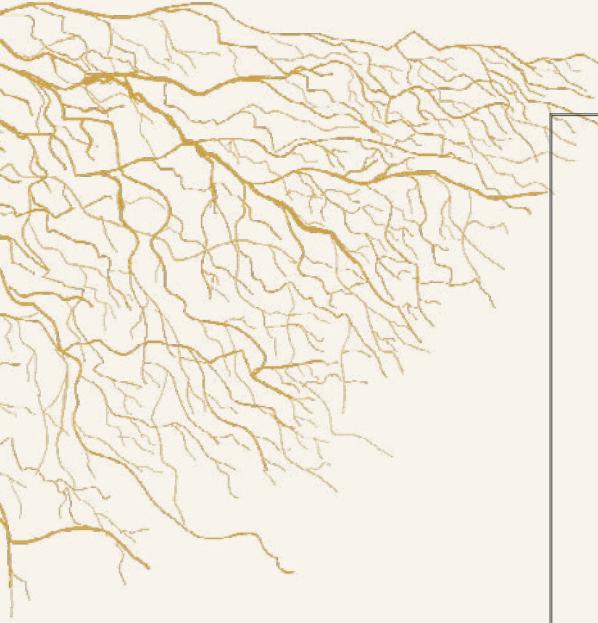


MDRnet Stay Tuned Survey 2025

When we analyzed the responses about how safe people feel talking about their mental health and people's race and ethnicity in all answers of the survey, we found illustrative trends in the survey's responses.

While Caucasian individuals - 42.5% of our survey's answers - were the only self-described group who identified speaking about mental health as being excellent, they also expressed feelings of emotional unsafety when thinking about job security, layoffs, funding cuts, and working in spaces where political extremism paints media in a negative light.

“AYFKM? No one is truly safe in the current U.S., and especially not journalists. [Mostly], though I worry when traveling that I could be targeted by the government for retribution”



While Asian Americans - 7.5% of those who answered - do not report feeling mentally unsafe, they consider the lack of opportunities, stigmatization and funding cuts aspects that hinder their professional prospects.

Sentiments around Asian hate grew during the height of the pandemic and are definitely present in communities around the country.

“I work from home, but I have to be discreet about what I do, as my area voted for Trump and Republicans”.

Black or African American respondents frame the question in relation to the place where they work and the beats they cover. What is interesting is that to them, the largest problem is newsroom culture as well as a lack of culturally competent mental health services.

[speaking about mental health services] “please tailor it and have options for people who come from various communities and cultural backgrounds. This will allow people to feel safe and that they are understood when speaking with someone who looks like them”.

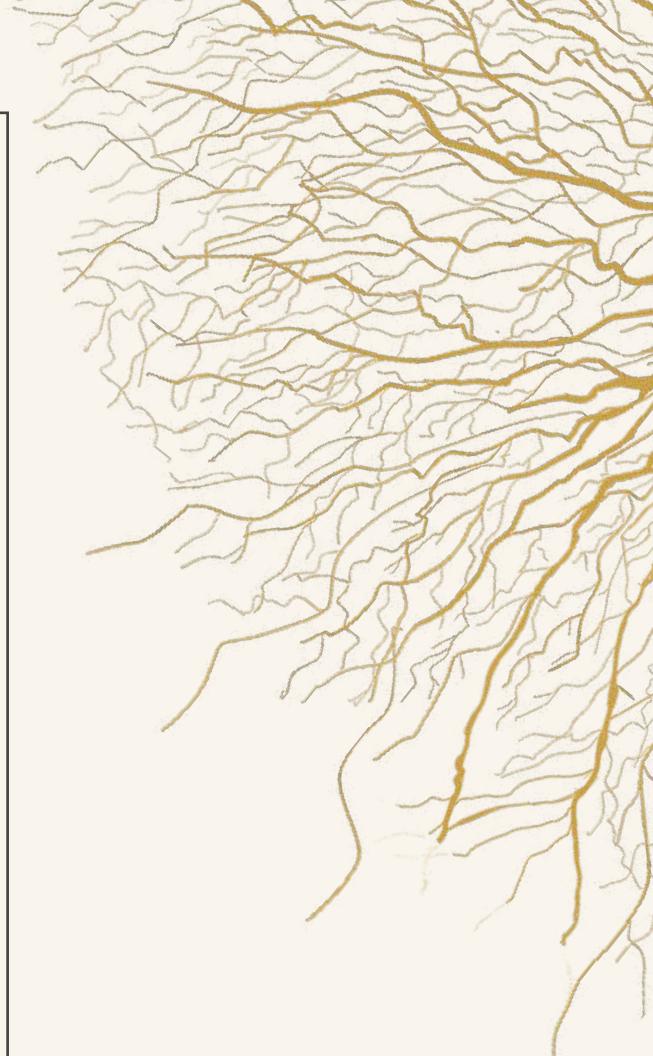
Latines consider emotional safety a concern connected to other factors such as social temperature and political upheaval. Immigration raids, police profiling, and perceptions of loss of objectivity harms reporters and freelancers' opportunities to advance in their careers. DEI demonization harms visible minorities and curtails efforts poured into local news.

“No, because there is an ‘alarming deterioration’ of press freedom in the United States, according to the latest report by Reporters Without Borders, published on May 2, 2025¹”.

¹ The answer refers to this Reporters without Borders Report <https://rsf.org/en/world-press-freedom-index-2025-over-half-matter,worlds-population-red-zones>

Middle Eastern and Arabic speaking responders interestingly respond to the question of safety by not commenting on their perception of safety when speaking about their mental health needs. We do not wish to interpret the choice, yet we know speaking about mental health in Middle Eastern cultures is quite challenging. Here is one of the journalists in their own words.

“I experienced a significant amount of racial trauma in newsrooms, both around 2020 and BLM as well as around Palestine. The experiences made me pivot to work in journalism support, which I’ve found to be a much healthier environment to work in, although I always miss reporting. I wish we could create more spaces that truly support impactful and honest journalism”.



Only two people identified as Native American or being of Indigenous descent in the survey. They both did not answer the question about emotional safety, yet commented on the following as part of their stressors.

“Uncertainty -- when’s the next round of layoffs going to hit? Who’s it going to be?”

“A mix of support and hostile comments in our social media”

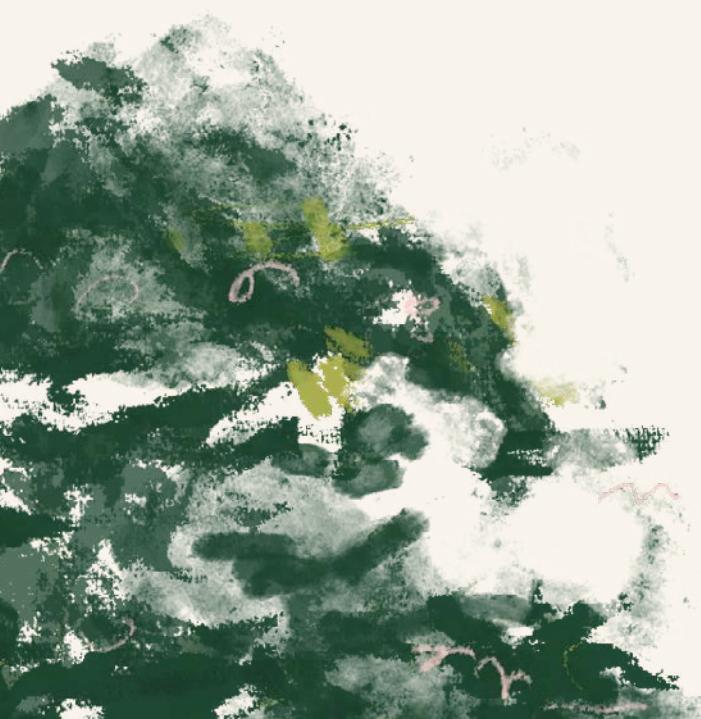
4.2. Equity, Representation & Cultural Safety: The Impact of Identity on Well-being

Journalists represented in our survey are mid-career and veteran journalists. Most of them are 29–60 with 10+ years of experience. Women overwhelmingly dominate both the sample and the top experience tier (15+ years). Non-binary respondents are present but concentrated among mid-career (29–44) journalists. Entry-level journalists (1–4 years) are rare and mostly found among 18–28-year-olds, and in our survey are mostly Latina women. Most 29-to 44-years-old already have 10+ years of experience, showing early entry and career longevity.

Age and rank matter when speaking about mental health

It is interesting to see that those who occupy higher positions in the newsrooms feel more comfortable speaking about their mental health than other people lower in the decision-making space. There is a clear age contrast between generations as well as locations where people are based. A Latine reporter in Utah notes the cost and lack of affordable options to support their mental health needs. Time constraints and workload limitations make it difficult for them to care for their needs in a more comprehensive way, other than by focusing on decompressing during their time off.

When asked about their overall working environment, those who are employed and or work closely as freelancers evaluate if there is a supportive or hostile place. Two in three consider their newsroom supportive or friendly. A quarter (25%) of the respondents to this open question say they are in a hostile, toxic, or angry workplace. And for 15%, it depends on the situation or if it is your peers or the management. In some answers, people said leadership is friendly while peers are toxic, or vice versa.



Story Vignettes:

A generational challenge

A non-binary junior reporter feels unsafe speaking about mental health in the newsroom, fearing stigma, retaliation, or judgment. They describe their mental health as poor, struggling and in need of support.

Another junior reporter, also non-binary, described their mental health as poor, struggling and needing support due to trauma exposure through reporting. They feel burnt out and write of a lack of resources. They write about organizations attempting to influence what/how things are reported. They note that extremist rhetoric is amping up consistently, and the normalization of violence as a solution disguised in jokes and memes.

A female Latina, daughter of immigrants in a mixed-status family has experienced multiple family separations. Reporting on immigration-related stories hits close to home, but is necessary for her. She notes passive aggressiveness from higher-ups and is not getting paid in a timely manner. "That is the #1 stressor that carries over into other aspects of my life." She experiences lack of support for the projects she leads, and lack of ability to make decisions for the organization.

In contrast, an African American experienced executive-level journalist shared concerns about stress following layoffs - they had to lead the layoffs themselves - and while their boss was supportive of them taking some time off, they said it with the caveat, "When you get back we need to know if you want to stay here or move on." In the end, they chose not to take the time off because it felt like they would be targeted as a problem. Their main stressor: numerous rounds of layoffs, a team stressed about having to do more with less, fewer financial resources, the general state of public media, and having to navigate journalism in the context of the current administration.

An Asian American freelancer who is currently unemployed and has had more than a 15-year career, describes their mental health as fair, often feeling stressed or depleted.

*"I work for myself,
so it gets lonely and
I am a tough boss on
myself."*

Finally, a Caucasian freelancer working in New York City, wishes their newsroom would start taking Israeli government and Zionist threats seriously. They feel their mental health has been suffering from the fact that their "editors have bowed to special interest groups instead of protecting reporters every time."





4.3. Financial & Access Barriers: Economic Insecurity as a Root Stressor

The media sector is undergoing a profound crisis, placing professional journalists at the center of overlapping structural pressures. Layoffs driven by budget constraints have become widespread across news organizations of all sizes, while journalists face growing fears of job displacement by artificial intelligence. At the same time, the profession increasingly demands constant upskilling, with journalists expected to operate as multimedia professionals, adapt to rapidly changing social media formats, and take on multiple roles simultaneously. Together, these dynamics have intensified job insecurity, workload, and stress, reshaping both the conditions and expectations of journalistic labor.

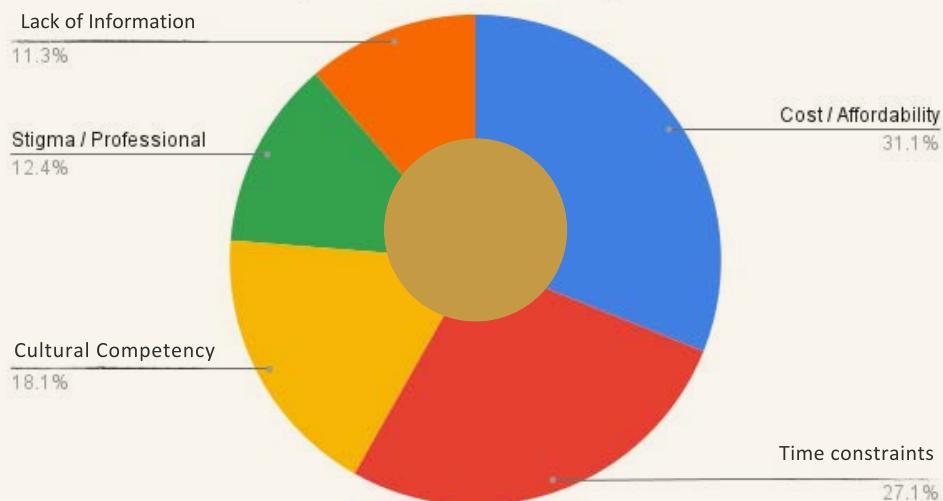
In the *Stay Tuned* survey, journalists describe “doing more with less,” “doing three jobs at once,” “being overworked,” “short staffing,” and “disappearing resources.”

Across the United States, news deserts have emerged — entire towns have lost all their reporters. Precarity is now dominant in the profession, with fewer permanently employed workers and a growing number of freelancers who suffer from income instability, late payments, and, of course, no benefits at all, including non-existent access to medical insurance.

Economic insecurity is the *root stressor* for journalists in the U.S. Emotional resilience support must be paired with time constraints for journalists and freelancers to look for *practical resources to mitigate their problems* — legal help, contract templates, access to grants, accessible mental health support, and guidance for sustainable freelance careers.

When asked about the barriers to accessing mental health support, journalists first mention the high cost of care and the lack of affordable options (34%), followed by the workload which leaves them with no time to take care of themselves (31%). The lack of culturally competent providers who can understand their profession, lived experience or community context is mentioned by 26%. In addition, we should not underestimate the 8% who fear professional consequences of being open about their mental health struggles.

What barriers have you faced in accessing mental health aid?



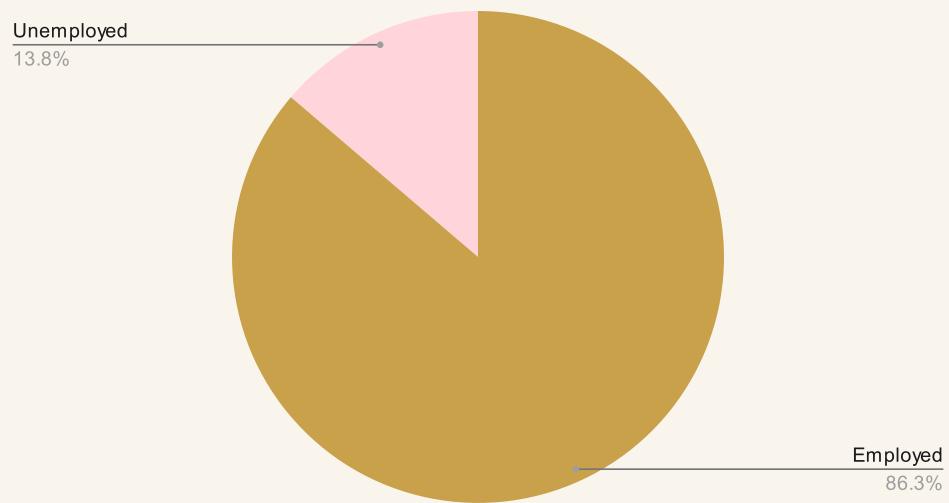
MDRnet Stay Tuned Survey 2025

4.4. Isolation & Freelance Life: Breaking the Cycle of Digital Disconnection

Remote journalists and freelancers report loneliness and absence of peer networks. The need for digital peer circles and community of practice is evident.

Precarity in the profession is a growing trend, and 1 in 3 respondents are freelancers who do not have a steady workplace, while a growing number of employed journalists do not go into a newsroom daily to interact with their peers.

Are you currently employed?



MDRnet Stay Tuned Survey 2025

Story Vignettes:

The isolation of freelancers

A Black Haitian from the East Coast in the 45-60 age group, requests tighter security against digital harassment via personal (non-work) channels. She often feels stressed or depleted and is grateful her newsrooms have received donations to provide financial support for people to access mental health support at low-cost or free as a one-off.

A Black journalist from Washington, D.C., in the 29-44 age group with self-described fair mental health states:

“Please tailor mental health support and have options for people who come from various communities and cultural backgrounds. This will allow people to feel safe and that they are understood when speaking with someone who looks like them. Having a grant or stipend that can be used to access mental health resources.”

An unemployed Asian American freelancer in California shares:

“At this point, for personal, financial, and health reasons, I’m likely going to have to do journalism as a freelancer while finding more stable sources of income in related or other professions. But thank you for asking us [about our mental health]. I hope that my experiences and those of fellow journalists will help future generations of journalists.”

4.5. Lived Experience & Mental Health: The Need for Identity-Aware Support

When asking respondents to name aspects of their lived experience, identity, or community context that should shape how mental health support is designed, we recognized that journalism does not happen in a vacuum and that one-size-fits-all solutions can feel alienating or even harmful.

At its core, the question was about safety, trust, and relevance: whether people can see themselves reflected in the support being offered, feel understood without having to over-explain their identity or trauma, and access care that accounts for real constraints like immigration status, disability, finances, geography, family responsibilities, language, or cultural stigma around mental health.

Across responses, journalists emphasized the need for culturally responsive, identity-aware, and structurally informed mental health support. Many highlighted racialized and intersectional trauma—particularly for Black, Latine, Asian American, immigrant, LGBTQ+, disabled, neurodivergent, and “only one” journalists—along with the cumulative toll of discrimination inside and outside newsrooms, online harassment, threats, exile, and covering traumatic content.

Respondents stressed that mental health support must account for realities like work visas, bilingual labor, mixed-status families, chronic illness, poverty, remote or rural living, religious mismatch, and caregiving responsibilities. Others pointed to stigma around mental health in certain cultures, the limits of generic wellness advice, and the importance of telehealth, language access, and practitioners with lived or journalistic experience. Overall, journalists made clear that mental health challenges are shaped by both the job and life beyond it—and that effective support must validate those overlapping pressures rather than flatten them into a single narrative.

Cultural Competency Infographic

Are there aspects of your lived experience or community context that you want us to consider when designing mental health support solutions?

INSIGHT

Mental health is cultural, not universal.

Healing requires representation and safety.

Many journalists live at multiple margins — identity, geography, economy.

Journalism trauma is both personal and systemic.

Some journalists are fatigued by “mindfulness industrial complex.”

NEEDS

Build with intersectionality and specificity; reject generic models.

Prioritize peer facilitators and counselors who share lived experience.

Design adaptable, tele-accessible programs with sliding scales.

Address both individual healing and newsroom accountability.

Offer somatic, creative, and community-centered approaches.

Insights provided by the responders of our survey

MDRnet Stay Tuned Survey 2025

Story Vignettes:

Calls for Trauma-Informed Care

Need for culturally matched care

“Tailor it and have options for people who come from various communities ... someone who looks like them.”

Frustration with generic support:

“I’m tired of workshops with people who have no idea what we are going through.”

Lack of representation among providers — Black, Latine, Asian American, immigrant, LGBTQ+, trans, and disabled journalists repeatedly said they do not see themselves reflected in mental health offerings.

BIPOC lumping backlash: The critique that

“Black issues get brushed aside or lumped in as BIPOC” underscores the need for nuanced, not homogenized support.

Stigma & cultural barriers

Many respondents, particularly from Black and Brown communities, named the “just push through it” mentality:

“Black and Brown people don’t see the use in therapy ... expected to just ‘suck it up.’”

This signals internalized stigma rooted in cultural, generational, and socioeconomic survival strategies. Normalize help-seeking through peer-led storytelling campaigns and role models from within each community, reframing care as strength, not weakness.

Immigrant, exile, and diaspora realities

Journalists in exile or with immigration histories described compound trauma: survival stress, displacement, cultural dissonance.

“Exile represents a permanent grief.”

“My therapist didn’t understand what it meant that I couldn’t quit because of my visa.”

Mixed-status families and immigration reporting further complicate healing. Specialized programs for immigrant and diaspora journalists, including language-accessible counseling, peer groups for exiled journalists, and training for therapists on immigration-related constraints.

Structural and geographic barriers

Reporters in remote or rural areas:

“I live in a very remote area; there’s not many resources here.”

Disabled journalists emphasized telehealth accessibility and masking safety. Financial precarity and cost barriers were also repeated. Telehealth-first design, low-cost access tiers, asynchronous mental health resources, and non-coastal inclusivity in all programming.

LGBTQ+ and gender diversity

Trans and non-binary journalists asked for resources built by and for them, not retrofitted general advice.

“You need to have trans and non-binary people with journalistic experience helping to shape these resources.”

They described mistrust of external consultants who don't understand newsroom realities. Build a Trans and Nonbinary Journalism Mental Health Council to co-design resources and ensure authentic representation could be an option.

Occupational trauma & safety

Strong theme: trauma is not only from violence, but also repeated exposure to suffering, harassment, and moral injury.

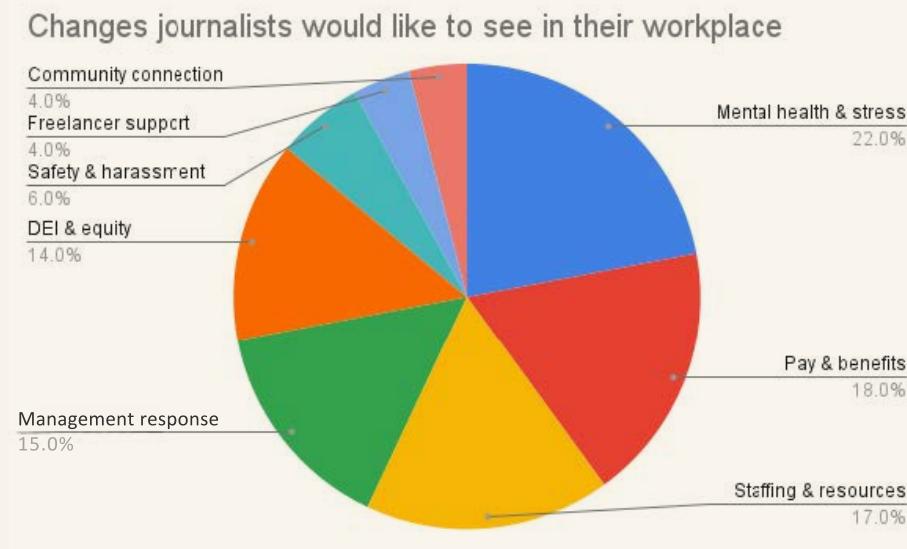
“Reporters don’t need to be shot to be traumatized.”

“Online harassment and external attacks are constant.”

Journalists are asking for industry-specific trauma frameworks, not generic therapy. They're looking for a trauma-informed, journalism-specific care model blending occupational trauma psychology with identity-informed approaches.

Moving from Individual Resilience to Collective Care

Journalists are not asking for more wellness tips — they are asking for free or affordable, culturally competent, journalism-aware mental health care that is visible, embedded in newsroom structures, accessible to freelancers and marginalized communities, and rooted in collective care rather than individual resilience.



MDRnet Stay Tuned Survey 2025

Affordability dominates every other concern

Journalists repeatedly state that mental health care is inaccessible because of cost, low pay, lack of insurance, or freelance status. Three-quarters of respondents want free care or stipends/grants, living wages and healthcare, and removal of cost barriers entirely. Any solution that does not directly address cost or income instability will fail to reach most journalists.

What they tell us is ...

“They should be free.”

“It’s all about money at the end of the day ... a good therapist is not a real option for me.”

*“F*** you, pay us and give us healthcare.”*

“Pay us a living wage that allows us to seek professionals who are culturally competent.”

“Remove cost barriers.”

Journalists feel misunderstood by generic mental health providers who lack knowledge of journalism, trauma exposure, deadlines, risk, exile, or harassment. 60% of our respondents note that journalism-specific & trauma-informed care is missing, signaling that providers trained in journalism-specific trauma are lacking. They express the need for counselors who understand newsrooms, breaking news, exile, and moral injury as well as long-term, not one-off, care.

Mental health support must be profession-aware, not generic wellness programming.

In their own words:

“I wish there (was) more low-cost therapy from trauma-aware and journalism-sensitive providers.”

“If there were more counselors who understood journalism or had been journalists themselves.”

“Stop telling us obvious stuff like ‘turn off notifications.’”

“Journalist-specific resources.”

Half of our respondents note cultural relevance and representation matters deeply to journalists of color, immigrants, and marginalized communities, and feel as though current resources are culturally unsafe, generic, or dismissive of lived experience. They want providers of color, multilingual care, resources designed by and for specific communities, recognition of immigration stress, exile, racism, and political targeting.

Cultural competence is not optional; it is foundational to trust and uptake.

“There should be a network of mental health resources specifically for people of color.”

“Resources offered are generic or come with barriers … not in a language or context that feels safe.”

“As a Latina journalist, I know many of us carry intergenerational pressures.”

“Exile represents a permanent grief.”

Even strong resources fail if journalists cannot find or recognize them.

Many journalists don't know what exists, how to find it, or who to trust. Discovery is often accidental, resources are invisible, fragmented, or unknown. For 45% of respondents, they want centralized, visible, trusted hubs; resources introduced during onboarding; ongoing visibility and not only during crisis.

“Do they actually exist?”

“I didn't know there were services geared towards journalists.”

“Having to find resources by happenstance.”

“I'd make them more visible and part of every intro session.”

Wellness cannot be separated from workload, management, and newsroom culture.

Mental health must be embedded in the work. It's not optional. 40% of respondents reject framing mental health as an individual responsibility handled outside work hours.

Mental health should be built into schedules with check-ins after traumatic coverage. There need to be clear work shifts, limits, and time-off during breaking news.

Leadership accountability are represented in these quotes:

“Built into our work schedule.”

“Bosses need to check on their employees after they cover difficult things.”

“More (support) based (on) the job itself.”

“Not to present it as an individual issue and recognize institutional issues.”

Respondents also noted:

- Collective care & peer support reduce isolation (40%)
- Access barriers: Time, freelancing, remote work (35%)
- Stigma, minimization and ‘part-of-the-job’ culture (30%)

Journalists feel isolated and want shared spaces to process trauma collectively. Even when resources exist, they often cannot use them due to schedules, remote work, or freelance status. Journalists want to dismantle normalization of harm and emotional numbness.

Journalists have told us they want:

“A place to talk openly with our colleagues about the moment we are in.”

“Make something available for people working remotely.”

“Deliberately deconstruct dismissive attitudes of ‘it’s just part of the job.’”

Peer support groups, affinity groups, and spaces to talk openly about the current moment in journalism form the foundation of a care model that reflects how journalists actually live and work. By offering evening and flexible hours, remote and online care, and explicit inclusion of freelancers, this support becomes accessible rather than symbolic.

Normalized conversations about mental health, reinforced by leadership modeling vulnerability and a clear rejection of “tough-it-out” culture, shift care from an individual burden to a shared newsroom practice — one that acknowledges the realities of precarity, trauma, and chronic stress across the journalism ecosystem.

Story Vignettes:

“When Leadership Finally Said ‘Take the Day’.

And of course, there are also leaders and workplaces that actively support their journalists. We gathered several testimonies from journalists who felt understood and confident speaking about their struggles:

“I have great bosses who are really willing not only to show compassion and support in professional moments, but who are also mindful of me as a whole human. Thank goodness for them.”

Caucasian female editor, 29-44, Vermont

“My boss is always there to hear me out, to vent, and to discuss anything frustrating me.”

Latino male, 29-44

“My boss is one of the few leaders who actually cares and understands burnout and workload.”

Caucasian female, 29-44, New York

“They understand and have found donations to provide mental health support, at least temporarily or as one-off support.”

Black female editor at a small digital media outlet, 44-60

“My boss cares about my mental health because of honest interest and concern, regardless of their ability to do anything about it.”

Non-binary Asian American visual editor, 29-44





“Because the bosses here are very supportive and listen to the reporter’s concerns.”

Caucasian male reporter, 44–60, Colorado

“I’ve had my own mental health crises, and our team has always stepped up to pick up the slack when I need it. I’ve done the same for others on our team. We have each other’s backs.”

Female editor-in-chief of a small nonprofit media outlet, 45–60

“My managing editor has been very open to listening to me about my mental health. She checks in regularly and does her best.”

Non-binary assistant editor at a small nonprofit newsroom, 29–44



“I work for a company with empathy.”

Latino male senior executive, 44–60

“Our organization is putting emphasis on our well-being.”

Mesoamerican Indigenous male community radio station manager, 29–44



Mental Health Advice from José Zamora, CPJ Regional Director for the Americas¹³

PHOTO CREDIT: JOSÉ ZAMORA, CPJ

José Zamora, regional director for the Americas at the Committee to Protect Journalists, shared during our recent Media Resilience Training Program for counselors some personal advice on self-care to overcome burnout and emotional crises. It describes exactly who MDRnet wants media professionals and leaders to look at when it comes to mental health and it's part of our self-care decalogue.

1. **Don't wait for a crisis to seek help.** Therapy or professional support should be preventive, not reactive. Caring for your mental health is part of doing your job well.
2. **Normalize mental health in newsrooms.** Talking about stress and burnout isn't weakness — it's strength. Leadership and peers must model openness.
3. **Listen to your body.** Fatigue, anxiety, or irritation are warning signs. Acknowledge them, name your emotions, and make space to process them.
4. **Use simple grounding techniques.** Intentional breathing. Drink water to calm the "fight or flight" response. Look at the horizon or step outside to reset your mind. Take short walks and reconnect with nature.
5. **Practice gratitude and find small joys.** Gratitude strengthens resilience. Activities like photography, exercise, or appreciating beauty restore balance.
6. **Take care of yourself first.** Like putting on your oxygen mask before helping others — self-care enables you to support your team and family.
7. **Slow down.** Urgency is not a virtue. Taking time to breathe, reflect, and rest helps you work — and live — better.

¹³ Zamora addressed MDRnet coaches and counsellors during our first training on the Journalism Resilience Program of trauma care for journalists, November 2025.

6. CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION:

A Roadmap for Embedding Mental Health into the Future of News

At MDRnet, our goal is to strengthen the human infrastructure of local news production by prioritizing the well-being, retention, and leadership resilience of journalists and media leaders, ensuring they can continue serving their local communities. We want to connect, promote, and sustain strong networks and communities of practice to enhance collaborative approaches for newsroom sustainability, and hence boost our democracy.

The *Stay Tuned* Survey respondents showed us that support to journalists in distress needs to focus on effective and trauma-informed services that can provide accessible, culturally competent support tailored to the profession's uniqueness, and to respond to the main changes journalists would like to see in their workplaces.

Physical unease and anxiety should be added to the list as new, work-related burnout factors. Working in a field where journalists feel uncertainty due to increasing threats against people in their profession raises the risk of people dropping out of the profession entirely. MDRnet will need to be more than a wellness counselor; we will need to incorporate our coaching and counselling to existing efforts providing holistic safety training and serve as a timely connector for harassed professionals with organizations that can support them in the U.S..

Toxic environments are not new, but in the current moment, journalists need to stand together. One of MDRnet's goals is to sensitize leadership and help navigate journalists' struggles by combating preconceptions and providing management tools to address these issues. Counselling and peer support can't compensate for abusive management systems. MDRnet can fill this gap with healthy newsroom leadership training and confidential coaching for mid-level managers who want to change cultures from within.

Crucially, identity-based trauma is central, not peripheral. MDRnet's affinity spaces and trauma-informed coaching and counselling programs are essential lifelines. MDRnet could further develop specialized peer spaces (e.g., "Queer Journalists Processing Room," "Women of Color in Newsrooms") to validate and heal these experiences.

Freelancers form an emerging majority of the industry — MDRnet can serve them through community networks, contract and legal support, and resource-sharing hubs. Burnout recovery programs will be designed by and for journalists, integrating peer groups, trauma education, and narrative repair (helping journalists reconnect with purpose and agency).

Economic insecurity is the root stressor. Emotional resilience support must be paired with existing practical resource provides — legal help, contract templates, access to grants, and guidance for sustainable freelance careers.

MDRnet's proposal for a structural change

These initiatives translate research into action and care into structural change, which MDRnet will boost in the U.S. news environment during the next three years:

Embedding mental health in the workday

MDRnet will advance newsroom well-being through a connected set of actions that meet journalists where they are. By providing free and culturally competent one-on-one coaching and counselling to journalists who require mental health support and career coaching. Our support will be timely, trauma-aware and designed for and by journalists.

By organizing in-person Task Force Visits alongside Virtual Resilience Clinics, MDRnet will create trusted spaces for honest dialogue, practical skill-building, and collective problem-solving. These engagements will be designed to promote open, stigma-free conversations about mental health, while also delivering concrete resources to help journalists cope with trauma, burnout, and chronic stress. Together, this work strengthens newsrooms' capacity to become healthier, more sustainable institutions, better equipped to withstand ongoing financial, political, and environmental pressures, and to support the people whose labor makes journalism possible.

Building culturally responsive networks

MDRnet will build durable care infrastructure for journalism by developing coaching and counseling pipeline programs in partnership with NABJ, NAHJ, AAJA, NLGJA, TJA, ONA, IRE, SPJ and other organizations to ensure culturally competent, journalism-informed support reaches journalists at every career stage. In parallel, MDRnet will support independent and small media outlets by addressing organizational and leadership needs in close collaboration with groups like Tiny News Collective and LION, recognizing that newsroom health is inseparable from structural capacity.

This work will be reinforced through peer-to-peer healing circles, co-created with affinity organizations, which reduce isolation and normalize collective care. Together, these efforts will strengthen newsroom affinity networks as essential care infrastructure, shifting mental health support from an individual burden to a shared, sustainable practice embedded across the journalism ecosystem.

Systemic solutions & leadership accountability

MDRnet will work to destigmatize and normalize mental health care within newsrooms by embedding support into everyday newsroom culture rather

than treating it as an individual or crisis-only issue. Through the promotion of a trauma-informed leadership certification, MDRnet will equip editors, managers, and executives with the skills to recognize harm, respond with care, and align workload expectations with human limits. This approach will center culturally aware strategies and solutions, ensuring mental health practices reflect the lived experiences of journalists across race, gender identity, immigration status, disability, and community context. At the pipeline level, MDRnet will integrate mental health literacy into journalism education and J-schools, preparing future journalists and newsroom leaders to sustain themselves and their teams in an industry defined by chronic stress, public hostility, and structural precarity.

Building capacity

MDRnet will strengthen the journalism care ecosystem by training culturally competent counsellors, coaches, trainers, and ambassadors who share lived experiences with the journalists they serve, enabling them to recognize nuanced needs and offer practical, trust-based solutions. These leaders will help ensure support is not generic, but grounded in the realities of race, gender identity, disability, immigration status, class, and newsroom power dynamics. MDRnet will also design adaptable programs that are accessible both online and offline, meeting the needs of remote journalists, freelancers, and those in resource-scarce or rural communities. By providing mental health support across multiple levels—individual, peer, organizational, and industry-wide, MDRnet will move beyond one-off interventions toward a sustainable, layered model of care that reflects the complexity of modern journalism.

Final remarks

The *Stay Tuned: A U.S. Journalism Mental Health Survey* reaffirmed our goal, and journalists from all around the United States gave us insights into what they urgently need. MDRnet meets the opportunity bridging cultural, financial, and structural gaps with programs that support journalists where they are, in all their complexity and courage. By offering a core framework for meeting these needs by scaling access and awareness of existing coaching, counselling and peer services, expanding specialized programs for freelancers and marginalized journalists, and embedding systemic change efforts (training newsroom leaders and policy advocacy) we are investing our resources in strengthening this country's democratic infrastructure.

The U.S. media environment needs to enhance structural changes to keep journalists working on their daily beats.

- News organizations need to normalize talking about mental health struggles to support their journalists and boost their impact in society instead of allowing highly valuable professionals to leave the field.
- Burnout, acute stress and trauma are most of the time work-related and should be considered by health and insurance providers as a consequence of extreme work conditions and, as such, an occupational hazard.
- Academia and professional organizations need to address the matter, too. First of all, they need to acknowledge these occurrences, but they also need tools to handle crisis situations and connections to organizations that can provide the needed care.
- Journalists should support each other, knowing that conversation among peers, who best understand the journalism-specific circumstances that lead to mental health crises, is the first step of healing.
- Journalists who experience burnout should feel confident to search for support of organizations like MDRnet.

For more resources and information please reach us at MDRnet. It will be our pleasure to support you.



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Media Resilience Network