

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Overview

#### *Statement of problem*

What is the impact of news reporting on victims and survivors of traumatic incidents in Australia? Understanding how news reporting impacts on victims, survivors and their families is a relatively new area of research endeavour, with some work in this area underway in several United States universities<sup>20</sup> where programs addressing trauma and journalism – or trauma and the media – have been established. One easily accessed resource is that posted by the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at <http://www.dartcenter.org> which has had the input of distinguished US psychiatrist and academic Dr Frank Ochberg who holds adjunct professorships in journalism and in justice at Michigan State University and consults to the Red Cross in the aftermath of major incidents. In the United Kingdom, only limited research about the media interfacing with victims and their families has been published to date.<sup>21</sup>

At present, Australian journalists and newsrooms get only infrequent feedback about what effects they might have on victims, survivors, families and communities when they cover, or publish news reports about, traumatic events. Feedback can come from diverse sources – e.g., witnesses or relatives of those most affected, concerned authorities or citizens, news consumers, interest groups and even local, state or federal government representatives. Typically it comes as telephone calls, in-person visits, e-mails, letters and even mentions in Parliament or by parliamentary committees.

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<sup>20</sup> University of Washington, Michigan State University, Columbia University, University of Oklahoma and the University of Tulsa all have researchers working in this area.

<sup>21</sup> See (a) Himmelstein, H., and Faithorn, E.P., (2002) 'Eyewitness to Disaster: how journalists cope with the psychological stress inherent in reporting traumatic events' in *Journalism Studies* [Vol 3 (4)] and (b) Jemphrey, A. & Berrington, E. (2000) 'Surviving the Media: Hillsborough, Dunblane and the press' in *Journalism Studies*, [Vol 1 (3)]

Some of that feedback is positive, even congratulatory, some is negative and some even contradictory. But rarely have Australian journalists, or even individual newsrooms, been able to examine feedback about specific traumatic news coverage in any sort of aggregated form. Nor have they been encouraged to systematically acknowledge and debate patterns of behaviour that might be harmful to individuals and communities.

Australian research into trauma and journalism has been initiated at the Queensland University of Technology and this thesis constitutes some of the earliest research work being done in relation to the impact of news reporting on victims and survivors. It has been conducted alongside research done into the impacts of reporting trauma on journalists by another QUT Master of Arts candidate, Philip Castle.<sup>22</sup>

The findings of both studies, then, are likely to have important ramifications not only for journalists and journalistic practice, but also for victims and survivors and those who support them in the aftermath of a traumatic event. As Australian news media cover more and more traumatic events, it is critical that journalists and newsroom decision-makers are aware of – and take responsibility for – both the positive and negative consequences of their actions.

### *Scope of review*

Identification of traumatic events or critical incidents is not a difficult task, given the steady flow of major local and international incidents that have attracted extensive and ever more intimate media coverage here and overseas during the past decade. As a result of those mass murders, bombings, natural disasters, horrific crimes, workplace deaths, etc., millions of people's lives have been changed irrevocably.

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Both researchers have been encouraged by Dr Ochberg and his Dart Center colleagues and informed by their published research and practice guidelines.

This thesis examines the extent Australian media reporting may impact on victims, survivors and their families and friends<sup>23</sup>. The researcher was aware many of the people who might be interviewed had suffered greatly already. The challenge then, for this research, was to inflict no further harm while determining what effects media reports or actions had on these people after they experienced their traumatic event/s.

In order to prepare and analyse such research, the international literature review undertaken for this thesis, therefore, has ranged across three professional fields:

- **psychology** (viz. traumatic stress, post-traumatic stress, critical incident stress, critical incident management and debriefing, crisis intervention, victimisation, psychological research ethics);
- **journalism** (viz. codes of conduct, reporting behaviours, journalistic standards and ethics, self-regulation, censorship, freedom of the press, truth and public interest/benefit); and
- **communication** (viz. crisis communication management, media management).

A selection of new academic journalism publications and educational websites arising from trauma programs being established in the United States – specifically related to how news media should deal with victims and survivors and how traumatic incidents are best reported – has also been reviewed<sup>24</sup>. Across this broad spectrum, anecdotal material has been plentiful, including substantive insights drawn from Australia's 1998 Senate Select Committee hearings into Self-Regulation in the Information and Communication Industries. Academic discussions of relative research and theoretical perspectives have also been available in print and on the Internet.

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<sup>23</sup> Spungen, D. (1998) *Homicide: The hidden victims*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications. This author calls the loved ones of victims (survivors, families and friends) 'co-victims'. Because this term is not yet in wide usage, the author of this thesis has limited its use apart from in quotations from that text.

<sup>24</sup> Coté, W. & Simpson, R. (2000), *Covering violence: A guide to ethical reporting about victims and trauma*. New York: Columbia University Press. Simpson, R.A. & Boggs, J.G. (1999), 'An exploratory study of traumatic stress among newspaper journalists.' *Journalism and Communication Monographs* 1 (1) Pp1-26. Coté, W. & Bucqueroux, B. (1996), 'Tips on interviewing victims.' *Nieman Reports* 50 (30) P27. Dart Center's Journalism and Trauma website <http://www.dartcenter.org>

## 2.2 Definitions

For the purposes of this thesis, the term ‘journalist’ is applied in its broadest sense to include reporters (print, radio, television, internet and wire services), photographers, camera operators, researchers and producers, editors and news directors.

### *Definitions of ‘trauma’ and ‘traumatic event’ and their research background*

Trauma and how it affects humans has been scrutinised by psychologists and others for more than a century. In an online training module for journalists, Ochberg et al. define traumatic stress as:

... the pressure, force or strain on the human mind and body from a specific event of major dimension that shocks, stuns and horrifies. The witnessing of and learning about traumatic stressors experienced by others can also be traumatizing. Common examples include witnessing or learning about the sudden death of a loved one or observing the serious injury or unnatural death of another person. Often the victim who directly experiences traumatic stress fears for his or her life or feels imminently threatened with serious injury. Some severely traumatized individuals may dissociate during a stressor or have a blunted response, due to defensive avoidance and numbing. Often, the intense emotional response to the stressor may not occur until considerable time has elapsed after the incident has terminated.<sup>25</sup>

This thesis will examine such traumatic events in Australian settings as well as their consequences for victims/survivors and their families/communities, especially any impacts experienced due to news coverage.

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This training module is available at [http://www.dartcenter.org/Curriculum/module1/content\\_main\\_intro.html](http://www.dartcenter.org/Curriculum/module1/content_main_intro.html)

Figley (1985)<sup>26</sup> and the American Psychiatric Association (1987)<sup>27</sup> both define what actually constitutes a ‘traumatic event’. According to Figley (1985), a traumatic event is recognised by the nature of an event, the effects of trauma on individuals and groups, and the response of individuals and groups to that event. In general, he notes, traumatic events are dangerous, overwhelming, and sudden. They are marked by their extreme or sudden force, and typically cause fear, anxiety, withdrawal and avoidance:

Traumatic events have high intensity, are unexpected, infrequent, and vary in duration from acute to chronic ... Disasters, by definition, are both traumatic, and overwhelm the available community resources, further threatening the individuals’ and community’s ability to cope.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, the APA – which is responsible for setting the diagnostic criteria for classifying psychological responses to traumatic incidents – defines a traumatic event as a psychologically distressing event that is outside the range of usual human experience (i.e., outside the range of such common experiences as simple bereavement, chronic illness, business losses, and marital conflict) that would be ‘markedly distressing to almost anyone and is usually experienced with intense fear, terror, and helplessness’. Such an incident, the APA suggests, typically involves:

- a serious threat to one’s own life or physical integrity;
- a serious threat or harm to one’s children, spouse, or other close relatives or friends;
- sudden destruction of one’s home or community; or
- seeing another person who has recently been, or is being seriously injured or killed as a result of an accident or physical violence.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Figley, C.R. (Ed.) (1985). *Trauma and its wake: traumatic stress theory, research and intervention*. New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel. In Ursano, R.J., McCaughey, B.G. & Fullerton, C.S. (Eds.) (1994). *Individual and community responses to trauma and disaster: the structure of human chaos*. Great Britain: University Press, Cambridge (Pp5-6)

<sup>27</sup> American Psychiatric Association, (1987). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*, 3rd edn. Revised, Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, pp. 247-51. As quoted in Ursano, R.J., McCaughey, B.G. & Fullerton, C.S. (Eds.) (1994). *Individual and community responses to trauma and disaster: the structure of human chaos*. Great Britain: University Press, Cambridge. (P6)

<sup>28</sup> Figley (1985), Pp5-6.

<sup>29</sup> Loc. cit.

In some cases, the trauma may be learning about a serious threat or harm to a close friend or relative, e.g., that one's child has been kidnapped, tortured, or killed. According to the APA, the trauma may be experienced alone (e.g., rape or assault) or in the company of groups of people, (e.g., military combat). Traumatic events include natural disasters (e.g., floods, earthquakes), accidental disasters (e.g., car accidents with serious physical injury, airplane crashes, large fires, collapse of physical structures), and deliberately caused events (e.g., bombing, torture, death camps). Sometimes there is a simultaneous physical component alongside the trauma, which may even involve 'direct damage to the central nervous system (e.g., malnutrition, head injury)'.<sup>30</sup>

US journalism educators William Coté and Roger Simpson suggest a wide range of news stories fall into the category of traumatic incidents.

As experts have grasped the causes and effects of trauma, they have seen that it infects populations far beyond war combatants, rape survivors, and abused children. Those vulnerable to emotional trauma include refugees, torture victims, people caught in the devastation of natural disasters, political prisoners, individuals who endure severe poverty, people struck by technological disasters such as the explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, and those caught up in war and genocide. A litany of such domestic events as school shootings, automobile and plane crashes, and urban riots also belongs on the list. These events are the news media's stock-in-trade, and journalists can convey their meaning more clearly if they understand how trauma will affect those at the center, those first to experience the shock waves.<sup>31</sup>

The cutting edge of information about psychological trauma, say Coté and Simpson, is the finding that it denies vital human values to those who suffer its effects.

The immediate deprivations ... of anxiety, unwanted memories, and numbness cost a person the vitality of life. Another devastating stage follows as the traumatized person moves into the margins and shadows of existence, unnoticed and little understood.<sup>32</sup>

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30 APA (1987), Pp 247-51, in Ursano et al (1994), P6.

31 Coté & Simpson (2000), P25.

32 Ibid, P8.

Studies on trauma and its impacts have given rise to some useful definitions that help pinpoint the extent of the emotional shock felt by those who experience trauma directly or indirectly. For instance, over the past two decades, the field of ‘traumatology’ has evolved, bringing with it a host of sub-category ‘disorders’ – each with its own set of diagnostic criteria – which aid today’s psychological and medical responses to individuals troubled by their experiences. But research on the impacts of trauma goes back much further. Veith (1965)<sup>33</sup> chronicles how, since 1889, researchers have examined a range of psychological responses to highly stressful events, classifying symptoms and moving the field from one initially reliant on religious notions to one more strongly grounded in science. But, Veith suggests, evidence of emotional reactions to highly stressful events are found in every century that has records of human behavior.

Over the centuries, theories and explanations of these behaviours have varied. Quoting Ellenberger (1970)<sup>34</sup>, Veith notes symptoms of flashbacks, dissociation and startle response were viewed as works of God, the gods, the devil, and various types of spirits. Veith also notes that, thanks to 18<sup>th</sup> Century physician and inventor of hypnotism Franz Anton Mesmer, scientific concepts began to replace religious ones, and ‘this has led to the analysis of psychological possession and multiple personality (Azam, 1887<sup>35</sup>; Flournoy, 1900<sup>36</sup>; Hodgson, 1891<sup>37</sup>).’

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33 Veith, I. (1965). *Hysteria: The history of a disease*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

34 Ellenberger, H.F. (1970). *The discovery of the unconscious: The history and evolution of dynamic psychiatry*. New York: Basic Books.

35 Azam, E.E. (1887). *Hypnotisme, double conscience et alteration de la personnalite*. Paris: Balliere.

36 Flournoy, T. (1900). *A study of a case of glossolalia*. New York: Harper.

37 Hodgson, R. (1891). A cs [case] of double consciousness. in *Proceedings of the Society of Physical Research*. London: Edward Arnold.

Hurst (1940)<sup>38</sup>, Trimble (1981)<sup>39</sup> and others note the important contributions of innovative work done at La Salpetriere Hospital in Paris<sup>40</sup>. Hurst also notes that Jean-Martin Charcot, its most distinguished physician, was the first to demonstrate that hysteria had psychic origins<sup>41</sup> in the late 1800s. Charcot's work, Hurst notes, subsequently had considerable influence on such traumatologists as Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud, John Eric Erichsen, and Helmut Oppenheim.

According to van der Hart, Brown & van der Kolk (1989)<sup>42</sup>, in the 1880s Pierre Janet became the first psychologist to study and treat traumatic stress, including hysterical and dissociative symptoms. Among Janet's important contributions, say van der Hart et al<sup>43</sup>, were:

- (1) the recognition of the inability to integrate traumatic memories as the core issue in posttraumatic syndromes,
- (2) the discovery of the importance of the fundamental biphasic nature of traumatic stress, and
- (3) the articulation of all the symptoms of PTSD [post traumatic stress disorder] that are cited in contemporary diagnostic criteria in the DSM-III [where its diagnostic criteria were first described], and other vital research.

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38 Hurst, A. (1940). *Medical diseases of war*. London: Edward Arnold.

39 Trimble, M.R. (1981). *Post-traumatic neurosis*. Chichester, England: Wiley.

40 Briquet, P. (1959). *Traite clinique et therapeutique de l'hysterie*. Paris: Balliere.

41 Charcot, J. (1889). *Clinical lectures of the disease of the nervous system*. London: New Sydenham Society. In Hurst, A. (1940). *Medical diseases of war*. London: Edward Arnold.

42 van der Hart, O., Brown, P., & van der Kolk, B.A. (1989). Pierre Janet's treatment of post-traumatic stress. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 2(4), Pp379-396.

43 van der Hart et al., Pp365-378.

Perhaps the greatest knowledge has been gathered in the aftermath of various wars, when many thousands of soldiers came home with firsthand experiences of a variety of traumatic events. War-related traumatic stress reactions stirred important research and the formation of new concepts. These began with the clinical observations of 19<sup>th</sup> Century wars by Hammond (1883)<sup>44</sup> where the term *melancholia* was applied to some American Civil War combat veterans. *Shell shock* emerged as the term most used during World War 1 (Glass, 1954)<sup>45</sup> to account for the PTSD-like symptoms observed in many returning war veterans. This was because the condition was thought to be caused by air blasts of explosives that left soldiers dazed and confused. Although this term was replaced with ‘war neurosis’ or ‘traumatic neurosis’ (Grinker & Spiegel, 1945)<sup>46</sup>, there was still a reluctance to ascribe its cause to exposure to – and difficulties coping with – frightening stressors.

The consensus was that a predisposing character or personality defect helped explain why some individuals developed combat-related psychological reactions and others did not when exposed to the same type of stressor (Figley, 1978)<sup>47</sup>. This position generally prevailed until the Vietnam War but did not officially change until 1980 with the publication of the DSM-III (American Psychiatric Association, 1980)<sup>48</sup>, which then incorporated the term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).<sup>49</sup>

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44 Hammond, W.A. (1883). *A treatise on insanity in its medical relations*. London: H.K. Lewis.

45 Glass, A.J. (1954). *Psychopathology of everyday life*. (A.A. Brill, Trans.) London: T. Fisher Unwin.

46 Grinker, R. & Spiegel, J.P. (1945). *Men under stress*. Philadelphia: Blakiston.

47 Figley, C.R. (1978). Introduction. In *Stress disorders among Vietnam veterans: Theory, research, and treatment*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

48 American Psychiatric Association, loc. cit.

49 Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) (1993) *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*. New York: Plenum Press. PXVII-XIX.

While valuable work was done after various military conflicts, psychiatrists, psychologists and physicians reported seeing other patients who demonstrated similar patterns of responses to non-war traumatic events. These were people who had experienced murders, motor vehicle accidents, violent crimes, etc. PTSD, now defined and increasingly accepted by the medical profession, became a legitimate, indeed humane, diagnosis for those whose lives had been irrevocably changed by a traumatic event.

John P. Wilson and Beverley Raphael say the exponential expansion of the field has moved the study and treatment of PTSD ‘into the mainstream of modern psychiatry, psychology, the neurosciences, as well as the social and behavioral sciences’.

... the development of the field of traumatic stress studies must symbolize the evolution of a humane concern for the consequences of violence and destruction, and, as such, must surely speak hopefully for the human race. If, at last, compassion for those who are inevitably wounded and hurt can override the aggressive and destructive themes so congruent in many of our cultures, then we may become ready for peaceful, nonviolent, just, and considerate human relationships amongst those who inhabit this small planet.<sup>50</sup>

Two decades on from its acknowledgment as a legitimate diagnosis, just how many people in any community in any country are currently affected by PTSD or its symptoms – and how they should be treated – is still being discussed by researchers in different fields around the world. What seems to be constant is the belief that the more intense or lasting a traumatic event is, the more likely it is to cause PTSD.<sup>51</sup>

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50 Op cit., PXIX.

51 Côté & Simpson (2000), P35.

Ochberg – one of the initial APA panellists who formally defined PTSD – is one of several trauma experts who sum up its likely incident rate in the US on the Dart website.<sup>52</sup> Even prior to the events of September 11, 2001, (citing Breslau, Kessler, Chilcoat, Schultz, Davis, & Andreski, 1998<sup>53</sup>), Ochberg et al. reported that up to 90 per cent of the general US population could expect to be exposed to a traumatic stressor at some time. Common types of trauma include traffic accidents, man-made or natural disasters, wartime combat, interpersonal violence (e.g., child abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence, other criminal violence), life-threatening medical conditions and the sudden, unexpected death of a close relative or friend.<sup>54</sup>

Ochberg et al. say the percentage of those exposed to traumatic stressors who then develop PTSD can vary depending on the nature of the trauma.

Most trauma survivors will be upset for several weeks following an event, but recover to a variable degree without treatment. The percentage of trauma victims that will continue to have problems and develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) will depend on many factors, including the severity of trauma exposure. In one major epidemiological study of American civilians aged 15-54 (National Comorbidity Survey, Kessler et al., 1995)<sup>55</sup> lifetime prevalence rates of PTSD following specific types of trauma were:

Combat	38% (men)	
Rape	65% (men)	46% (women)
Life-threatening accident	6% (men)	9% (women)
Physical attack	2% (men)	21% (women)
Witnessing death or injury	6% (men)	8% (women)
Natural disaster	4% (men)	5% (women) <sup>56</sup>

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52 <http://www.dartcenter.org> (various pages).

53 Breslau, N., Kessler, R. C., Chilcoat, H. D., Schultz, L. R., Davis, G. C., & Andreski, P. (1998). *Trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder in the community: The 1996 Detroit Area Survey of Trauma*. Archives of General Psychiatry, 55, 626–632. This research was cited online by Ochberg et al. at [http://www.dartcenter.org/Curriculum/module1/content\\_main\\_intro.html](http://www.dartcenter.org/Curriculum/module1/content_main_intro.html)

54 Ochberg et al., online at [http://www.dartcenter.org/Curriculum/module1/content\\_main\\_intro.html](http://www.dartcenter.org/Curriculum/module1/content_main_intro.html)

55 Kessler, R.C., Sonnega, A., Bromet, E., Hughes, M., and Nelson, C.B. (1995). *Posttraumatic stress disorder in the national comorbidity survey*. Archives of General Psychiatry. 52 Pp1048-1060

56 Ochberg et al., loc. cit.

Citing the National Comorbidity Survey of 1995, the site says about one in 12 adults in the US will experience PTSD at some time during their lifetime<sup>57</sup>, with women (10.4 per cent) twice as likely as men (5 per cent) to develop PTSD following exposure to traumatic events.

Such a popular diagnosis has PTSD become in some quarters that it has won a special niche in medico-legal circles, ratcheting up compensation payouts for some trauma victims to unprecedented levels and calling into question its applicability in particular cases. Yet, after the most severe traumatic events – such as holdups, threats of death, rape, torture, multiple shootings, murder, kidnappings, life-threatening floods, cyclones and earthquakes – it is clear that PTSD and other psychological responses are the potential outcome of unwanted or unsolicited exposure to scenes or experiences that continue to horrify or haunt victims, survivors, witnesses and their families, friends and communities for long periods.

There are various types of traumatic responses that victims and survivors of a traumatic event may experience. Acute stress disorder [ASD], posttraumatic stress disorder, and secondary traumatic stress each has its own set of criteria.

A journalist who covers traumatic events and their victims would do well to recognize particular stress symptoms for accuracy and fairness in reporting ... We are only beginning to learn that prolonged coverage of traumatic events may trigger traumatic stress symptoms in journalists themselves.

It is hoped that by discussing this long-overlooked subject of trauma effects on journalists, the profession as a whole will benefit by improving its understanding and response to journalists' emotional and psychological well-being.<sup>58</sup>

The training module on the Dart Center's Journalism and Trauma site explains that *acute stress disorder (ASD)* has similar symptoms to PTSD – recurring intrusive recollections; emotional numbing and constriction of life activity; a physiological shift in the fear threshold – that affect sleep, concentration and one's sense of security. However, it notes, ASD is usually experienced for less than a month. While the idea that PTSD and ASD are similar, it adds, ASD actually takes into account dissociative processes such as dazes and feeling perceptual symptoms.<sup>59</sup>

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57 Kessler et al. (1995), Pp1048-1060.

58 Ochberg et al. at [http://www.dartcenter.org/Curriculum/module1/content\\_main\\_intro.html](http://www.dartcenter.org/Curriculum/module1/content_main_intro.html)

59 Loc. cit.

On the other hand, the site explains, *secondary traumatic stress* is ‘an empathic response that affects people such as therapists and journalists when they become overwhelmed by others’ traumatic experiences’. Sufferers of STS are not directly exposed to the traumatic event and, so, they tend to suffer its consequences secondarily.

Here Ochberg et al. acknowledge there are other, less common psychological responses to trauma that indicate the likelihood of an individual’s need for assistance from a medical or mental health professional. Their website summarises them thus:

- Severe Dissociation – feeling as if you or the world is ‘unreal,’ not feeling connected to one’s own body, losing one’s sense of identity or taking on a new identity, amnesia;
- Severe Intrusive Re-experiencing – flashbacks, terrifying screen memories or nightmares repetitive automatic re-enactment;
- Extreme Avoidance – agoraphobic-like social or vocational withdrawal, compulsive avoidance;
- Severe Hyperarousal – panic episodes, terrifying nightmares, difficulty controlling violent impulses, inability to concentrate;
- Debilitating Anxiety – ruminative worry, severe phobias, unshakeable obsessions, paralyzing nervousness, fear of losing control/going crazy;
- Severe Depression – lack of pleasure in life, worthlessness, self-blame, dependency, early wakenings;
- Problematic Substance Use – abuse or dependency, self-medication; and
- Psychotic Symptoms – delusions, hallucinations, bizarre thoughts or images.<sup>60</sup>

What distinguishes PTSD from more temporary effects, is the first of the trio of conditions: recurring and unavoidable recollections. Victims and survivors have to deal not only with lasting and unpleasant memories of a bad event but memories that hit so often and so hard ‘that the person cannot lead a normal life’<sup>61</sup>. Sometimes such recollections are so vivid that they are referred to as flashbacks or hallucinations and they cause the victim or survivor to repeatedly relive the event.<sup>62</sup>

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60 Ibid.

61 Coté & Simpson (2000), Pp29-31.

62 Ibid.

All memories related to traumatic injury are not created equal, say Coté and Simpson (2000), just as they are not all signs of PTSD.

A memory of how a loved one died in a drive-by shooting may be very painful but clearly remain just that, a memory, not a terrifying re-enactment. Retelling the painful memory under the right conditions can even help reduce and eventually master the pain. Volunteers from the Michigan Victim Alliance tell Michigan State University journalism classes that retelling their stories to sympathetic listeners does help victims to heal. That is an important factor for journalists to remember ...<sup>63</sup>

They acknowledge that avoidant behaviour and a sense of numbing ‘can help someone up to a point’.

The concern in PTSD is that this aspect becomes a serious obstacle to recovery. Journalists interviewing a survivor also can greatly underestimate how much the person still is affected months or years after the violence happened. A man who seems calm, even casual and unconcerned, during an interview about the drive-by shooting death of his son may in fact be numb – and may have lost his wife, friends, and job as a result ...<sup>64</sup>

These US journalism educators also describe in layperson’s terms what it is like to deal with serious emotional responses to trauma as well as the long-term consequences of dissociation. ‘Emotions tell us when and how to act, but they sometimes convey the stunning message that we cannot act. We are captive of horrible circumstances, and neither flight nor fighting back is possible. Then the emotional system itself may be torn apart or fragmented.’

When the system fails us, we often find respite in such defensive measures as use of drugs or alcohol, surrender of choices to another person, distractions, or dissociation. Dissociation is a mechanism of the brain that we use regularly in everyday circumstances, for example, to plan a project with one part of the brain while another enables us to steer a car through perilous traffic. The mechanism also comes into play in highly stressful situations, enabling us to focus alertly on things going on around us, although we seem not to feel the usual emotional reactions. In cases of prolonged or repeated stress, such as a torture victim might endure, the capacity to dissociate protects us from being overwhelmed. Forgetting, a form of dissociation, enables a person to maneuver through all the potentially upsetting reminders of an earlier traumatic experience without dealing with their full emotional effects. Helpful in times of real stress, dissociation becomes an impediment in calmer times when reminders of the old trauma habitually trigger dissociation.<sup>65</sup>

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63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid, P26.

### *Defining 'crisis' and 'disaster'*

The price of covering crisis after crisis is high and impacts on field and newsroom staff. But does constant coverage of crises have impacts beyond the personal? According to Moeller (1999), psychologist Charles Figley, and others, have labelled indirect traumatic exposure 'compassion fatigue' because constant exposure to traumatic incidents draws on the empathy of people who work with those who suffer trauma, desensitising them in some ways.<sup>66</sup>

Sometimes ... it seems as if all that the media cover are those regions of the world trampled by the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. At times it seems as if the media careen from one trauma to another, in a breathless tour of poverty, disease and death. The troubles blur. Crises become one crisis...

Compassion fatigue is the unacknowledged cause of much of the failure of international reporting today. It is at the base of many of the complaints about the public's short attention span, the media's pathetic journalism, the public's boredom with international news, the media's preoccupation with crisis coverage.<sup>67</sup>

A University of Maryland journalism professor, Moeller has written extensively about the ways compassion fatigue affects news coverage and audiences in the US, particularly coverage of foreign news. She suggests compassion fatigue alters news agendas, acting as a 'prior restraint', with editors and producers failing to assign stories and correspondents not covering 'events they believe will not appeal to their readers and viewers'. It also 'reinforces simplistic, formulaic coverage' and 'ratchets up the criteria for stories that get coverage', tempting journalists to find 'ever more sensational tidbits' to retain the attention of their audience. This, she says, leads to journalists rejecting 'events that aren't more dramatic or more lethal than their predecessors ... the newest event is represented as being more extreme or deadly or risky than a similar past situation'.

Compassion fatigue encourages the media to move on to other stories once the range of possibilities of coverage have been exhausted so that boredom doesn't set in. Events have a certain amount of time in the limelight, then, even if the situation has not been resolved, the media marches on. Further news is pre-empted. No new news is bad news.<sup>68</sup>

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66 Côté & Simpson (2000), P49.

67 Moeller, S.D., (1999). *Compassion Fatigue: How the media sell disease, famine, war and death*. New York: Routledge. Pp1-2

68 Loc. cit.

Compassion fatigue is not an unavoidable consequence of news coverage, Moeller concludes, but it is ‘an unavoidable consequence of the way the news is now covered’.<sup>69</sup>

Understanding the difference between a crisis (or critical event), a traumatic event (defined in the previous section) and a disaster is useful, and crisis literature from the fields of communication and psychology is plentiful. Hendricks (1985)<sup>70</sup> describes a crisis thus:

... a ‘turning point for better or worse’ or ‘an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs whose outcome will make a decisive difference for better or worse’ ... a state of crisis creates a perceived threat, a loss, or a challenge and that a crisis has three distinct components: a hazardous event which poses a threat to one’s life; a threat to instinctual need which is linked to prior vulnerability; and an inability to apply adaptive coping behaviors to the crisis situation.<sup>71</sup>

Hendricks suggests that among the many definitions of a crisis, common elements are:

1. Anxiety and stress produce a hazardous event.
2. This event occurs suddenly and unexpectedly.
3. The event may be one single event or a number of events.
4. Stress mounts as the person is unable to effectively cope or solve the problem.
5. As a result of overwhelming stress and the failure to adequately cope with stress, maladaptive behavior ensues.
6. The crisis gains momentum and personality fragmentation occurs.
7. As this crisis is occurring, there is increased likelihood that another crisis will occur (a common crisis producing event is the feeling that ‘I have failed to cope adequately’).
8. The crisis victim moves toward specific types of maladaptive behavior, including criminal behavior.
9. If effective intervention does not occur, the crisis victim reaches a physical and psychological breaking point and permanent damage is likely.<sup>72</sup>

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69 Loc. cit.

70 Hendricks, J.E., (1985). *Crisis Intervention: Contemporary issues for on-site interveners*. Springfield, Ill. USA: Thomas.

71 Op. cit., P7.

72 Op. cit., P8.

According to Caplan (1964)<sup>73</sup>, most crisis experiences that induce a psychological reaction have an active duration of from one to three days, while the crises themselves last from one to six weeks. Although one day or six weeks is a relatively short time, it is also an emotionally dangerous period. The crisis victim, says Caplan, needs timely assistance. And, while crises may involve physical impacts, threat of death or actual deaths, the scale and potential duration are much less than those after disasters, which – according to Ursano et al. (1994)<sup>74</sup> – are likely to impact on individuals and communities more and for longer. These trauma clinicians point out that disasters are either natural or manmade, noting that ‘disasters cause social disruption, loss and damage to property, and mass casualties’. The effects on individuals and communities are physical, psychological, and social, with both immediate and long-term consequences. The time taken to recover can vary greatly from person to person.<sup>75</sup>

Following research by Janoff-Bulman (1985) and Figley (1985), Ursano et al. (1994) also suggest that man-made disasters – those caused by the actions or inactions of human beings – often wrought far more distress for victims/survivors and their families/communities than those caused by ‘acts of God’.<sup>76</sup>

Unfortunately, however, longitudinal studies are rare and few attempts have been made to chart the course of post-trauma reactions over time. Studies investigating reactions to disasters of human origin are less common ... Those traumata resulting from pure human malevolence may be expected to shatter more basic assumptions (Janoff-Bulman, 1985) and be harder for victims to understand and cognitively process (Figley, 1985a) than those resulting from combat experiences or natural disasters. In addition, traumata of human origin are thought to result in more severe psychological reactions than natural disasters.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Caplan, G., (1964). *Principles of preventative psychiatry*. New York: Basic Books Inc. In Hendricks, J.E., (1985). *Crisis Intervention: Contemporary issues for on-site interveners*. Springfield, Ill. USA: Thomas. P8.

<sup>74</sup> Ursano, R.J., McCaughey, B.G. & Fullerton, C.S. (Eds.) (1994). *Individual and community responses to trauma and disaster: the structure of human chaos*. Great Britain: University Press, Cambridge. Pp75-75.

<sup>75</sup> Op. cit., P6.

<sup>76</sup> Op. cit., Pp75-76.

<sup>77</sup> Janoff-Bulman, R. (1985). ‘The aftermath of victimization: Rebuilding shattered assumptions’; & Figley, C. (1985a). ‘From victim to survivor: Social responsibility in the wake of catastrophe.’ Pp15-35. In C. Figley (Ed.) *Trauma and its wake: The study and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder*. Pp. 398-415. Both mentioned in Creamer, M., Burgess, P., Buckingham, W, & Pattison, P. (1993). ‘Posttrauma reactions following a multiple shooting.’ Mentioned in turn in Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) (1993) *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*. New York: Plenum Press.

Hendricks (1985) notes that the psychological field of ‘crisis intervention’ emerged from 1945 onwards. Even prior to this time, the importance of crises was noted. Hippocrates, a medical doctor, described crisis as ‘a sudden cessation of a state that gravely endangers life’<sup>78</sup>.

For the purposes of this thesis, the term ‘trauma’ will be taken to encompass any critical incidents, traumatic events or disasters that evoke traumatic responses – up to and including PTSD – in victims/survivors or their families/communities.

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78

Hendricks, J.E., (1985), P3.

### 2.3 Psychological consequences of trauma for individuals and communities

#### *Traumatic incidents in Australia*

One only has to look at broad crime statistics to see that in Australia alone a large number of people are touched by violent crimes each year. According to a 1991 video made by the South Australian Victims of Crime Support (VOCS) group, 4 per cent of reported crimes are crimes of violence with at least one victim in the justice cycle. Across Australia, says VOCS, that translates to about one million victims whose lives have been disrupted, violated and their recovery process takes time. For most, the trauma is eventually overcome and normal life resumes. However, there are some victims for whom recovery is a slow and painful process, particularly those who have suffered from crimes of violence.<sup>79</sup>

Even if one focuses on just a fraction of those statistics and examines the likely impact of people who go missing each year in Australia, it is easy to see that this, alone, touches thousands of families and hundreds of communities. And, while many cases will be resolved, some deliver brutal outcomes like that uncovered in Snowtown, South Australia where the decomposing and dismembered bodies of 11 missing persons were found after a 12-month investigation.

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Video recording, 'Victims of Crime' (South Australian Film Commission), 1991.

In 1998, the National Missing Persons Unit (NMPU)<sup>80</sup> told the Australian Senate that 26,000 people had ‘gone missing’ over a 12-month period and that around 98 per cent of cases were solved<sup>81</sup>. This would still translate to around 520 people going missing, without any trace, each year. Again, while not all will have suffered the fate of the Snowtown victims, families with a member who is missing without trace are likely to experience significant reactions to such difficult news and the way it is portrayed by the media.

Australian-based psychiatrist Raphael – in company with other researchers from around the world – has researched widely in the area of trauma and advocates more validation and evaluation of initiatives that have grown out of the PTSD area, such as critical incident stress debriefing programs offered to emergency services personnel. Such programs are largely based on work done by Dr Jeffrey T. Mitchell and his colleagues. While calls for more rigorous evaluation of interventions are being heeded, one drawback researchers in this area seem to face is that they rarely have pre-trauma baseline data to compare with post-traumatic responses.

Whatever individuals’ responses are to trauma – and they do vary – the role of the media and the impact of its reports in the aftermath of traumatic events are the principal interests of this thesis.

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80 Evidence given to the Australian Senate Select Committee during its 1998 hearings into self-regulation in the information and communication industries. The National Missing Persons Unit (NMPU) was established in December 1995, initially under a four-year grant. It supported jurisdictional missing persons units and community initiatives to establish a uniform national approach to the issue of outstanding missing persons. These were those persons who disappeared under suspicious circumstances or were missing for more than 60 days. The NMPU sought to gain access to government information relating to missing persons to resolve cases earlier and to reduce the trauma for those involved.

81 Carol Kiernan, Co-ordinator, NMPU, Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence, in Commonwealth of Australia Senate Official Committee Hansard (1998, February), *Self-regulation in the information and communications industries*, February 16 hearing, Canberra (uncorrected proof).

### *Impact of trauma on victims*

Trauma affects one's sense of vulnerability and can impact on victims immediately after an event and for some time after that. According to Figley (1985b), reaction to trauma is 'an emotional state of discomfort and stress resulting from memories of an extraordinary, catastrophic experience which shattered the survivor's sense of invulnerability to harm'.<sup>82</sup> Citing Quarantelli (1985) and Wilson et al. (1985), Figley says it appears that the presence of psychological symptoms following exposure to a traumatic incident is the norm rather than the exception, particularly in the period immediately post-trauma.<sup>83</sup>

Ursano et al. (1994) conclude that certain factors predispose some individuals to prolonged traumatic responses and that most studies show those with psychiatric illness prior to a traumatic event or disaster may be at an increased risk. However, those with no previous psychiatric illness are also clearly at risk. Other studies highlight the importance of the degree of trauma rather than pre-existing psychiatric illness or even biology in the development of psychiatric illness after traumatic events.<sup>84</sup>

VOCS suggests certain experiences can also be a predictor for greater psychological impacts. In cases of sexual assaults or rapes, survivors often find psychological damage is far greater than physical damage.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Figley, C. (Ed.) (1985b). *Trauma and its wake: The study and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder*. Pp 398-415. In Creamer, M., Burgess, P., Buckingham, W., & Pattison, P. (1993). Posttrauma reactions following a multiple shooting.' In Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) (1993) *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*. Plenum Press, New York.

<sup>83</sup> Quarantelli, E.L. (1985). An assessment of conflicting views on mental health: The consequences of traumatic events. In Figley, C. (Ed.) *Trauma and its wake: The study and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder* (pp. 173-215). Brunner/Mazel, New York; and Wilson, J., Smith, W.K., & Johnson, S. (1985). A comparative analysis of PTSD among various survivor groups. In Figley, C. (Ed.) *Trauma and its wake: The study and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder* (pp. 142-172). Brunner/Mazel, New York. Both mentioned in Creamer, M., Burgess, P., Buckingham, W., & Pattison, P. (1993). Posttrauma reactions following a multiple shooting. In Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) (1993) *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*. Plenum Press, New York.

<sup>84</sup> Ursano, R.J., McCaughey, B.G. & Fullerton, C.S. (Eds.) (1994). *Individual and community responses to trauma and disaster: the structure of human chaos*. Great Britain: University Press, Cambridge. Pp 9-10.

<sup>85</sup> Video recording, 'Victims of Crime' (South Australian Film Commission), 1991.

Despite a large body of research devoted to the negative impacts of trauma on victims and survivors, some researchers note that trauma can also have positive effects. Sledge, Boydstun and Rahe (1980)<sup>86</sup> found that approximately one-third of US Air Force Vietnam era prisoners of war (POWs) reported having benefited from their prisoner of war experience. These POWs tended to be the ones who had suffered the most traumatic experiences. According to Card (1983)<sup>87</sup>, Sledge et al (1980) and Ursano, Boydstun & Wheatley (1981)<sup>88</sup>, trauma facilitates a move toward health for some people. Ursano himself later notes that a traumatic experience can become the centre around which victims reorganise a previously disorganised life, reorienting their values and goals.<sup>89</sup>

So how does one confirm whether a victim, survivor or witness has been adversely affected by a traumatic event? And what role might news media and news reports have played in their reactions?

The first question is easier to answer than the second because, by turning to established diagnostic criteria for disorders like PTSD, symptoms can be matched and impacts clearly understood. Firstly, the diagnosis of PTSD requires exposure to a traumatic event. In addition to exposure, there must be re-experiencing (intrusive), avoidant and arousal symptoms (see Appendix 4 of this thesis for the full APA list of diagnostic criteria). The symptoms must also have been present for at least one month. Confirmation of disorders such as PTSD, of course, requires the assessment of a trained clinician.

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86 Sledge, W.H., Boydstun, J.A., & Rahe, A.J. (1980). Self-concept changes related to war captivity. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 37, Pp 430-43.

87 Card, J.J. (1983). *Lives after Viet Nam*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

88 Ursano, R.J., Boydstun, J.A., & Wheatley, R.D. (1981). Psychiatric illness in US Air Force Vietnam prisoners of war: a five-year follow-up. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 138, Pp 310-14.

89 Ursano, R.J. (1987). Comments on: 'Post-traumatic stress disorder: the stressor criterion.' *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 175(5), Pp 273-5.

VOCS readily acknowledges victims of crimes, and those who support them, usually suffer other losses than simply physical or psychological ones. Financial losses are common and criminals are not always caught. Even if they are, VOCS notes, they are not always able to pay. *Ex gratia* payments are often poor by comparison to potential earnings and ‘victims who have lost a loved one often face a community disdain when questions of compensation arise’.<sup>90</sup>

Only anecdotal accounts from those who experience crises, traumatic events and disasters – both directly and indirectly – can help answer the second question by highlighting various impacts of both news media behaviour and news reports on individuals and communities beyond that of their responses to the trauma itself. Later in this thesis, nine Australian case studies begin to answer this question.

It is clear victims and survivors of trauma already have to deal with impacts that include physical losses, significant to severe psychological reactions, financial burdens, as well as community/social opprobrium or isolation. Their families/communities can also experience some or all of these as well. Enter into this equation media coverage of the trauma and its victims and survivors – whether that coverage be accurate or otherwise – and an already potent mix of impacts will be escalated, as Ochberg points out:

Because human response to psychological trauma is varied, it is important for the journalist not to make unfounded assumptions about what the person who has experienced trauma is feeling. The adage, ‘You can’t judge a book by its cover,’ is particularly apt when assessing the state of other people’s emotions and well-being when they are under psychological stress. Seemingly ‘normal’ and composed people may be suffering deeply but, for one reason or another, don’t reflect that pain outwardly. On the other hand, someone who is crying during an interview may not necessarily want to stop talking. Indeed it may be the interviewer who is uncomfortable and decides to end the interview abruptly or prematurely, but the interviewee would actually prefer to continue. The point is, interviewing and writing about traumatized people professionally and accurately requires a degree of skill and insight ...<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Video recording, ‘Victims of Crime’ (South Australian Film Commission), 1991.

<sup>91</sup> Ochberg cited from in the Dart Center’s trauma awareness training module for journalists which can be accessed online at [http://www.dartcenter.org/Curriculum/module1/content\\_main\\_intro.html](http://www.dartcenter.org/Curriculum/module1/content_main_intro.html)

When the victim of a traumatic incident is a journalist, his or her insights into trauma and how the media reports such incidents can be especially powerful. US journalist Bruce Shapiro was the victim of a multiple stabbing in a sidewalk café in Seattle in 1994. He first wrote of his experiences in the newsmagazine *Nation*<sup>92</sup> and later shared his critical impressions about media coverage of this event with Côté and Simpson (2000)<sup>93</sup>. Appendix 11 of this thesis recounts how Shapiro found the approaches of some reporters shallow and the content of certain reports callous or carelessly prepared. Similarly, the complicated and complexing experiences of retired psychotherapist Audrey McCollum – who found she had to deal with local, state and national media attention after her neighbours were murdered – also sheds light on a number of things that can and do go wrong, even when an interviewee only has the best of intentions<sup>94</sup>. The research done for this thesis reinforces Shapiro’s and McCollum’s observations.

### *Working with traumatised people*

For victims and survivors themselves, formal assistance tends to come, post-trauma, from psychiatric and psychological support services – often self-sought – and tends to be delivered one-on-one, as the symptoms dictate and over whatever period a victim or survivor chooses. Psychologists call this sort of support ‘intervention’ and its aim is to help victims become survivors and return them to as ‘normal’ a state as possible.

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<sup>92</sup> Shapiro, B. (1995). ‘One Violent Crime.’ *Nation*, April 1995. Pp445-52.

<sup>93</sup> Côté & Simpson (2000), Pp39-41 [Reproduced, with permission, in Appendix 11.]

<sup>94</sup> McCollum, A. (Fall, 2001), “When Journalists Arrive ... A neighbor wonders about her role as a media source: ‘had my attempt to honor dear friends actually caused harm?’”, *Nieman Reports*, v55 i3 p86 (3).

Hendricks (1985) describes psychological ‘crisis intervention’ as the timely intrusion into people’s lives when their own coping mechanisms prove ineffective. The goal of such intervention, he says, is to assist crisis victims to return to their pre-crisis levels of functioning and to ‘seek avenues for positive change’.<sup>95</sup> He says the theory of crises and crisis intervention is concerned with how and why crises occur, the resultant behaviour, how it affects one’s thinking and belief system, and how interveners can effectively help.

A crisis occurs when unusual stress brought on by unexpected and disruptive events render an individual either physically and/or emotionally disabled because (the individual’s) usual coping mechanisms prove ineffective. During the crisis period, the individual has the opportunity either to marshal additional resources in order to gain control and to grow personally or to encounter a disorganisation of the personality and become more vulnerable and emotionally unstable. As a result of this ineffective problem solving, anxiety increases, depression mounts, disorganisation of thought and behaving continues and a severe disabling condition ensues.<sup>96</sup>

This intervention may be immediately or much later, Hendricks says, depending on when symptoms become evident or overwhelming.

According to Mitchell & Dyregrov (1993)<sup>97</sup>, several authors – including Raphael, viz., Singh, Bradbury, & Lambert (1983-1984)<sup>98</sup>; Titchener & Lindy, (1980)<sup>99</sup> and Cox (1980)<sup>100</sup> – have indicated that it is not rare for there to be a latency period of a few months, or occasionally a few years, before psychological reactions became apparent. This, say Mitchell and Dyregrov (1993), presents a major problem for the diagnosis of PTSD and the management of the post-trauma situation.

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95 Hendricks, J.E., (1985), P9.

96 Op. cit., P164.

97 Mitchell, J.T. and Dyregrov, A. (1993). In *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) Plenum Press, New York. Pp907-908.

98 Raphael, B., Singh, B., Bradbury, L., & Lambert, F. (1983-1984). Who helps the helper? The effects of disaster on the rescue worker. *Omega*, 14 (1), Pp9-20.

99 Titchener, J.L., & Lindy, J.D. (1980). *Affect defense and insight: Psychoanalytic observations of bereaved families and clinicians at a major disaster*. Unpublished manuscript. University of Cincinnati.

100 Cox, J.D. (1980). Occupational stress and individual strain: A sociopsychological study of emergency medical personnel. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

Most news journalists will be interacting with recent and longer-term trauma victims and survivors in the course of their work, but how will they know whether or not the individual is coping? Even with a clear idea of a victim's or survivor's frame of mind, will journalists stop to consider whether what they write, say or show will further distress the victim/survivor or their families/communities?

Indeed, journalists themselves are at potential risk of experiencing unwanted psychological responses to traumatic events. Yet there is almost no academic research or debate about the impacts journalists might cause or experience. Nor is there much written about the families of those whose job it is to respond to traumatic incidents.

Sale had cause to ponder both problems when he was involved in negotiations with Port Arthur gunman Martin Bryant and in the months afterwards.

During the event itself, which went for 19 hours of more, one of the things I didn't realise because I was down there, was the very limited information that was coming out through the media during the night. And I didn't realise until I got home how distressed my family were. They knew I was there and they didn't know what the hell was happening because nothing was coming (out). The police were so careful about what they released because they knew Bryant might be hearing it. So the information about where people were and their circumstances and, that was not just for me – I was up in a caravan at Taranna – what about all the police officers and their families, the families of the media ...

Sale said those who were involved in responding to the massacre 'in a big way' were obviously struggling at times. An 'outstanding example of that', Sale said, was ABC Radio and TV reporter Judy Tierney: 'She's made of tungsten that lady, she's so tough. But I saw her a couple of times in the aftermath and on TV and she was getting quite rattled, almost incoherent, by the time of the trial. Her reports from the trial are probably things she wouldn't normally produce.'

Australian journalists themselves have acknowledged the difficulties and challenges faced when covering traumatic events. Former ABC TV News Director Richard Lower<sup>101</sup> has spoken in detail about the fallout felt in the ABC's Hobart newsroom, while Tasmanian journalism educator and occasional *Sydney Morning Herald* reporter Lindsay Simpson gave her personal account of reporting the massacre as well as residual ethical dilemmas that arose.<sup>102</sup>

Yet, despite these experiences, few Australian newsrooms have seriously embraced trauma education or support programs at the turn of the century. Simply by looking at how trauma education and support initiatives have developed in other industries, Australian media organisations could readily find valuable pointers. Lest individuals in media organisations think that an absence of discussions about the impact of trauma means there is no problem in their field, research suggests this has been the 'historical' pattern elsewhere. For instance, trauma support for personnel in 'first-responding agencies' – police, ambulance, fire and rescue bodies, state emergency services, etc. – has come a long way over the past decade or more. Mitchell and Dyregrov (1993) noted the paucity of literature related to emergency and disaster workers prior to 1978: 'It is as if researchers and clinicians failed to consider the potential deleterious impact that emergency work was having on the participants.'<sup>103</sup>

Work by Mitchell and other experts in the US, Europe and Australia has seen the development of critical incident stress debriefing, trauma education and peer-support programs for police and emergency services workers. This trauma support work bears consideration by Australian media at all levels, as parallels between these industries and journalism are evident.

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<sup>101</sup> Lower, R. (July-December, 1999), "Port Arthur Massacre: A TV Editor's Experience", *AustraliaPacific MediaEducator*, Issue No. 7.

<sup>102</sup> Simpson, L. (December, 2001), "Reporting Port Arthur: A Personal Account", *Australian Journalism Review*, Vol. 23 (2). Pp 191-199.

<sup>103</sup> Mitchell, J.T. and Dyregrov, A. (1993). In *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) Plenum Press, New York. P905.

It has long been known that victims of disasters and other smaller, but still painful, life events suffer significant short- and/or long-term psychological sequelae. The focus of most psychosocial interventions and follow-up services or research during the last three or four decades has been on the actual victims and survivors of the distressing events.

Those who came to help others (e.g., emergency medical service personnel) were thought to be trained not to react to human carnage and destruction or to the pain of the survivors. They were considered exempt from the psychological sequelae which befell the victims and survivors.

However, recent research and experience with emergency personnel, such as firefighters, paramedics, police officers, and disaster workers, clearly indicates that these helpers are subjected to stressors which can produce an array of psychological, social, and physical reactions that may be extremely stressful.<sup>104</sup>

Disaster workers are not alone in their reactions to stressful work conditions. Rayner (1958)<sup>105</sup> described over-intellectualization, emotional suppression, rigid thinking and limited decision-making in emergency care nurses. Lippert and Ferrara (1981)<sup>106</sup> reported police officers who take a human life in the line of duty experience strong feelings of guilt, anger, immobilization and denial. Direct work with people in need of help is emotionally stressful and may produce feelings of fear, anger, embarrassment, frustration and despair, according to Adams, (1980)<sup>107</sup>; Cherniss (1980)<sup>108</sup>; Kahn (1978)<sup>109</sup>; Maslach (1978)<sup>110</sup>; and Maslach and Jackson (1979).<sup>111</sup>

According to Mitchell & Dyregrov (1993), even emergency workers who did not have direct on-site involvement with chaos and destruction – nor direct contact with any victims – may still experience significant stress as a result of their work in support of those more directly involved personnel. Both groups, they conclude, can benefit from pre-event trauma training.

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Loc. cit.

105

Rayner, J.F. (1958). How do nurses behave in disaster? *Nursing Outlook*, 6, Pp 572-576.

106

Lippert, W. & Ferrara, E.R. (1981, December). The cost of 'coming out on top': emotional responses to surviving the deadly battle. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* 50(12), Pp 6-10.

107

Adams, J.D. (1980). *Understanding and managing stress: A book of readings*. San Diego, CA: University Associates.

108

Cherniss, C. (1980). *Professional burnout in human service organisations*. New York: Praeger.

109

Kahn, R. (1978). Job burnout prevention and remedies. *Public Welfare*, 36(2), P61.

110

Maslach, C. (1978). Job burnout: How people cope. *Public Welfare*, 36(2), Pp56-58.

111

Maslach, C. & Jackson, S. (1979, May). Burned out cops and their families. *Psychology Today*, P59.

In the field of emergency services, support tends to be delivered to groups of personnel and often incorporates a pre-event education component, including 'stress inoculation' or exposing personnel to images and experiences in order to 'prepare' them for the real thing.

It seems apparent then that pre-incident stress education programs can play a vital role in reducing stress reactions in emergency personnel and disaster workers ... Our own experience has demonstrated that stress education programs for emergency personnel have enhanced their sense of self-confidence in their ability to cope successfully with distressing events.

These programs have partially desensitized emergency personnel to the sights, sounds and experiences of the emergency scene so that they are less distressed by those stimuli. It has been our experience that stress-trained emergency workers recognize more readily stress reactions in themselves and others and are more prone to request help earlier.

Stress-educated and trained emergency workers also face their stress reactions with a greater sense of control and a feeling that they are not abnormal or unique but expectable aspects of the work itself.<sup>112</sup>

Few journalists in Australia covering traumatic stories will have had anywhere near the same level of preparation. And, if one accepts that it is basic human instinct to help those in greatest danger or distress, journalists will at times face dilemmas when they witness graphic events or share in their recall with interviewees immediately afterwards. Journalists need to – and are expected to – keep a professional distance at the scene of traumatic incidents, to allow first responders free access to victims and to allow themselves to complete their assignments with objectivity and within pressing deadlines. But, if they are called on to assist, even temporarily, they are being asked to cross their usual boundary of separation. Those journalists who do not 'surrender' to fundamental instincts in such circumstances could well walk away with traumas of their own.

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112

Mitchell, J.T. and Dyregrov, A. (1993). Traumatic Stress in Disaster Workers and Emergency Personnel Prevention and Intervention in Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, Plenum Press, New York. P 908.

This phenomenon has been recognised among paramedics by McGown (1981),<sup>113</sup> who notes that paramedics routinely list infant deaths, child abuse, mass casualties, disaster and high-rise fires as the most stressful calls that they handle.<sup>114</sup> For many of these sorts of events, journalists are also in attendance – albeit in an even more constrained role – and, depending on the circumstances and available technology, these journalists may remain on the scene for longer periods than even some first-responders.

A few Australian media organisations have started to provide access to internal or external counselling services for individual staff who might be traumatised by their experiences on the job<sup>115</sup>. However, as QUT Master of Arts candidate Philip Castle discovered, anecdotal evidence from those in the field suggests journalists eschew any such services if they perceived such assistance might jeopardise their careers.

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<sup>113</sup> McGlown, K.J. (1981). *Attrition in the fire service: A report*. Washington, DC: Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Fire Administration. In Mitchell, J.T. and Dyregrov, A. (1993). *Traumatic Stress in Disaster Workers and Emergency Personnel Prevention and Intervention* in Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, Plenum Press, New York. Pp 906.

<sup>114</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>115</sup> Castle, P. in his QUT Master of Creative Industries thesis.

*Impact of news reporting of trauma*

In his account of the April 28, 1996 massacre at Port Arthur, pharmacist Walter Mikac – who lost his wife and two daughters – explained what it felt like to be the brunt of intense media interest at such a vulnerable time. He told how, on the morning after the massacre, he travelled with his father-in-law, Keith Moulton, and two friends – local medical doctors Pam and Steve Ireland – from where he lived at Nubeena to Port Arthur where he was to formally identify the bodies of his wife and children, at that stage still lying beside the road. Because police still had the area under tight restrictions, they first had to travel to the police forward command post at Taranna’s Tasmanian Devil Park. When they reached Taranna, they found a horde of media:

My eyes were swelling and becoming puffy from crying. My hands didn’t want to leave my forehead in some kind of bid to shield the reality from entering my brain. As I focused on the people in front of the park, I saw a huge contingent of vehicles, police milling around and people standing behind an *impromptu* barricade. Interim police headquarters and a media base had been set up outside the park. It was not until we had become stationary in the carpark that I realised they were news crews. Scores of them gazing in our direction with TV cameras pointing and long-range lenses at the ready. It then became clear that we were the focus of their attention. Not being quite sure how to react, I held my hands up over my face as tears streamed down my face. I was totally unprepared for this.

‘Can’t they leave me in peace? I haven’t even had a chance to say goodbye to my family yet,’ I cried.

Pam Ireland was outside jousting with the powers-that-be. Her dogged ability to steamroll where necessary meant that, although it would be difficult, she would get the required permission.

During this brief period the media edged closer towards the three of us waiting in Keith’s car until we felt like caged animals being thrown to a sea of unknown, ravenous faces. More media congregated up to the barricade. Keith’s face was totally expressionless, as though all life had drained from it. His wife and Nanette’s mother, Grace, had died just three months before from a long-standing illness.

[Dr] Steve Ireland could feel I was uncomfortable. Propped on the edge of the back seat, he placed his hand on my shoulder to ease my anxiety.

‘How pathetic are the press. They’re bloodhounds,’ he said, unable to contain his aggravation. I desperately wanted to escape to the refuge of a dark cave somewhere far away. Then, Steve jumped out the rear door. Moving just a few steps towards the barrage of lenses, he yelled, ‘Have some bloody consideration. This guy has just lost his entire family. Give him some privacy.’

This had the effect of a 44-gallon drum of berley being dumped into a shark cage. The media line acted like a starting line rather than a barricade. Bodies with microphones and cameras surged towards our vehicle. I didn’t want to be photographed like this, but then again I wanted the world to see the tears that were welling up in every cell of my body. I could hear the shutters flickering. At that moment I knew I was no longer just a husband and father mourning the loss of his life’s essence – whether I liked it or not, I had become one of the living casualties, the walking wounded from Port Arthur. The image of my distressed, slumped body trying to deny the inevitable would be splashed all over the newspapers the following day.<sup>116</sup>

American social scientist Deborah Spungen, the mother of a murder victim and a victim advocate, says the circumstances of a murder case ‘may transform co-victims from ordinary citizens into household names’. The reputation of these people, as well as the reputation of the murder victim, can be seriously maligned in the process, Spungen says. If what they do or say is broadcast inaccurately, ‘co-victims are faced with a possible lose-lose dilemma: (a) Speak to the press in an often futile attempt to set the record straight and possibly intensify the media coverage, or (b) remain silent in the hope that this inaccessibility will make the press lose interest’.<sup>117</sup> Spungen singles out the media as ‘quite aggressive at preliminary hearings of high-profile cases’.

Much of this confusion and jockeying for position is caused by the competitiveness of the various stations and news media to obtain the best possible coverage. Cases at a homicide preliminary, grand jury, or other first hearing stage are still fresh stories. A year or more down the road, when the trial is held, the case may no longer hold the same allure. Television coverage at these hearings tends to border on the sensational – shots of grieving co-victims, fights between the families of a homicide victim and the defendant, and pictures of the defendant being led away in handcuffs and leg chains. When the still photographers from the newspapers, accompanied by their reporters, and the microphones and reporters from the radio stations are added, the net result is a welcoming committee that resembles a swarm of killer bees. This is the scene that generally awaits co-victims<sup>118</sup> as they approach the courthouse or courtroom.

From Spungen and Mikac’s words, one begins to understand what it might feel like to be at the epicentre of a traumatic incident involving loss of lives. But news reports of traumatic incidents impact on victims and survivors, witnesses, families, the broader community and journalists themselves in various ways. Sale described the ‘avalanche’ of media coverage in Tasmania following the 1996 massacre as ‘quite extraordinary’, saying it had a ‘withering’ effect on the whole community over the coming days. Despite the hypercoverage in the aftermath of a traumatic event, stories and images remain the most powerful communicators, not only of facts and impressions but also of emotions and the human condition.

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117 Spungen (1998), P224.

118 Ibid.

In examining individual and community responses to trauma and disaster, McCaughey, Hoffman & Llewellyn (1994)<sup>119</sup> are positive and constructive about the media's role in natural disasters such as earthquakes:

The news media is a very important factor during the post-earthquake period. During this time communications can be dramatically impaired (Spencer et al., 1977)<sup>120</sup>. The news media can pass information even though their means may be limited (Sood et al., 1987)<sup>121</sup>. After the September 19, 1985, Mexico City earthquake telephone service was disrupted; radio and television stations used their facilities to help dispatch rescue equipment. At other times, the news media have been viewed unfavorably. The same television stations in Mexico City replayed death and injury scenes, which unnecessarily upset the population (Palacios et al., 1986)<sup>122</sup>.

Research done for this thesis shows people who are near an event – and those who are distanced from it – usually draw on the media to make sense of what is happening. In confronting and digesting a critical or traumatic incident, victims and survivors are searching for the ‘how’ and ‘why’, attempting to construct a chronology of events and mental pictures of what transpired.

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- 119 McCaughey, B.M., Hoffman, K.J., & Llewellyn, C.H. (1994) in *Individual and community responses to trauma and disaster: the structure of human chaos*. Great Britain: University Press, Cambridge. Pp145-150.
- 120 Spencer, H.C., Campbell, C.C., Romero, A. et al. (1977, July) Disease surveillance and decision-making after the 1976 Guatemala earthquake. *Lancet*, Pp181-4.
- 121 Sood, R., Stockdale, G. & Rogers, E.M. (1987). How the news media operates in national disasters. *Journal of Communication*, 37 (3), Pp27-41.
- 122 Palacios, A., Cueli, J., Camacho, J., Clergia, R., Cuevas, P., Ayala, J. & Cossoff, L. (1986). The traumatic effect of mass communication in the Mexico City earthquake: crisis intervention and preventative measures. *International Review of Psychoanalysis*, 13(3). Pp279-93.

Because news media are so heavily focused on conflict and impact, says Moeller (1999), the picture seen through the eyes of the media can be skewed.

As the *New York Times* columnist Max Frankel says, 'Conflict is our favorite kind of news.' Crises are turned into a social experience that we can grasp; pain is commercialized, wedged between the advertisements for hemorrhoid remedies and headache medicines. In that cultural context, suffering becomes infotainment – just another commodity, another moment of pain to get its minute or column in the news. Our experience and our understanding of a crisis is weakened, diluted and distorted. If the news shows prompt us to equate chronic famine with chronic fatigue syndrome we are somewhat relieved. It helps absolve us of responsibility for what we see and can do little about. So with relief, we forget and go on with our everyday lives – until some other crisis image seizes our attention for a second.<sup>123</sup>

Even decades later, Moeller notes, most people – even those with little or no connection to an event – will remember where they were and what they were doing when they first heard about a major news event such as an assassination, a massacre or a particularly barbarous act of terrorism. They will also be able to recall specific images in detail.

Coté and Simpson (2000) describe how 'international media armies' converge on the scenes of particularly newsworthy traumatic incidents, fight for the most revealing words and pictures, then quickly move on, 'leaving those events framed in our minds as fleeting actions, lasting only hours or days, and the images at their center only those of fear, anxiety, shock, and grief'.<sup>124</sup> In their frenzy, some journalists break the traditional rules of reporting by pulling on hospital scrubs or firefighter's gear or falsely claiming to be a victim's relative 'to gain illicit entry to off-limits wards, areas designated as official crime scenes, and hotel areas set aside for families of the dead'.<sup>125</sup>

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123 Moeller, (1999), P35.

124 Coté & Simpson (2000), P1.

125 Ibid.

The price of becoming a public commodity after a traumatic incident, whether willingly or not, is high according to Walter Mikac. In *To have and to hold*, the book he wrote with Simpson, Mikac details his path from anonymity to public figure.<sup>126</sup> This phenomenon will be examined more closely in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

In an attempt to gauge the impact of news coverage after traumatic events, Coté and Simpson brought together journalists and the families of murder victims in Seattle, Washington, in the late 1980s. They found that when survivors vented their anger, usually confident journalists became more defensive than sensitive when they faced families' complaints.<sup>127</sup>

In Australia, according to VOCS, the nation's murder rate has not altered significantly in 100 years, yet the impact of having a loved one murdered is just as traumatic. Some of that trauma is caused by the media, according to Anne-Marie Mykyta, the author of *It's a long way to Truro*<sup>128</sup>. Mykyta's daughter was one of those killed in South Australia's 'Truro murders' in the 1970s.

Often, I think, a lot of very dreadful things are done in the name of the public's right to know. I remember when [another Truro victim] Richard Kelvin was found and the news was coming out on the hour – and I was home and my son was here, it must have been the school holidays – and he said to me 'What does it mean 'anal injuries'?' and then you could see this look of absolutely sick comprehension ... as he realised how Richard had died and the reports in *The Advertiser* were far too brutal and specific. I wrote to the editor and he wrote back and said 'we do sympathise and we're sorry it upset you but we believe passionately in the public's right to know' ... which become, I think, somebody's voyeuristic tendencies and not the public good.<sup>129</sup>

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126 Mikac & Simpson (1997), Pp135-183.

127 Coté & Simpson (2000), PX, where they describe face-to-face confrontations of families and journalists at a seminar.

128 Mykyta, A.M. (1981), *It's a long way to Truro*, Melbourne: McPhee Gribble.

129 Video recording, 'Victims of Crime' (South Australian Film Commission), 1991.

Spungen – who has written at least two books about the experiences of ‘co-victims’, the loved ones of the deceased – says stories on television ‘can speak for themselves, but this quality also makes the medium inherently more intrusive as a result of the lights, cameras, news crews, and news vans’.<sup>130</sup> Spungen says that multiple television news crews arriving at murder scenes, hospitals, victims’ homes or courthouses ‘can be overwhelming and frightening to the co-victim’. Furthermore, these anxious sources might willingly give a lengthy interview to see their story compressed into a much shorter news report and they end up feeling ‘shortchanged’: ‘Television reporters generally do not inform co-victims about the television news process, so their expectations are rarely met.’<sup>131</sup>

Spungen points out that the initial footage, which may be quite gruesome, ‘may be replayed for years as the murder case progresses through the criminal justice system or as other events put the story back in the news’. Spungen asserts that such repeats retraumatise people close to the dead person each time they see these images. In cases that receive extensive coverage, ‘the mere presence of the media can trigger traumatic memories, even if the co-victim feels that the reporters have done a good job’.<sup>132</sup>

‘Violence as entertainment’, says Spungen, is ever more evident on US television, with the advent of tabloid-format programs like *Hard Copy* and *Inside Edition* where the show ‘will often pay large sums for interviews, which are not typically offered by regular news or magazine-style shows.’ These programs, Spungen notes, ‘are usually not amenable to requests to consider the privacy, pain, and grief of the co-victim when making production decisions’ and their reporters ‘can be persistent and intimidating’. Print journalists ‘may be more subtle, but pens, pencils, tape recorders, and cameras can be equally intimidating’, according to Spungen, who recalled her own experience:

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<sup>130</sup> Spungen, D. (1983) *And I don't want to live this life*. New York: Random House. Pp379-380. In Spungen, D. (1998), *Homicide: The hidden victims*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications. Pp219-220.

<sup>131</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>132</sup> Loc. cit.

I thought you would want to know. We're running a whole feature on your daughter. If you don't talk to me, it's going to be an unflattering portrait. I'm sure you'll find it upsetting. If you'd only give me a few minutes. I'll say whatever you want me to say.' ... What easy marks we were that day. What a smoothie he was. He was, in effect, saying: 'Give me an interview or your daughter gets screwed in print.'<sup>133</sup>

Spungen says the quality of reporting about the victim and 'the media's attempt to involve the co-victim unnecessarily in that process become major issues to add to the co-victim's trauma' and amount to the infliction of a 'second wound'.

This harm is caused by a general insensitivity to and lack of understanding of the co-victim's situation. One newspaper editor lamented, 'Reporters are often accused of exploiting horror, harassing traumatized families, invading the privacy of mourners. Alas, it can happen' (Gissler, 1989, p. 11)...

For example, in covering a murder case, the media tend to look at the victim as one extreme or the other – a *good* victim or a *bad* victim. The proclivity of the press to automatically assign labels and euphemisms, however accurate or inaccurate, to a murder victim greatly increases the co-victim's second wound.<sup>134</sup>

This is evident in the number of complaints lodged to the media. For example, *Seattle Post-Intelligence* editorial page editor Joann Byrd, during her three years in the role of ombudsman (sic) at *The Washington Post*, fielded thousands of calls from people angered by media coverage of traumatic incidents.<sup>135</sup> Australian media outlets have largely eschewed the appointment of complaints officers.

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133 Loc. cit.

134 Gissler, S. (1989, February 16). 'Death and the media: An editor's dilemmas.' Paper presented at the Interdisciplinary Education Conference on Bereavement and Grief, Yeshiva University, New York. In Spungen (1998), Pp224-228.

135 Coté & Simpson (2000), P2.

*The prospect of secondary trauma*

Victims, survivors and witnesses are not the only ones affected by a traumatic event. Families, communities, colleagues and ‘first-responders’ – police, ambulance, fire and rescue services, state emergency services personnel, tow truck drivers, mortuary workers and, in larger events, support agencies such as the Salvation Army or the Red Cross – are potentially susceptible to secondary trauma as these individuals work through what happened to victims and survivors. The actions of the media and its subsequent reports also have significant effects on this group of ‘indirect’ victims. As was discussed previously, those in the media can themselves experience traumatic responses to covering particularly disturbing events.

Many victims and survivors, or their families, hold the media responsible for, or contributing to, their secondary trauma. The sister of a victim in a series of murders of young boys in South Australia, who was 12 herself at the time, recalled her family’s experiences with the media:

When Alan first went missing and (then) was found to be a murder victim, we had a lot of trouble with ... all sectors of the media through (their) speculation of (him) being a male prostitute, a drug addict, a drug pusher, a street kid and if, of course, we stood up and said ‘No, that’s not true’ then a lot of the community attitude would be ‘of course they’re going to say that, that’s their son or their brother’.<sup>136</sup>

Scott describes the extent of secondary trauma experienced by the Tasman Peninsula community and others after the Port Arthur massacre.

It was almost as though the people who had been at Port Arthur on April 28 had contracted a plague that went on to infect their families, friends, acquaintances, counsellors and everyone else with whom they came in contact .... Children have suffered especially severely ... many ... are still having nightmares and are frightened of the bad man coming to get them, of guns or helicopters.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Video recording, ‘Victims of Crime’ (South Australian Film Commission), 1991. (These were the Truro murders referred to earlier.)

<sup>137</sup> Scott, M., (1997). *Port Arthur: A story of strength and courage*. Milsons Point, NSW: Random House. Pp140-141.

She notes the tragic consequences of reporting seemingly accurate details about Bryant's mental health when those who suffered from schizophrenia also experienced 'untold distress'. This came about, she says, because when Bryant applied for a disability pension in 1994, he had been assessed by a psychiatrist who 'raised the possibility that he might be developing an illness of a schizophrenic type'. But Bryant was never diagnosed or treated as suffering from schizophrenia, and all the psychiatrists who examined him after his arrest agreed that, although intellectually impaired and suffering from a 'personality disorder', he was not schizophrenic. Unfortunately, the remark made in 1994 led to an assertion in a police media briefing that Bryant was schizophrenic and this, in turn, was published and led to a great deal of ignorant hostility in the broader community towards the mentally ill.

Elaine Reeves was prompted to write in *Open Mind*, the journal of the Tasmanian Association for Mental Health: 'At least three suicides in New South Wales were attributed to reaction to [the police media announcement]. It was reported that one young man who killed himself had left a note saying he had schizophrenia and rather than be capable of such a horrific act, he was taking his own life.'<sup>138</sup>

Later, forensic psychiatrist Dr Ian Sale, in his role as the Crown's expert medical witness, attributed much of Bryant's conduct to the autism spectrum disorder Asperger's Syndrome.<sup>139</sup>

Interestingly, Sale also pointed out that sometimes those who suffer physical injury exhibited lower rates of psychological disorder than those eye witnesses who escaped physical injury.

So far as the police were concerned, the eye-witnesses – people who could say that they had seen Bryant shoot one victim or another – make up a special group from which, if Bryant had come to trial, the witnesses for the prosecution would have been drawn. But when it comes to assessing the traumatic effects of the massacre, the experiences of the eye-witnesses are similar to those of some who saw only the aftermath of the shooting: the scene in the Broad Arrow (Cafe), covered bodies on the road, the ruins of Seascope (Cottage). Others who saw very little but spent the afternoon shut up in one of the houses, terrified that the gunman would come back and kill them, have also shown symptoms as severe as those of people who were closer to the epicentre of the tragedy.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Op. cit., Pp141-142. It should be noted that current thinking on the reporting of mental health and suicide – as depicted by the ResponseAbility training package released to Australian universities by the Hunter Institute of Mental Health – is highly critical of simplistic reporting such as this which could prove dangerous or destructive for others.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, and this also confirmed by Sale in interview with author of this thesis.

<sup>140</sup> Op. cit., Pp139-140.

Follow-up stories and overuse of particular images – many quite graphic or at least evocative of the trauma – also face those who are still trying to work through their experiences. For instance, one of three police officers sent to the Broad Arrow Café to try to identify the bodies and list details recalled to Scott that he saw himself as ‘weak or inadequate’ because he was haunted by ‘demons’. The officer said he still had problems with some news reports more than a year after the event. He described how he had to leave the room when a program on firearms and the surrender of firearms was aired, showing images of the memorial cross erected at Port Arthur and the amateur film of peoples’ reactions when they initially heard the shots.<sup>141</sup>

Does Australia’s media – let alone its community of helpers – have the capacity to understand the difference in individual and community responses to a heinous crime such as the Port Arthur massacre or a natural disaster such as a flood or earthquake? Scott suggests not.

Unfortunately the difference between the Port Arthur massacre and a natural disaster and, consequently, the peculiar nature of the suffering experienced by the bereaved has not always been appreciated. A good deal of the lore cited by counsellors who were helping those who had lost friends or family members at Port Arthur and other victims of the shooting was drawn from studies of events like the Ash Wednesday bushfires at Mount Macedon in Victoria in 1983 so that the wisdom which emerged was of a rather general kind.

It was recognised that chronic stress effects, anxiety, depression and family tensions make up part of the legacy of disaster – any disaster – but much less attention was given to the painful and pressing difficulties faced by those whose dead are the victims of a mass murderer, or to the still more exceptional ordeal faced by those whose dead are the victims of Martin Bryant. The relatives and friends of those who died at Port Arthur have to contend first with rage, hatred and a desire for vengeance.<sup>142</sup>

In the rush to meet deadlines and dress up the news in the most attractive way to win circulation and ratings wars, the ripple effect of secondary trauma is either not readily acknowledged or is simply ignored by Australian news decision-makers. The challenge for the nation’s media appears to be finding time to pause for reflection about the impact of its reports on a very large number of people in such situations – situations that, while mercifully uncommon, are certainly no longer rare.

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<sup>141</sup> Op. cit., P144.

<sup>142</sup> Op. cit., P134.

*Long-term impacts of news coverage of major traumas*

News coverage can have long-term impacts that begin with compilation and/or presentation of initial reports or images and continue with repeated exposures to the traumatic incident in question via follow-up media coverage of that event, subsequent court cases and other similar events. According to the VOCS video, 'every night crimes of violence are played out on TV as entertainment, where the crime is always solved. Coping with the physical and psychological impact of a crime can be hard enough, but many victims feel doubly traumatised by the stories which spring from their misfortune.'<sup>143</sup>

The Tasmanian community's response to the court processes after the massacre at the Port Arthur is not uncommon and needed to be understood by those in the media. Scott reports that Bryant's various court appearances, the prospect of the trial all through October, and the November sentencing hearing all represented obstacles that the victims had to face in their 'struggle towards finding peace'.<sup>144</sup> Even experienced Tasmania Police Manager, Public Affairs, Geoff Easton told a Senate hearing he was surprised by the vigorous media coverage the Bryant court case attracted.

Once Bryant was brought to trial and had already been placed inside the courtroom, there were relatives that then came from an adjacent building across the road from Salamanca where the court was being held. The media tended to hassle them something fierce. We appealed to them not to. But ... once one breaks ranks, all the rest decide to go with it.

We really had to get very tough and say: 'Excuse me.' We briefed them beforehand and said: 'These people have been through a terrible situation. Can you please desist from doing that? Eventually they did. But as one pursued a relative, sticking a microphone under his nose and asking him to make some comments, it was not nice to see.'<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Video recording, 'Victims of Crime' (South Australian Film Commission), 1991.

<sup>144</sup> Scott (1997), P146.

<sup>145</sup> Geoffrey Easton, Manager Public Affairs, Tasmania Police, in Commonwealth of Australia Senate Official Committee Hansard (1998, February), *Self-regulation in the information and communications industries*, April 27 hearing, Adelaide.

Scott observed other mass murderers – ‘Vitkovic in Melbourne’s Queen Street, Frankum in Strathfield, Hamilton in Dunblane, Ryan in Hungerford’ – took their own lives, but Bryant survived ‘to loll and giggle in the dock while the relatives and friends of his victims looked on’.<sup>146</sup> She noted that news media contributed to the pain and distress felt by survivors when they created visual icons of these people at their moments of greatest anguish. A photograph of volunteer ambulance officer Glen Imber bending, grim-faced, beside a stretcher appeared on the cover of *The Bulletin* of May 7, becoming – like the photograph of Mikac holding a spray of irises at the Hobart memorial service – ‘one of the images which defined the events of April 28’.<sup>147</sup>

Whether or not individuals in the media consider the long-term effects of a traumatic event on victims, survivors and witnesses or their families and communities, the reality is further news reports can trigger complications for individuals and communities. In detailing the impact of Bryant’s actions on eye-witnesses, Tasmanian DPP Damian Bugg pointed out ‘the realisation of how close they came themselves to suffering such violence ... has had a shattering effect on many people’. Many had felt anger and bitterness, disbelief and powerlessness, and some suffered from panic attacks, social insecurity and claustrophobia in crowds or public places.

Like the bereaved and the injured, they may have trouble sleeping or concentrating ... Others have developed eating disorders, lost weight, taken up smoking or started drinking too much. Some have become violent while others are terrified by any sign of violence. A great many are troubled by various forms of guilt ... Many ... feel guilty and inadequate simply because they are experiencing various symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder ... They become increasingly anxious about their anxiety.<sup>148</sup>

Scott described her tumultuous community nearly a year afterwards and how it still struggled for balanced coverage. ‘Like the bereaved, the injured suffered from a whole host of ills which follow trauma ... Others have suffered from insomnia, nightmares, phobias, daytime flashbacks and bouts of nausea or uncontrollable weeping. Many are still suffering in some or all of these ways.’<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Scott (1997), Pp134-135.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, Pp111-112.

<sup>148</sup> Bugg, D., in Scott (1997), Pp138-139.

<sup>149</sup> Scott (1997), Pp106-161.

## 2.4 Journalistic practice issues

Towards the end of 1997, Australia began to examine the role of the media in such situations more closely when the Commonwealth Government appointed a special Senate Select Committee to evaluate ‘the appropriateness, effectiveness and privacy implications of the existing self-regulatory framework in relation to the information and communications industries and, in particular, the adequacy of the complaints regime’. Its terms of reference included orders to:

- (a) receive and consider the outstanding government responses to the reports of the Senate Select Committee on Community Standards relevant to the supply of services utilising telecommunications technologies;
- (b) evaluate the development of self-regulatory codes in the information industries; and,
- (c) monitor the personal, social and economic impact of continuing technological change created by industries and services utilising information technologies.<sup>150</sup>

This committee’s Hansard teases out some issues surrounding journalistic practice as well as the impact of media behaviour and of media reports on victims and survivors. It presents the opinions of various stakeholders, including parliamentarians (Senators), journalists and managers from private and public media organisations, industry regulators as well as individuals and bodies with a vested interest in the deliberations (e.g., privacy agencies, civil liberties and legal representatives). For instance, the committee referred to a Clemenger report that has been published each decade since 1977. The August 1997 report demonstrates the changing attitudes to the news media, finding that the conduct of news media, for the first time, emerged as an area of considerable concern, accounting for six of the top 40 problems of the most concern to ordinary Australians. (In 1987 there was only one issue dealing with the media.)<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Commonwealth of Australia Senate Official Committee Hansard (1998, February), *Self-regulation in the information and communications industries*, February 5 hearing, Sydney.

<sup>151</sup> Senator Ferris, Chair of Senate Select Committee, loc. cit.

Throughout history, literally hundreds of scholars and practitioners have examined the issues of journalistic practice that were drawn out during these hearings. However, the anecdotal evidence from journalists, regulators and others to this committee helps put Australian concerns in a recent light. Thus, this section consists of a series of sub-sections, each featuring a table of issues raised at various Senate hearings that pertain to trauma and the media in an Australian context. The sub-sections examine:

- the sensitivity of journalists;
- pressures on journalists;
- ethical and regulation issues versus journalistic practice;
- privacy versus intrusion;
- Australia's complaints mechanisms;
- the preparation of media for coverage of traumatic events; and
- the opinions of victims and survivors of the media's behaviour when covering a traumatic incident.

Issues from these hearings are complemented in each sub-section by observations from other, mostly overseas, sources.

### *Journalistic sensitivity*

The reality of modern Australian newsrooms sometimes sees some journalists value disposability, pragmatism and detachment (cloaked in sensation), over more sensitive yet in-depth reporting. But 'foot-in-the-door' and 'ambush journalism' tactics are a particular concern for agencies that work with victims, survivors and their families and communities, as a 1991 VOCS video outlined:

Three teenagers (two female, one male) who had worked at a fast-food outlet (KFC) in Dulwich were the subject of an armed hold-up in 1988 where two men burst into their store late one evening armed with a pump-action shotgun. They were being interviewed by police in the front section of the (closed) store when the television cameras began to roll. Eliza, who had frozen completely during the hold-up, described what then happened [overdubbed on the footage of them being interviewed which went to air on the news]: '... and, suddenly, all these floodlights came on, while we were sitting giving statements to the police, right around the building and they started to film us and this wasn't the best time, I suppose, but Chris especially, he had a spotlight right in his face as he was talking to a policeman and it upset him so much that he went somewhat hysterical.' [Chris recalled his reaction:] '... and we're trying to give statements, etc., etc., while they're shining all their lights in, which I think they're a bunch of idiots just quietly.' [Eliza continued:] 'I suppose I felt even more violated and they were trying to get a good story off what was happening to us.'<sup>152</sup>

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Video recording, 'Victims of Crime' (South Australian Film Commission), 1991.

Seasoned journalists and news managers appearing before the Senate hearings in 1998 painted a frank picture of journalistic sensitivity and even spoke of changes in newsroom practices after particular traumatic incidents.

<b>TABLE 2.4.1 – Issues relating to journalistic sensitivity covered by Australia’s 1998 Senate Committee hearings<sup>153</sup></b>	
<i>Summary of comments (actual quotes indicated)</i>	<i>Person/entity cited &amp; date of comment/s</i>
The ‘adrenaline junkie’ – the journalist who lives for the next big story to get another ‘rush’ is not new or unique.	<b>Tom Burton</b> , Federal President, Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance; February 16, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
Journalists are like doctors working in casualty units – they ‘become very hardened to the tragedy of life because (they) deal with it all the time’.	<b>Tom Burton</b> , February 16, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
Speaking of his experience as a young journalist: Sensitivity meant little more than apologising if you upset someone and ‘only if you could not get away with not apologising’.	<b>George Negus</b> , Veteran freelance presenter/journalist; February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
In most situations where ‘the media does tend to put its foot in and intrude, the issue is not really worth it’ and could be covered some other way – ‘where grief is concerned, it is usually unnecessary entirely’	<b>George Negus</b> , February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Sensitivity at all levels of the Australian media – in the wake of the ‘big public debate’ on privacy, paparazzi, etc., meant journalists were treading more carefully.	<b>Peter Manning</b> , (then) Head of Current Affairs, Seven Network; April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Australia’s media are ‘not an insensitive group’ but they deal with difficult situations ‘sadly, quite often’ and are aware of the reactions they get. Regardless, ‘there is a common feeling that we are a bunch of godless, heartless and childless monsters sitting away in our castles plotting to destroy the world. We are not. We have children, families, wives – whatever.’	<b>John Rudd</b> , (then) Director of News, Seven Network; April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Whether intrusions into grief were warranted or defensible, many in the media were so uncomfortable with this sort of behaviour that new codes of conduct had been formatted and adopted by ABC journalists after multiple shootings in Victoria, bus crashes in New South Wales and international events such as the Lockerbie plane crash. ‘One section ... describes the need for sensitivity when covering traumatic events and their aftermath, taking proper account of the shock of witnesses and survivors and the grief of family and friends. The section refers to the need for sensitive editing of sound and vision and the use of pooled footage – for example, at funerals and events of that kind – and the careful selection of images which are repeated as the story unfolds or, indeed, when a similar event occurs at a later date ...’	<b>Pauline Garde</b> , (then) General Manager, Corporate Policy Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC); February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)

### *Pressures on journalists*

The Senate heard from industry representatives how journalists face a variety of pressures – rolling deadlines, strong competition from other media, ever-present circulation/ratings concerns, even physical danger or risk of prosecution. Additional pressures can be experienced when journalists cover particularly traumatic events – the expectation of returning with the best possible story/images, at whatever cost, the complications of working in a major crime or accident scene, recollections of similar past personal experiences, dealing with sometimes irrational and potentially violent victims/survivors and their families/communities, coming to terms with what details or images they will submit or use and even what they will tell their peers and their families.

<b>TABLE 2.4.2 – Issues relating to pressure on journalists covered by Australia’s 1998 Senate Committee hearings<sup>154</sup></b>	
<i>Summary of comments (actual quotes indicated)</i>	<i>Person/entity cited &amp; date of comment/s</i>
The competitive nature of news and current affairs has been intensified by commercial pressures, leading to an ‘expectation from employers that journalists should go further than their competitors’. This pressure ‘does not necessarily exist’ for ABC journalists.	<b>George Negus</b> , February 5, 1998 hearing (Sydney)
Pressure had increased as journalism had gone from ‘a calling’ to an extremely glamorous, potentially lucrative activity.	<b>George Negus</b> , February 5, 1998 hearing (Sydney)
The ‘feeding frenzy’ could be a two-way process, with one potential interviewee at a race riot in Watts, California, offering to do an interview for a fee, with more money demanded if he would be ‘absolutely over the top’.	<b>George Negus</b> , February 5, 1998 hearing (Sydney)
While journalists were very uncomfortable with ‘death knocks’ – ‘when someone passes away and you have to go and ask the family, particularly for a photo, say, or ask them how they are feeling’ – journalists still had to work within an ‘incredibly competitive process’.	<b>Tom Burton</b> , February 16, 1998 hearing (Canberra)
Intrusive behaviour by the media had been fuelled because traditional news values had been pitted against increasing pressure for ‘infotainment’, highlighting the shortcomings of self-regulation.	<b>Mark Pearson</b> , Head of Communication & Media Studies, Bond University; April 22, 1998 hearing (Sydney)
‘Journalists have always been competitive; and they are no more competitive than they always were ... I do not think the competitive pressures have encouraged us to push the envelope.’	<b>Peter Meakin</b> , (then) Director of News & Current Affairs, Nine Network; April 22, 1998 hearing (Sydney)

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Commonwealth of Australia Senate Official Committee Hansard (1998, February), *Self-regulation in the Information and Communications Industries* (various hearing dates).

Hurst & White (1994) also acknowledge that no journalist or photographer likes doing death knocks, a ‘somewhat macabre term for the task of interviewing and filming people still in shock and grief’.

It is probably the least popular assignment in journalism, next to covering funerals. In both situations emotions run high, nerves are on edge and the anger mourners feel as a natural response to death may turn to aggression against the presence of unwanted strangers. The media are an obvious target with their video cameras and microphones. Highly strung relatives or their friends may react instantly to any sign of insensitivity by gung-ho reporters. Tempers flare, abuse follows and sometimes punches are thrown.<sup>155</sup>

### *Ethics and regulations versus journalistic practice*

In an age when computer technology ‘allows practically anyone to produce and disseminate visual messages in massive numbers for a worldwide audience’<sup>156</sup>, the question of whether to cover a traumatic incident in one way or another ultimately comes down to each news organisation’s ethical framework. As California State University visual journalism academic Paul Lester (2002) explains, some news organisations journalists employ a ‘limited’ or ‘oversimplified’ categorical approach, where once something is published (by themselves or by competitors) there can be no exception to further publication. Others, take a utilitarian approach, arguing that shocking images or distressing stories ultimately benefit more people than they harm because they either warn communities or provoke some kind of action or response. Some blatantly sensational coverage is likely to eventuate from personal (hedonistic) choice and, on occasion, heated debate in newsrooms sees coverage downgraded to accommodate potential sensitivities. Most internal or external complaints though, can be seen as coming from those who support the Judeo-Christian principle of ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ where they implore journalists to consider what it is like for the relatives and friends of those being covered.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Hurst, J., & White, S.A., (1994) *Ethics and the Australia news media*. South Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia. P13.

<sup>156</sup> Lester, P.M., (2002), *Visual Journalism*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon. P45.

<sup>157</sup> Op. cit., Pp46-49.

The clash between the two groups of ethical philosophies – the journalistic approaches of categorical impartial, utilitarianism, hedonism, and golden mean and the subject or viewer approaches of golden rule and veil of ignorance – is seldom resolved. But when you consider you own motivations those of other visual journalists, victims and their families and friends, and readers and viewers through these six ethical philosophies, you become more aware of meanings and motives that may lie beneath the surface of any action or picture.<sup>158</sup>

Across the various forms of media in Australia, there is a multitude of ethical and practice codes that apply to journalists. There are also a number of bodies ostensibly overseeing journalistic behaviour and ethics.<sup>159</sup> While the most relevant sections of codes pertaining to Australian print and broadcast media are included in Appendices One and Two of this thesis, the remainder of this sub-section will summarise the feedback given to the Australian Senate about the main ethical and practice codes relevant to the three main forms of media – print, radio and television.

<b>TABLE 2.4.3 – Issues relating to ethics and self-regulation versus journalistic practice covered by Australia’s 1998 Senate Committee hearings<sup>160</sup></b>	
<i>Summary of comments (actual quotes indicated)</i>	<i>Person/entity cited &amp; date of comment/s</i>
The structure of the current set of ethical and practice codes for journalists in Australia is basically flawed because their interpretation is based on perception, not fact, with qualifications undermining the effectiveness of codes, ‘making the test for breach of the code a question of reasonableness rather than a question of fact’.	<b>Senator Jeannie Ferris</b> (South Australia), Chair, Senate Select Committee; February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Sometimes coverage of a particularly traumatic situation is initiated by victims or their families. For example, a family with a dying child asked him to do a program about that child. ‘This raised all sorts of ethical questions ... but these people passionately wanted the world to see what they were going through because they thought it might help people in similar situations, and I tussled with that. It was almost the obverse of grief intrusion; I was being asked to intrude. It was probably the toughest assignment of my life ... (but) It had the desired effect from the family’s point of view.’	<b>George Negus</b> , February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Of 15,000 journalists in Australia, 13,000 are MEAA members and the MEAA is not empowered to impose its code of ethics on non-members (e.g., senior managers, program or publication sub-contractors, freelance journalists, etc).	<b>Tom Burton</b> , February 16, 1998, hearing (Canberra)

<sup>158</sup> Op. cit., p50.

<sup>159</sup> See Appendices 2 and 3 of this thesis for a cross-section of the main ethical and practice codes that have been adopted by Australia’s media.

<sup>160</sup> Commonwealth of Australia Senate Official Committee Hansard (1998, February), *Self-regulation in the Information and Communications Industries* (various hearing dates).

<i>Summary of comments (actual quotes indicated)</i>	<i>Person/entity cited &amp; date of comment/s</i>
There is 'no regulatory structure for journalistic practice' in Australia. 'It is very much driven by public acknowledgment, I think, of the distrust that much of the public has for journalism and journalists, and their lack of accountability, so as to try to put a bit of comfort into the system whereby people can get fair access to some sort of complaints process and, in cases where there have been clear breaches, some action be taken ...'	<b>Tom Burton</b> , February 16, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
The present situation demands top-level attention. 'The single biggest thing you could do to improve [compliance with ethical standards] is to get some agreed view amongst the media management ... as to what is acceptable (behaviour) and what is not.'	<b>Tom Burton</b> , February 16, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
(In the Australian Press Council's opinion) self-regulation is working in the print media.	<b>Jack Herman</b> , Executive Secretary, Australian Press Council <sup>161</sup> ; February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Better mechanisms were needed to make self-regulation work with Australia's news media than the current proliferation of ineffectual codes that did not bind all journalists ... (what was proposed was) 'one set of ethical standards that everybody knows, understands and adheres to, with compliance mechanisms that the industry controls that have some teeth'.	<b>Maira Scollay</b> , Privacy Commissioner, NSW Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission; February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
It was one thing to have a code of ethics, but journalists need also to work through professional scenarios where they are forced to apply the code, otherwise they risk facing a tribunal, press council or court and it would be the first time they thought seriously about their behaviour. Self-regulation, in the print media at least, had not worked effectively and the issue of whether to establish a regulatory body to supervise the print media had repeatedly come in inquiries. The Australian Press Council had vested interests, being dominated and funded by publishers with its main aim being 'to preserve and defend press freedom' ahead of its role as a complaints body. The MEAA/AJA, whose disciplinary procedures involve only a jury of peers, also had vested interests. The diversity of media interests and their constant convergence also complicates the question of establishing a regulatory body for print media.	<b>Mark Pearson</b> , Head of Communication & Media Studies, Bond University; April 22, 1998 hearing (Sydney)
The commercial television industry code of practice already provides that – in broadcasting news and current affairs programs – 'licensees must not use material relating to a person's personal or private affairs or which invades an individual's privacy other than where there are identifiable public reasons for the material to be broadcast' and 'licensees must also display sensitivity in broadcasting images of, or interviews with, bereaved relatives and survivors or witnesses of traumatic incidents'.	<b>Giles Tanner</b> , Australian Broadcasting Authority; February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Television stations were 'more closely regulated than any other media' and faced even more detailed codes of practice than radio stations. The absence of a uniform code of practice for print media was contrasted to the FACTS Code of Practice, which applies to all commercial, free-to-air television stations. The FACTS code was also compared to ABC TV's Code of Practice and was described as a longer and far more detailed document that aimed to regulate a wider range of activity in considerable detail.	<b>Anthony Branigan</b> , General Manager, Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS); April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
The Nine Network's code of practice applies to all commercial TV employees that are employed by the network, including 'people who are not members of the union'. [He did not mention whether it also applied to the employees of companies that provide programming to the network on a contracted basis.]	<b>Peter Meakin</b> , April 22, 1998 hearing (Sydney)

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The Australian Press Council (APC) adjudicates on complaints about the print media's actions or publications. It issues its adjudications and obliges publications to report both complaints and the outcome of its deliberations.

<i>Summary of comments (actual quotes indicated)</i>	<i>Person/entity cited &amp; date of comment/s</i>
(There was a strong belief that) self-regulation by people in the industry is the way to go [a position also put by FACTS].	<b>Peter Harvey</b> , Private citizen (and Nine Network's political chief); April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Those who advocated the status quo 'must be dealing with a different bunch of people from the ones we in public life are used to' ... 'the way the slants on stories in the media are put when it suits particular editors to push particular lines' and how that gave [the Senator] 'very little confidence in the way that the media in this country operates under self-regulation'. One South Australian inquiry into privacy had led to a proposed bill which 'drew threatening telephone calls from media powerbrokers to politicians as well as critical editorials'.	<b>Senator John Quirke</b> , South Australia, Member of the Senate Select Committee; February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
'We are getting a constant pattern of where we see the electronic media attempting to do what we would consider to be the appropriate thing ... (but) in evidence that has come before this committee in the last few months, a number of examples where matters have been taken to the press council – in fact, flagrant breaches have been reported to the press council – and very little or nothing has been done about [the breaches].'	<b>Senator John Quirke</b> , April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
[This South Australian lawyer was] 'not a fan of self-regulation' because self-regulators usually fail to overcome 'the enormous conflict of interest inherent in self-regulation' and because the media would not abide by already established codes. 'When an issue becomes big news and everybody ... is under enormous pressure to cover it, then we see the media at its worst. Almost anything will get a run in its thirst for information. In particular, the statements of those who choose to defame are picked up and repeated by the media, and the person at the centre of the storm is entirely helpless to stop it.' 'The provisions of the <i>Broadcasting Services Act</i> have not stopped it ... defamed people are ground into the dust by the technicalities, the heavy legal costs and the uncertain outcomes of defamation action.' Lawyers 'say they never saw a defamation plaintiff who did not wish, by the end of the case, that he or she had never started it'.	<b>Stephen Palyga</b> , Private citizen and lawyer representing the Chapman family in South Australia's Hindmarsh Island bridge dispute; April 27, 1998, hearing (Adelaide)
It was essential to have strong laws enforcing program standards and 'a proper watchdog – a regulator, not a self-regulator'. The ABA should issue mandatory program standards that require fair, accurate and honest reporting, respect for privacy, and the curbing of trial by media, with the ABC and SBS 'legally obligated to comply with such standards'. Those who breached the standards would face stiffer penalties and pay damages to those wronged.	<b>Stephen Palyga</b> , April 27, 1998, hearing (Adelaide)
Self-regulation was not working in the best interests of children, especially where parents were expected to constantly monitor programs or other media coming into their homes.	<b>Barbara Biggins</b> , (then) Executive Director, Young Media Australia; April 27, 1998, hearing (Adelaide)
The problem is that the system essentially allows journalists and news editors 'to be judge and jury on themselves'. APCC called for a single set of rules and a single, independent adjudicator with some teeth to take some 'robust decisions'.	<b>Nigel Waters</b> , Vice-President, Australian Privacy Charter Council; April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)

It is, however, important to remember that (a) these Senate hearings did not hear directly from victims or survivors of traumatic events, and (b) research conducted for this thesis shows victims, survivors and their families rarely have the emotional or other resources to pursue complaints or legal action against the media in the immediate aftermath of their trauma.

*Privacy versus intrusion*

Specific instances of where the media has ‘crossed the line’ can easily be found in Australia over the past couple of decades. For example, despite several requests to news media by the distraught parents of Clinton Gage, a nine-year-old boy who was mauled to death in May, 2001, by a dingo on Queensland’s Fraser Island, print, radio and television reporters repeatedly called on the family for many days after the boy’s funeral in the hope of an interview that would not be granted. Two decades earlier, Mykyta told how someone from *The Adelaide Advertiser* had phoned her family’s home on the morning her daughter was found dead and said, ‘We’re sending out a photographer to take a photograph of you in your anguish’, to which her husband reportedly replied, ‘Well don’t bother because we’re not opening the door.’<sup>162</sup>

<b>TABLE 2.4.4 – Issues relating to privacy versus intrusion covered by Australia’s 1998 Senate Committee hearings<sup>163</sup></b>	
<i>Summary of comments (actual quotes indicated)</i>	<i>Person/entity cited &amp; date of comment/s</i>
The right to freedom of speech should be balanced against other sorts of human rights referred to in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. ‘You have got to balance the public’s right to be informed on matters of importance, particularly matters that are going to be important to them in forming political opinion, against the rights of privacy.’	<b>Jack Herman,</b> February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
There had been one serious transgression of a ruling in the council’s 22 years, concerning a complaint about the invasion of privacy by the media of Senator Bob Woods and his then wife Dr Jane Woods who were shown in a photograph arguing in their backyard by Sydney’s <i>Daily Telegraph</i> . The council upheld the complaint and described the publication of the photographs as ‘an unjustified invasion of the privacy of Senator Woods’, noting in its adjudication that ‘newspapers and magazines need to be aware that public figures have a right to privacy in their private places’. However, the council was virtually powerless to act when the newspaper republished one of the photographs when it was nominated for a prize because no further complaint about republication was received.	<b>Jack Herman,</b> February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
The importance of freedom of speech should be placed above that placed on privacy.	<b>John Morgan,</b> Australian Press Council Member; February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)

<sup>162</sup> Video recording, ‘Victims of Crime’ (South Australian Film Commission), 1991.

<sup>163</sup> Commonwealth of Australia Senate Official Committee Hansard (1998, February), *Self-regulation in the Information and Communications Industries* (various hearing dates).

<i>Summary of comments (actual quotes indicated)</i>	<i>Person/entity cited &amp; date of comment/s</i>
There was disagreement with the Australian Press Council's approach to matters of privacy; the NSWCCCL was more partial to the Australian Broadcasting Authority's views on a number of issues.	<b>Tim Anderson</b> , Secretary, New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties (NSWCCL); February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
The dilemma of intrusive or inappropriate coverage is irreconcilable in a democratic society. 'The problem is that, because we are a free, democratic, secular society, we do not license newspapers. A price of our freedom is that we have to cop bad taste as well. We can complain about it, we can attack, we can condemn – and we probably should – but if we start prescribing and proscribing we are in a very real way hacking away at the very fabric of our freedom.'	<b>Paul Bongiorno</b> , (then) Canberra Press Gallery President and senior Ten Network political reporter; April 15, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
A clear incident of intrusion, after the April 28, 1996, Port Arthur massacre: 'On the Tuesday, <i>The Mercury</i> ran a front-page photo of Martin Bryant that said, "This is the man." I immediately had every other journalist there accuse me of favouritism to the local media. That caused me some great concern ... I checked all the photographs that we had of Martin Bryant, and none of them was the one that appeared in <i>The Mercury</i> . Later that morning I had a phone call from a person who identified himself as an employee of <i>The Mercury</i> . He said that he was distressed and disgusted. He said two journalists and a photographer went up to Bryant's house. We had a person there. They engaged him in conversation while the other person gained entry to the house. He alleged that that person took the photo from there. In fact, there was a very detailed description of the interior of the house that could not have been got any other way.'	<b>Geoffrey Easton</b> , Manager Public Affairs, Tasmania Police; April 27, 1998, hearing (Adelaide)
Pressure on journalists to return with a story or images should be understood but, equally, the MEAA did not condone break-and-enter exercises. Privacy considerations were evident in the mid-1990s revision of the Australian journalists' code of ethics. The revision came after a 30-year gap and those who worked on the revision could see, certainly in the commercial end of things, a lot more pressure in terms of 'soft journalism' – advertising-driven journalism – and privacy issues.	<b>Tom Burton</b> , February 16, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
'In Australia you have the constitutional problem in that the Commonwealth does not have any power directly to regulate print media. It does regulate print media through other arrangements such as cross-media rules but it does not have a direct role over content.'	<b>Tom Burton</b> , February 16, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
Responding to criticisms of media behaviour after the 1997 Thredbo landslide and citing the dilemmas and chaos journalists faced, particularly in the first 48 hours of coverage: 'The landslide was on one side of the valley and so they were able to organise most of the media onto the other side of the valley where they could get clear TV shots of what the rescuers were doing but without being so intrusive ... the problem was that you had people in high grief and a very curious media trying to get insights into what had happened ...' [The corralled media partially obstructed the sole access road into and out of the village for locals, rescue workers and others legitimately at Thredbo during that tense period.]	<b>Tom Burton</b> , February 16, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
What media does and what it presents are a function of its audiences, reflecting what they were looking for – human interest, personal stories: 'People might make judgments about whether that is a good or bad thing, but that is what they want. They are not particularly interested in a dull but worthy analysis of whether the road was safe or not ...'	<b>Tom Burton</b> , February 16, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
Acknowledging the difficulty of corraling diverse journalistic responses and behaviours into one set of privacy rules: '[Privacy] is a very difficult area in day-to-day practice with journalists. In my experience, it tends to be dealt with in a case-by-case situation where individual journalists, editors and executive producers tend to take a case-by-case approach to it. Attempts in the past to try to put these into a hard set of rules tends to fail primarily because there is not a really strong consensus within either the community or the media as to what is fair and what is unfair.'	<b>Tom Burton</b> , February 16, 1998, hearing (Canberra)

<i>Summary of comments (actual quotes indicated)</i>	<i>Person/entity cited &amp; date of comment/s</i>
Radio is a far less intrusive [news] media.	<b>Graeme Carroll</b> , Manager, Public Affairs, Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters (FARB); April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Intrusion was not a major issues in the radio industry because most Australian radio broadcasters had reduced their journalistic staffing levels and, with fewer and fewer journalists on the road, 'it was more common practice for (radio reporters) to take our information from the wires'.	<b>George Buschman</b> , Chief Executive Officer, Macquarie Radio Network; April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Citing the opposite experience of families and communities: 'It has often been the case in the past that a death, for example, through accident of some other unfortunate means, has been broken on radio and there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that that often means the family of that person hears it first on radio.'	<b>Senator Jeannie Ferris</b> (South Australia), Chair, Senate Select Committee; April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
'The issue that the inquiry must be certainly wrestling with is the fine line between intrusion and censorship, whether it is self [censorship] or otherwise ... there are occasions when any media organisation would regard what other people think of as intrusion as being arguable at least.'	<b>George Negus</b> , February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
The media was continually balancing 'press freedom and the public's interest to know about these things with individual rights of privacy and so on'. The 'basic ethical question as to whether the end justifies the means' would only be answered if journalists saw the effects their actions or reports had. The closest Australian journalists had come to this was the prolonged MEAA/AJA Code of Ethics review during the 1990s.	<b>Mark Pearson</b> , April 22, 1998 hearing (Sydney)
About amendments made in 1997 to the FACTS code of practice: The changes were intended to 'tighten up some aspects of the reporting in news and current affairs programs of areas of personal privacy'. They related in particular to including images of dead or seriously wounded people, unfair identification of a person or business when commenting on the behaviour of groups and the identification of murder or accident victims. The level of formal complaints about privacy was 'surprisingly low over the life of the code, which is now well over four years', averaging 'six to eight (upheld) a year'.	<b>Anthony Michael</b> , General Manager, Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS); February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
The code's section on privacy states: 'The rights of individuals to privacy should be respected in all ABC programs. However, in order to provide information which relates to a person's performance of public duties or about other matters of public interest, intrusions upon privacy may, in some circumstances, be justified.'	<b>Pauline Garde</b> , February 5, 1998 hearing (Sydney)
Privacy had been a 'very minor' area of complaint in the ABC, accounting for one in 1,100 matters that come to its attention. 'We believe this reflects the fact that the ABC editorial policies and the code in relation to privacy and grief are appropriate and that they are observed.' Unlike the ABC, Australian commercial TV stations seemed not to record the number of complaint calls.	<b>Pauline Garde</b> , February 5, 1998 hearing (Sydney)

<i>Summary of comments (actual quotes indicated)</i>	<i>Person/entity cited &amp; date of comment/s</i>
Noting a low number of complaints in the FACTS submission: Over the previous seven or eight years, there had been ‘four or five surveys undertaken on community attitudes to privacy, and privacy is consistently rated as one of the major issues of social concern by the people in these surveys’. ‘... looking at the number of complaints ... is not necessarily a good indicator of people’s concern or even of the problem ... you also have to add other issues such as: do people know that they can complain; will they bother complaining; and do they have any faith in the system? ... looking only at the number of complaints will not necessarily give ... a good indication of whether privacy is a major issue...’	<b>Lindy Smith</b> , Senior Advisor, Office of the Privacy Commissioner (NSW); February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
HREOC noted the greater number of allegations of intrusions by media were raised by ordinary people rather than prominent individuals or celebrities and that ‘intrusions into the private lives of ordinary citizens (are) of enormous concern’.	<b>Moira Scollay</b> , February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Noting at least one Government department is already actively monitoring and reviewing media behaviour surrounding traumatic events: ‘It is something that we have been monitoring in the wake of, particularly, Thredbo but also of more international events which are sparking general concern around the world. The minister has said that it is something that we should keep under review.’	<b>Dr Beverly Hart</b> , (then) Acting First Ass. Secretary, Licensed Broadcasting & Information Services Division, Dept of Communications and the Arts; February 16, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
Australia was ‘very much out of step with most of our trading partners, and will become increasingly so ...’ [Despite recently introduced privacy laws impacting certain media activities, such as collecting or handling customer data, Australia remains behind international best practice when it comes to news coverage. The normal work of journalists is exempt from the new Federal privacy laws. <sup>164</sup> ]	<b>Nigel Waters</b> , April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)

### *Australia’s news media complaints mechanisms*

The Senate hearings discovered that while individual media outlets as well as peak industry associations (FACTS, FARB and the MEAA/AJA) all have complaints processes, they are complex, poorly understood, or respected, by the public and generally limit complainants from taking the matter any further legally. However, determined or resourceful victims/survivors or their families/communities can pursue legal redress through expensive, often protracted and rarely satisfying actions under the nation’s various defamation laws.

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The new Privacy Act is outlined at <http://www.privacy.gov.au> while the Australian Press Council's Privacy Standards are outlined at [http://www.presscouncil.org.au/pcs/site/priv\\_stand.html](http://www.presscouncil.org.au/pcs/site/priv_stand.html)

<b>TABLE 2.4.5 – Issues relating to Australia’s news media complaints mechanisms covered by Australia’s 1998 Senate Committee hearings<sup>165</sup></b>	
<i>Summary of comments (actual quotes indicated)</i>	<i>Person/entity cited &amp; date of comment/s</i>
It is difficult for the public to get any sense of justice or a fair hearing when raising a complaint with the media.	<b>Tom Burton,</b> February 16, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
The public got ‘no sense that their problem has been dealt with in any sort of coherent, proper way’. ‘... if the public had a feeling that media organisations – the journalists themselves – were taking this stuff seriously and were prepared to listen to them, then I think a lot of their anger would be relieved or dealt with. But at the moment they get no sense of that because there is just no process for even dealing with it.’	<b>Tom Burton,</b> February 16, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
‘We certainly have a very strong view about defamation, which is that the current system does not serve anyone well: it is costly, inaccessible, <i>ad hoc</i> , diffident – depending where you are. We would be more than enthusiastic to become involved with any attempt to put together some sort of national framework.’ The current system is ‘very expensive’ and it is ‘a gamble’ as to whether complainants get any response from it.	<b>Tom Burton,</b> February 16, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
The Seven Network had found that, because of the high costs of taking defamation proceedings, people were resorting more to taking action under the code because it was at no cost to them.	<b>Catherine Rothery,</b> Legal Counsel, Seven Network; April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
‘Just as a rough estimate, we would perhaps get 10 to 12 new sets of (defamation) proceedings commenced in a given year ... most end at an early stage, quite often straight after the statement of claim is filed and perhaps after the defence is filed. Very few go to trial. In fact, most are settled, usually at quite an early stage.’	<b>Jessica Block,</b> Corporate Counsel, Nine Network; April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Regardless of how incensed an individual who has been directly or indirectly traumatised by the media might be, they face the frustration of a system that consorts to prevent them finding some form of retribution. Under the current system, it remained beyond ‘almost all but the very rich or those backed by some enterprise or organisation’ to take on mainstream media organisations in the courts if they were wronged in some way.	<b>Mark Pearson,</b> April 22, 1998 hearing (Sydney)
ABA research aimed at monitoring the effectiveness of the commercial television industry code of practice found (in 1995, 1996 and 1996) that the level of concern about television content remained stable, with just under 40 per cent of viewers saying they had seen anything of concern on television. Of most concern were news and current affairs programs, with just over 400 people saying they had concerns with something on television in the first 10 months of 1997. One in three concerns related to news and current affairs. Those concerns related both to the style of presentation and to the content. Concerns about style included journalists pushing their view, misrepresentation of facts, poor reporting techniques, inaccuracy of reporting and invasion of privacy. Privacy was raised as an issue in 19 of 192 ABA investigations, with only two breaches found.	<b>Giles Tanner,</b> Australian Broadcasting Authority; February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
In the four-and-a-half-year life of the FACTS code (to 1998), there had been 3,773 complaints arising from around 10,000 hours of news and current affairs on commercial stations across the country. Just 25 of those complaints related to privacy (or less than 1 per cent) and only two of those complaints were upheld (eight to 10 out of the 25 were pertaining to current affairs programs). ‘A typical complaint, for example ... is a deceased accident victim being referred to as unemployed. That was regarded as unwarranted. The complaint was not upheld ...’ About half of the complaints involved issues such as identification of witnesses to a hold-up, alleged invasion of privacy in coverage of a dog attack story, lack of sensitivity in linking a report of the discovery of a dead body to search for a missing man, unauthorised filming outside a court and invasion of privacy in images of a former prime minister and his second wife.	<b>Anthony Branigan,</b> April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)

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Commonwealth of Australia Senate Official Committee Hansard (1998, February), *Self-regulation in the Information and Communications Industries* (various hearing dates).

<i>Summary of comments (actual quotes indicated)</i>	<i>Person/entity cited &amp; date of comment/s</i>
There were 7,000 complaints to FARB in the 52 months between May 1993 and September 1997 – with 12 breaches of codes of practice. The majority of complaints were about controversial talkback radio and talkback on music programs. It was the talk and discussion area that usually generated the most complaints, often because complainants did not agree with announcers' views.	<b>Graeme Carroll</b> , April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
The NSWCCCL was 'opposed to regulation of content generally' and made the distinction between behaviour – 'which may involve commercial transactions, harassment and so on' – and content. 'We believe adults should be entitled to see and read what they choose to see and read, on the principle that it is not causing harm to other people.' The NSWCCCL's 'attitude to content-based regulation' was in accord with the US Supreme Court Reno decision that 'decried content-based regulation as an extremely dangerous thing'.	<b>Tim Anderson</b> , February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
When the media's apparent tendency to invade the privacy of close relatives of those currently in the full glare of the media's spotlight was questioned: '(The ABC and the MEAA) share the view that is expressed in the revised Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance code, which is that a member of a family which includes another person of public importance or notoriety still retains their right to legitimate privacy. The fact that you happen to be the spouse of someone in the public eye does not strip you of that legitimate right to privacy ... If the matter of public importance does not attach to a member of the family, then we would not pursue it in discharging our normal news-gathering operations.'	<b>Walter Hamilton</b> , (then) National Editor News (Radio), Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC); February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
When it came to the media and litigation, proceedings were difficult and complicated by personalities, power and persuasion. 'I think the Hindmarsh Island example is a very important indicator ... My general observation, having closely observed the media at work for about four and a half years, is that it is a law unto itself. This is especially so when a media firestorm lights up.'	<b>Stephen Palyga</b> , April 27, 1998, hearing (Adelaide)

According to Spungen (1998), some families of murder victims feel so aggrieved by the behaviour of the media that they want to pursue legal action despite the fact that there is little chance of success in the courts.

The power of the press and the right to free speech will severely limit the co-victim's ability to redress grievances or perceived grievances in the legal arena. This may intensify feelings of frustration, anger, and helplessness and, in some cases, lead to further traumatization ...<sup>166</sup>

In Australia, as in the US, if a case is viable, victims may initiate action in relation to the media at two stages: prior to the publication or airing of a news story, a television program or the communication of information, or afterwards. Where plaintiffs seek injunctions or stop writs to halt publishing, such a solution is usually only temporary, until the matters in dispute can be heard.

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Anderson, D.A. (1986). 'Crime victims: Do they have privacy rights?' In T. Thomason & A. Babili (Eds.), *Crime victims and the news media*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Department of Journalism. (Pp7-10). Gifis, S.H. (1984). *Law dictionary* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Woodbury, NY: Baron's Educational Series. (P244). In Spungen (1998), Pp 233-234.

As Spungen (1998) notes, the possibility that someone may be upset by information to be released in the future is insufficient legal grounds to halt its release, and this may be difficult and painful for plaintiffs to comprehend.<sup>167</sup> Of course, they can appeal directly to the media not to release offensive information and rely on goodwill.

After publication in the US, Spungen says, complainants have two legal avenues if they want to pursue damages: invasion of privacy and intentional infliction of emotional distress. Both have significant restrictions and conditions. In Australia, complainants can resort to complex defamation laws designed to protect both the truth and their reputations. Spungen concludes that, often, the ‘only recourse is to become better informed in dealing with the media and to educate and persuade the press to deal with co-victims in a fair and sensitive way’.<sup>168</sup> With past reviews of Australian codes failing to produce changes that mollify non-journalists, pressure appears to be mounting on this country’s news media industry as a whole to accept external direction.

#### *Preparation of media for covering traumatic events*

There are three questions when considering the preparation of media for covering traumatic events such as massacres, serial or particularly savage murders, horrific motor vehicle accidents and episodes of torture or extreme deprivation. The first is: ‘What sort of preparation do journalists get for dealing with victims/survivors and their families/communities?’ The second is: ‘What sort of preparation do journalists get that helps them personally to handle such events and the accounts of victims/witnesses/survivors?’ The third is: ‘What prepares journalists for decision-making about what information or images will be used and what information and/or images will be kept out?’

It is beyond the scope of this research to survey journalists about the kind of preparation they have but a series of media representatives appearing before the Senate committee gave some insights.

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<sup>167</sup> Spungen (1998), loc. cit.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<b>TABLE 2.4.6 – Issues relating to preparation of media for covering traumatic events covered by Australia’s 1998 Senate Committee hearings<sup>169</sup></b>	
<i>Summary of comments (actual quotes indicated)</i>	<i>Person/entity cited &amp; date of comment/s</i>
As Seven’s Network Director of News, Rudd ‘personally and regularly’ made network news staff aware of the various codes that applied and talked regularly with producers about topical issues.	<b>John Rudd,</b> April 22, 1998 hearing (Sydney)
It was sometimes hard to brief staff before they went out ‘and, if you are sending someone out at one o’clock in the morning ... which is what happened at Thredbo ... it is a case of telling them: “Get there.” Where possible, if it was a really major story, only the most experienced people who would “know instinctively the way to conduct themselves” would be sent.’	<b>Peter Meakin,</b> April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
The Nine Network had in-house training programs that dealt with defamation and contempt and, as part of that, the code of practice and complaints handling. Every journalist would attend such training. ‘We also issue memoranda regularly and each finding that the ABA makes us aware of is passed along to each relevant executive producer of each relevant program with instructions for them to make the relevant producer and journalist aware – and also all staff aware – of those findings.’	<b>Jessica Block,</b> April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Staff were not ‘sent off and not heard from again’ but would be in touch up to 12 times a day: ‘We know everything they are doing and at the same time we are getting community feedback. If they do offend people’s feelings, we often know before they do, because the police – or whoever – let us know. We are very sensitive to that sort of issue.’	<b>Dermot O’Brien,</b> News Manager, Network Ten; April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Saying he made regular trips to the various newsrooms around the country to brief senior reporters, producers, etc.: ‘The code is circulated as well and staff are expected to know and have a working knowledge of the code. Exactly the same as the Nine Network, we also have both our in-house lawyers and our external lawyers give regular briefings on defamation, copyright, contempt, trespass and that sort of thing.’	<b>Dermot O’Brien,</b> April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
The Australian Press Council occasionally issues guidelines on particular things like the reporting of drugs or youth suicide. ‘We trust the newspapers will abide by those as well. Our experience is that by and large newspapers and magazines do abide by the press council’s adjudications ... A number of newspapers use press council adjudications as the basis of discussions at staff meetings and the formulation of their own internal policies.’	<b>Jack Herman,</b> February 5, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
MEAA acknowledges issues of privacy and pressures on journalists to intrude deserve more attention in newsrooms on a daily basis. A specialist advisor in these areas needs to be available to all news personnel ... Some good could be done by educating journalists about the best ways to approach victims. While complaints about intrusions did <i>not</i> figure strongly in Australian Press Council statistics, ‘it is a huge concern amongst the public’.	<b>Tom Burton,</b> February 16, 1998 hearing (Canberra)

Much of the groundwork for trauma preparation and training programs has been done in industries that are not unlike the media. Those who know even a little about journalists’ work will instantly recognise parallels with emergency work described by Mitchell and Dyregrov (1993)<sup>170</sup>:

<sup>169</sup> Commonwealth of Australia Senate Official Committee Hansard (1998, February), *Self-regulation in the Information and Communications Industries* (various hearing dates).

<sup>170</sup> Mitchell, J.T. and Dyregrov, A. (1993). ‘Traumatic Stress in Disaster Workers and Emergency Personnel Prevention and Intervention.’ In Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, Plenum Press, New York. P906.

Emergency work is filled with unanticipated and novel situations and is complicated by disturbed rest periods, long working hours, and limitations in staffing levels. All these factors tend to affect most workers negatively (Holsti, 1971<sup>171</sup>; staff reporters, Firehouse, 1980<sup>172</sup>).

The writing is on the wall for media employers if the parallels run deeper than just work patterns. When cognitive, physical and emotional factors are affected by stress, it is a virtual impossibility not to also affect a person's behaviour. 'The behavioral manifestations of stress in emergency workers often affect their homelife ... Job turnover may also be negatively impacted by the stress associated with emergency work.'<sup>173</sup>

Like journalists, emergency personnel are good at suppressing their own reactions to stressful events. Under field conditions, the ability to suppress immediate reactions is very important, according to Mitchell and Dyregrov (1993). They note that such an ability prevented emergency personnel from being incapacitated by their reactions while still attempting to save the lives of others, treat their wounds or limit property destruction, but while immediate reactions were 'successfully suppressed, they are generally encountered later'.<sup>174</sup> Frederick (1981) says these symptoms and many others can occur much later and 'emotional breakdowns can occur long after the crash site has been cleared and the physical injuries have been treated'.<sup>175</sup>

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171 Holsti, O.R. (1971). Crisis, stress and decision making. *International Social Science Journal*, 23, Pp53-67.

172 Staff (1980, November). Hotline: A year in review, common problems, uncommon solutions. *Firehouse*, Pp78-82.

173 Mitchell, J.T. and Dyregrov, A. (1993). In Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, Plenum Press, New York. P907.

174 Mitchell, J.T. and Dyregrov, A. (1993). Traumatic Stress in Disaster Workers and Emergency Personnel Prevention and Intervention in Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, Plenum Press, New York. P907.

175 Frederick, C.J. (Ed.) (1981). *Aircraft accidents: Emergency mental health problems*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Mental Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Forstenyer (1980) says 'the most common forms of expression for suppressed reactions tend to be nightmares and other intrusive images, such as flashbacks and obsessive thoughts about the incident, humor, physical activity, and at times, emotional outbursts'.<sup>176</sup> Wilkinson (1983) found symptoms of distress in some people six or more months after an incident.<sup>177</sup>

Howarth and Dusseyer (1988) suggest literature shows training that enhances a person's ability to cope effectively in a distressing environment is considered to be prevention-oriented and should be encouraged for emergency personnel.<sup>178</sup> For highly stressful situations, they recommend, small teams should be assigned to perform the tasks usually assigned to just one or two people. This spreads exposure effects and may limit the number, extent and duration of the more powerful exposures encountered by an individual.

Pre-deployment briefings can alert personnel of likely stressors associated with the event and should clearly explain the type and nature of the event and any known information to enable responders to have realistic expectations of what they would encounter. Leaders should share information and ensure all appropriate personnel are informed of developments and new information relating to the incident.

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<sup>176</sup> Forstenyer, A. (1980, July). Stress, the psychological scarring of air crash rescue personnel. *Firehouse*, Pp50-52, 62.

<sup>177</sup> Wilkinson, C.B. (1983). Aftermath of a disaster: The collapse of the Hyatt Regency Hotel skywalk. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 140, Pp1134-1139.

<sup>178</sup> Howarth, I., & Dusseyer, I.E. (1988). Helping people cope with the long-term effects of stress. In S. Fisher & J. Reason (Eds.), *Handbook of life stress, cognition and health*. New York: Wiley. In Mitchell, J.T. and Dyregrov, A. (1993). Traumatic Stress in Disaster Workers and Emergency Personnel Prevention and Intervention in Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, Plenum Press, New York. P909.

The mental health aspects of disasters are discussed by Myers (1989), who confirms that prolonged exposure increases the risk of traumatic responses.<sup>179</sup> However, Myers also found if personnel had less than 12 hours at the scene of a traumatic event, ‘adverse psychological sequelae associated with more extensive exposures’ could be prevented. He also recommends a break of at least six hours away from the site, along with short walks and team meal breaks.

Mitchell and Bray (1989) say post-trauma interventions for emergency personnel fall under two broad categories: the first includes support services provided *on site* or directly associated with the scene; the second group of support services includes activities which are provided immediately *after* an event or in the weeks or months which follow.<sup>180</sup> These services include psychological debriefing, individual counseling, assessments, referrals for additional services, spouse support programs and debriefings, while on-site support services may be performed by specially trained peer support personnel, mental health professionals or by combined teams of peer support personnel and mental health professionals.

The services at the scene can be categorized into three distinct areas of involvement. Support services may be provided to individuals who are showing obvious signs of distress at the scene. The obvious signs of distress include emotional lability [emotionally instability], angry outbursts, severe withdrawal, psychomotor dysfunction, psychogenic shock, mental confusion, and dissociative reactions.

Group intervention and counseling are not provided under field conditions since personnel are at various stages of distress and are often unprepared to manage their feelings in the context of a group setting. Individual contacts are therefore indicated when psychological first aid is presented under field conditions.<sup>181</sup>

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179 Myers, D.G. (1989). Mental health and disaster, preventive approaches to intervention. In R. Gist & B. Lubin (Eds.). *Psychological aspects of disaster*. New York: Wiley. In Mitchell, J.T. and Dyregrov, A. (1993). *Traumatic Stress in Disaster Workers and Emergency Personnel Prevention and Intervention* in Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, Plenum Press, New York.

180 Mitchell, J.T., & Bray, G.P. (1989). *Emergency services stress*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. In Mitchell, J.T. and Dyregrov, A. (1993). *Traumatic Stress in Disaster Workers and Emergency Personnel Prevention and Intervention* in Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, Plenum Press, New York. P910.

181 Ibid.

Mitchell and Dyregrov (1993) say the second area of involvement for support services personnel is that of providing advice and counsel to command staff who are in charge of the personnel involved in the incident. Stress-mitigation programs for emergency workers, examined by Mitchell and Bray (1989), feature the following factors:

- (1) workers are given general information about the nature of stress-response syndromes and their causes and their effects on the average person;
- (2) course material discusses and reviews critical incident stress or emergency service stress reactions;
- (3) significant differences are shown between the routine stress of everyday work (i.e., hassles) and the acute stress of emergency or disaster work;
- (4) personnel are then presented with information on the typical signs and symptoms which are likely to appear during or shortly after an emergency team's participation in tragic events (also delayed symptoms);
- (5) material is presented ... which describes stress survival strategies during the actual on-scene operations (e.g., frequent breaks, limiting of exposure to disturbing sights or sounds, limit work time blocks to 1.5-2 hours maximum, need for adequate food/fluids to sustain themselves). Also encouraged to render support to peers during event and after return to work;
- (6) stress-related information is provided to spouses and significant others in stress workshops.<sup>182</sup>

Decompression and defusing sessions are small group meetings provided by peers in proximity to the event. These are not provided at the scene itself but instead at a facility appropriate for such a group meeting. They also say the objectives of decompression are either to eliminate the need to provide a full debriefing or to enhance a full debriefing if one is indicated.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Mitchell, J.T., & Bray, G.P. (1989). *Emergency services stress*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. In Mitchell, J.T. and Dyregrov, A. (1993). *Traumatic Stress in Disaster Workers and Emergency Personnel Prevention and Intervention in* Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, Plenum Press, New York. Pp908-909.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, P910.

After large-scale incidents, such as disasters, another form of intervention is frequently used. Called a ‘de-escalation’ or ‘demobilization’, it is designed to reduce the distress associated with moving from a traumatic event into the routine of daily operational duties or home life.<sup>184</sup> For details on decompressing, defusing and debriefing, refer to Mitchell and Dyregrov (1993 and 1989).<sup>185</sup>

These researchers concluded that disaster and emergency personnel are not exempt from the devastating impact of tragic events on their emotions, their health, their careers, their families, or their lives. ‘In fact, they may be more seriously affected because they suppress their reactions in order to maintain their ability to function during the crisis and later because they fear debilitation from their own emotions within their family systems or other aspects of their personal lives.’<sup>186</sup>

Journalists covering trauma regularly employ detached coping strategies and would benefit from better preparation and support. Burton said he thought some good could be done by educating journalists about the best ways to approach victims. He conceded that while complaints about intrusions did *not* figure strongly in APC statistics, ‘it is a huge concern amongst the public’.<sup>187</sup>

His words are backed up by Coté and Simpson (2000):

We have come to appreciate how much of the training of reporters and photographers, the day-to-day conduct of the business, and even the rewards of journalism reflect ‘assembly-line’ thinking. On the news assembly line each person performs a set of tasks so that a finished product will emerge at a pre-set time – a television news program at 6p.m., a newspaper on the porch at 5a.m., a newsmagazine in the mail on the same day each week, or a bulletin on a Web site in minutes. The assembly lines of the news media squeeze both mundane and extraordinary events – even those that kill and maim people – into the same hourly, daily, or weekly production schedule. They push reporters to get more information at a faster pace, exposing the brutal surface of events but little of the truth about what will follow.<sup>188</sup>

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184 Mitchell, J.T. and Dyregrov, A. (1993). Traumatic Stress in Disaster Workers and Emergency Personnel Prevention and Intervention in Wilson, J.P. & Raphael, B. (Ed.) *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, Plenum Press, New York. Pp910-911.

185 Loc. cit.

186 Ibid, P112.

187 Evidence given by Tom Burton, Federal President, Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance as it appeared in the Commonwealth of Australia Senate Official Committee Hansard [1998, February], *Self-regulation in the information and communications industries*, February 16 hearing, Canberra (uncorrected proof).

188 Coté & Simpson (2000), P4.

*Victims' and survivors' opinions of the media's behaviour*

In the 'fish-and-chip-wrapper' world of journalism, do its practitioners pause enough to consider how they package and present the news and what consequences this might have for readers, listeners and viewers? At a time when the public's opinion of journalists in Australia seems to be at an all-time low, some victim accounts of their reactions to the media are sobering:

Adelaide lecturer Michael Downes – who spent 14 weeks in hospital after sustaining horrific cleaver wounds in an unprovoked attack on him by the estranged husband of another staff member – was critical of print media coverage of his predicament, particularly in the early days while he was unconscious and able to respond to speculation about why he had been at his colleague's home. He had been there marking papers.<sup>189</sup>

The print media deliberately misinterpreted what had happened and made quite sure that it appeared to the general public that I was out at that house involved in some affair with this lady and that's how the whole thing had happened ...I did hear, afterwards, that my relatives were extremely distressed by the media coverage, in particular the thorough television coverage of me in the foyer (of nearby flats where he went for help after the attack) spraying blood everywhere and sliding down the wall which, I thought, was totally unnecessary for a news service. The more blood it seems the better it is, but my own family didn't know about it until they saw it on TV.<sup>190</sup>

Another victim – who was shot in the neck by an allegedly deluded neighbour who claimed the victim had been making too much noise and will carry significant physical injury for the rest of his life – was also annoyed with media coverage of the perpetrator. 'They basically just gave the offender's story and his reasons for having shot me which, to say the least, would have to be fairly unfair, considering all of his reasons were a result of delusions anyway.'<sup>191</sup>

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189 Video recording, 'Victims of Crime' (South Australian Film Commission), 1991.

190 Loc. cit.

191 Loc. cit.

For communities responding to a traumatic event, the rehabilitation process is slow and poignant – a fact often overlooked by time-pressured media searching for sensation, conflict and more exciting angles. At Port Arthur, from the day after the shootings began, there were huge numbers of practical tasks to be accomplished, according to Scott, but this was not evident in media coverage.<sup>192</sup>

Many of these were organised by highly professional and dedicated people without whom some of the victims would not have survived and many would have suffered even more than they did. A number of these people were members of the Peninsula community, which is not as passive or as demoralised as the image imposed on it by some carers or experts and most media reports.<sup>193</sup>

However, Scott admitted, every now and then, though, media outlets would ‘get it right’. When Bryant pleaded not guilty and it looked, for a time, as though there would be a trial that went on for up to five weeks, the atmosphere in Tasman grew more tense Scott says. But once the plea was changed and the sentencing hearing had come and gone, many believed all would be well. *The Mercury*, now free to print what it liked, carried a batch of ‘we can now tell you’ stories and announced: ‘Port Arthur is not just a story about death. It is also a story about life and how precious it is. It is not just a story about tragedy. It is also a story about triumph. Triumph of the human spirit.’

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192 Scott, M., (1997). Pp193-194.

193 Ibid.

## 2.5 Communication issues around traumatic events

### *The role of media management in times of trauma*

Media often rail against those in government, industry or the community who try to organise or ‘manage’ their activities, citing such arrangements as manipulative and the antithesis of freedom of speech. However, the reality for those at the centre of media attention in the aftermath of a critical incident or traumatic event is that, unchecked, media personnel will overwhelm victims and survivors and sometimes their families and communities as well. The bigger the story, the greater that risk, according to Burton. The MEAA Federal President told the Senate in 1998 there was room for improvement in the organising of media around traumatic incidents, particularly in their immediate aftermath.<sup>194</sup>

<b>TABLE 2.5.1 – Issues relating to role of media management in times of trauma covered by Australia’s 1998 Senate Committee hearings<sup>195</sup></b>	
<i>Summary of comments (actual quotes indicated)</i>	<i>Person/entity cited &amp; date of comment/s</i>
Citing the case where 12-year-old Canberra girl Katie Bender was killed by flying shrapnel when a local hospital was demolished: ‘I think about five media organisations approached that family the next day for photos. One media group actually came back twice because one half of the media group got the photo and would not give it to the other side of the media group’. In some cities like Sydney, police take on part of the intermediary role by taking a message to victims, survivors and/or their families that ‘the media would like a photo’ and then providing any supplied photographs to the media.	<b>Tom Burton,</b> February 16, 1998 hearing (Canberra)
On why most journalists do not want information flows and access to interviewees ‘managed’: Protocols could be counterproductive and were prone to fail, even if only one or two people decide: ‘We’re not going to be corralled into some sort of cow yard where we can only talk to three people when they are served up to us; we’re going to go and get some real people.’	<b>Tom Burton,</b> February 16, 1998 hearing (Canberra)

<sup>194</sup> Tom Burton, Federal President, Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, in Commonwealth of Australia Senate Official Committee Hansard (1998, February), *Self-regulation in the information and communications industries*, February 16 hearing, Canberra (uncorrected proof, brackets mine).

<sup>195</sup> Commonwealth of Australia Senate Official Committee Hansard (1998, February), *Self-regulation in the Information and Communications Industries* (various hearing dates).

<i>Summary of comments (actual quotes indicated)</i>	<i>Person/entity cited &amp; date of comment/s</i>
Some journalists would argue the media management at Port Arthur was excessive, but it was effective. ‘Some would argue it was perfect because it spared victims’ families and the general populace the horror of the event in its first hours. That showed fairly savvy media management whereby the media were just stopped from going in there.’	<b>Paul Bongiorno,</b> April 15, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
The authorities at St Mary’s Cathedral arrange media pooling to cover major funerals and ceremonies that gives limited access that still achieves full coverage of events.	<b>Paul Bongiorno,</b> April 15, 1998, hearing (Canberra)
Media management is becoming more sophisticated, with public relations and public affairs management becoming more of a science. ‘There is a gulf between what I call the media literate and the media illiterate, I suppose. There is a call for much more media education in schools so that ordinary citizens have a better knowledge of how to deal with the media and what their rights and obligations are ... But I can see all sorts of advantages to pooling, just as there are disadvantages ... If you have an intrusion of privacy or someone in a grief situation or a tragedy of some sort, then it is better that there is only one camera on the scene than a whole huddle of media around the individual ... if you are pooling resources, you can cover more news and have the general public served by cameras being in more places at one time than otherwise.’	<b>Mark Pearson,</b> April 22, 1998 hearing (Sydney)
Describing the changing nature of relations between police and the media: ‘In days past the police had an attitude that they would ignore the media and not give them any information. That has changed considerably over the last five years. Our attitude today is facilitation, not confrontation ... The media, for us, is a very useful ally. I would say that, for us, 75 per cent of the equation is in our favour. There is 25 per cent when at times the media can, perhaps, cause us some disquiet.’	<b>Geoffrey Easton,</b> April 27, 1998, hearing (Adelaide)
Around Australia, police departments employ staff whose responsibility it is to interact with and manage information flows to the media. In responding to the Port Arthur massacre, Tasmania Police employed media management strategies that, while not pleasing everyone, did go some way towards limiting potential harm to victims and survivors and their families and communities. Relations between police and media can readily become adverse, especially during major incidents where ‘the media become somewhat intrusive’. In these cases, the police ‘isolate the media from the actual incident itself, contain them within a media barrier and inform them as the events unfold’ with a controlled drip-feed of information.’	<b>Geoffrey Easton,</b> April 27, 1998, hearing (Adelaide)
Speaking about another form of ‘media management’ known as ‘pooling’, where a limited number of reporters, photographers or crews, sometimes only one, are given access to a site or interviewee: This practice pre-dates Sir Robert Menzies (Australia’s Prime Minister between 1949 and 1996) and (Harvey) disagreed with any restriction at all to numbers of media able to access sources. The practice was common with doorstep interviews at Parliament House in Canberra but ‘infrequent’ in Sydney.	<b>Peter Harvey,</b> April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
People were ‘fairly daunted by the idea of (media) scrums, so there is a great incentive to make those arrangements if you can’.	<b>Senator Jeannie Ferris</b> April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
Most journalists accepted that, in a situation like Port Arthur or Thredbo, there had to be some form of control exercised: ‘It was a disaster situation. I think in both cases there might have been a couple of cowboys out there, but in most cases all members of the media behaved remarkably well, which is reflected in the fact that ... we received no complaints at all regarding our coverage.’	<b>Peter Meakin,</b> April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)
The Nine Network had punished two staff who intruded into ‘a house in Queensland’ not long before the Senate hearings. One person was suspended without pay for a month, the other was fired. ‘There was no code complaint – it just happened on the day. The story was never used.’	<b>Peter Meakin,</b> April 22, 1998, hearing (Sydney)

## **2.6 In summary**

This investigation of available literature shows that while Australian media representatives acknowledge some shortcomings in the current methods of coverage of traumatic incidents, they are largely comfortable with the self-regulatory framework in which they operate. However, others outside the industry are not as accepting of claims that self-regulation is protecting those it should.

With the growing body of knowledge about trauma and its impacts, especially that coming from the United States, Australian journalists could easily become more aware of important issues raised when traumatic incidents occur.

The challenge the author of this thesis faced after conducting an initial literature review has been to devise and conduct relative Australian research to ascertain how survivors and their families feel about the media attention they received, what was useful and what, if anything, could have – or should have – been different. The following chapters outline how this was done and what was discovered. These chapters should provide Australian journalists with valuable information as well as potential steps for improving their coverage of traumatic events and critical incidents.