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Is Journalism Making Its Workers Sick? Labor Conditions and Mental Health in Mexico and Spain

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In recent years, precarious employment in the media industry has become a global phenomenon. Based on 48 interviews with journalists from Mexico and Spain, this article explores how working conditions affect journalists' well-being. Professionals unanimously confirm a worsening of mental health in the past 5 years. Although coverage of the pandemic has served as an escape valve, exposing this problem, interviewees stress that its root causes lie in the ongoing decline in labor conditions, driven by the crisis of the media business model and digitalization. Journalists report symptoms similar to those experienced by war correspondents, yet media companies have taken no action to support their employees' mental health. Findings show that psychological distress in journalism extends beyond conflict coverage and stems from the broader context of job insecurity. This article invites reflection on the consequences of a profession marked by exhaustion, harassment, and lack of corporate care.

Keywords: journalists, mental health, labor conditions, precarious employment, well-being, Spain, Mexico

Mental health has long been a taboo subject in Western societies, despite its prevalence among the general population (Dahlberg, 2008). The media have played a role in reinforcing this situation through decades of silence and obfuscation (Dimitrov et al., 2022), which have done little to mitigate the severe impact of the pandemic on public mental health (WHO, 2022). In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a shift in media agenda, leading to a twofold increase in publications on mental health (Goswami, 2023).

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Moreover, the underreporting of mental health issues has been further compounded by misleading portrayals (Bowen & Lovell, 2013), which have fueled stigma (Markiewitz & Jungblut, 2023).

Despite journalism being a profession highly susceptible to stress-related issues (Fedler, 2004) and exacerbated by heavy workloads (Miret, 2021), until very recently, news workers' mental health has not been a focal point for communication researchers (Bélair-Gagnon et al., 2024; Storm, 2024). Historically, it was psychiatrists and psychologists who researched this topic (Aoki et al., 2013).

The pandemic has catalyzed attention on journalists' mental health, highlighting not only the challenges they face in covering the COVID-19 crisis (Hoak, 2023; Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2022; Pearson et al., 2022; Posetti et al., 2021; Selva & Feinstein, 2020) but also the broader implications for current journalistic practice (Asociación de la Prensa de Madrid [APM], 2024). This aligns with the growing openness among prominent professionals about mental health and its impact on journalists (Biehlmann, 2024; Storm, 2020).

Despite its growing visibility within professional circles, the study of media personnel's mental health remains relatively new, especially in Mexican and Spanish academia. This research, therefore, starts from the assumption that the deterioration of working conditions—driven by an intersection of economic, technological, and cultural factors (Besbris & Petre, 2020)—is a key factor affecting news workers' mental health. It proposes a comparative and qualitative approach to assess how the nature and specific demands of journalists' work increase the risk of mental health issues. The contrast between Spain—severely affected by the 2008 crisis—and Mexico, where journalists frequently operate under conditions of extreme violence and censorship, enriches the understanding of how systemic factors shape professional ill-being. It is important to emphasize that these aspects are external to journalism and, thus, have a widespread impact on other professions (Irvine & Rose, 2022). Hence, this study has a descriptive scope aimed at fostering further research that advances theory within journalism studies by suggesting a connection between external factors impacting news outlets' operations and their personnel's psychological well-being.

Literature Review

Mental Health and Media: The Focus on Traumatic Coverage

Journalism scholars have primarily examined mental health issues among war correspondents, reporters who cover conflicts and hazardous stories such as organized crime activities, and victims of anti-press violence.

War is a dangerous and traumatic event; hence, covering it involves both physical and psychological challenges (Feinstein, 2006). Exposure to systematic violence and devastation—and surviving to tell the story—causes journalists not only moral injury associated with emotions such as shame and guilt (Newman, 2002) but also post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which may involve major depression, substance abuse, and dissociative disorders (Feinstein et al., 2002; Frey, 2023). Furthermore, compared with their

peers reporting on other beats, war correspondents are significantly more likely to experience problems similar to those of combat veterans (Feinstein et al., 2002).

Covering sensitive issues is part of journalism's watchdog role. Nevertheless, beyond the potential risk of aggression, journalists who constantly report on crime news—particularly on drug lords' activities—are more likely to experience mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Flores et al., 2014; Hughes et al., 2021). Besides this inherently stressful beat, covering natural disasters, terrorist attacks, or mass shootings is also associated with psychological problems derived from excessive workloads in a short period, unethical practices, or personal connections with the victims, which over time foster exhaustion, professional dissatisfaction, and a desire to quit journalism (Chiarito, 2019; Stupart, 2021).

Anti-press violence is another source of mental health problems for media staff, particularly in authoritarian regimes across the Global South. Studies report that victims of aggression often experience post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep disorder, paranoia, constant fear, isolation, and even substance abuse (González, 2020; Hughes et al., 2021; Nieto-Brizio & Márquez-Ramírez, 2023). However, the psychological impact of such attacks on news workers extends beyond individual victims to their families and colleagues, fostering a broader sense of vulnerability among peers and relatives (González, 2020; Hughes et al., 2021).

In addition, there is a growing incidence of gender-based aggression both offline and online, causing mental health problems among female journalists worldwide (Hanusch et al., 2024; Hart & Sharma, 2024). Constant harassment, limited access to higher editorial positions, and an overall patriarchal environment leave many women in journalism feeling discriminated against, isolated, and afraid. Beyond these extraordinary challenges, day-to-day journalistic work has also become increasingly stressful and a significant source of psychological discomfort for many professionals because of political polarization, 24/7 news cycles, and the immediacy driven by digital platforms and social media (Chew et al., 2024; Kim & Buzzelli, 2024).

Media in Times of Disruption

Over the last two decades, the journalism industry has undergone radical technological, economic, and organizational changes, affecting everything from professional roles to journalistic boundaries and values, including the nature of news content and working conditions (Ekdale et al., 2015; Eldridge II & Broersma, 2018).

The digitalization of newsrooms has forced journalists to take on new responsibilities and tasks to support multiplatform production, reflecting an evolution toward multitasking (González Fernandes & de Mendonça Jorge, 2017) and multiskilling (Carr, 2019) journalism. Similarly, the increasing professionalization of social media spaces has increased hyperconnectivity, affecting both professional reputation and personal well-being (Bossio & Holton, 2021).

Digitalization has also highlighted new challenges for viable business models (Olsen et al., 2021) following the significant decline in advertising revenues for traditional media since the 2008 financial crisis (Mitchell et al., 2016), the entry of competitors such as technology platforms (Fu, 2021; Geradin, 2019), and the difficulties in securing subscription revenues (Newman et al., 2024).

The pursuit of economic survival has affected the structure of journalism at several levels, prompting drastic measures to reduce costs. These are evident in the hemorrhage of media closures and layoffs (Grieco, 2020; Shearer & Tomasik, 2022) and in the precariousness of working conditions (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2012), with increasing casualization in the newspaper industry (Cohen, 2016), job instability of professionals, and deterioration of their working conditions (Besbris & Petre, 2020). Indeed, layoffs, downsizing, and wage freezes have not only increased the workload of those remaining in newsrooms but have also reduced their income (Cohen et al., 2019; Ekdale et al., 2015; Sybert, 2023).

Second, the precariousness of employment conditions has influenced journalists' roles and professional identities, depriving them of the time and resources needed for quality reporting and replacing it with content produced by corporate communications offices (Macnamara, 2016). This is exacerbated by revenue-generating measures that undermine journalistic integrity and pose serious threats to the profession. On the one hand, the pressure to produce content that monetizes audience traffic, associated with the so-called click economy (Munger, 2019) and clickbait phenomena (Palau-Sampio, 2016), erodes editorial standards. On the other hand, the rise of branded content, presented as a salvation plan for recovering advertising revenues (Ferrer-Conill, 2016), perverts professional values.

Third, the adoption of neoliberal hiring models as a survival alternative by news organizations (Moisander et al., 2018) has led to increased self-employment through the use of bogus freelancers (Cohen, 2016; Gollmitzer, 2019; Örnebring, 2018). These labor measures have led to a "de-professionalization" of journalism worldwide (Witschge & Nygren, 2009), weakening careers (Örnebring & Möller, 2018) and core professional values, while increasing vulnerability to commercial, political, and business pressures (Hanitzsch et al., 2019).

Working Conditions in Mexico and Spain

The precarious labor conditions affecting media staff have long been assumed in both countries to be an inherent feature of Mexican and Spanish journalism (Cepeda-Robledo, 2018; Reyna, 2018). Although it has been widely discussed in Mexico as an overarching issue associated with other problems such as clientelism and limited professionalization (De León et al., 2018; Del Palacio, 2023; González, 2018), only recently has this topic become a proper object of academic inquiry (Reyna, 2018; Rodelo, 2023; Rodelo et al., 2024). In Spain, the main trigger for this concern was the 2008 financial crisis, which put this issue on both academic (Figueras-Maz et al., 2012) and professional agendas (APM, 2015).

The most discussed aspect of this phenomenon in Mexico concerns news workers' salaries. Because of the generally low profitability of media outlets, many depend on government advertising contracts (González, 2018; Salazar, 2018). This dependence fosters clientelism and corruption and compromises

professional autonomy, as low pay and scarce social benefits push journalists to accept bribes from their sources (González, 2018). Increasingly, technology-driven workloads also promote a harsh labor environment (Rodelo, 2023; Rodelo et al., 2024). In Spain, both low wages and high workloads—with working hours exceeding the legal limit (APM, 2024)—are at the forefront. Similarly, the persistently high unemployment rate—which has not fallen below 6,000 since 2008—coincides with fraudulent practices such as bogus self-employment (Örnebring, 2018). These precarious working conditions have increased vulnerability, with three out of four Spanish journalists reporting having faced pressure in the exercise of their duties on one or more occasions (APM, 2024).

Even though job precariousness is a common feature across Mexican media, journalists—particularly women—who work in rural areas or small cities tend to be more vulnerable to this phenomenon (Cepeda-Robledo, 2018; De León et al., 2018; Del Palacio, 2023; Rodelo et al., 2024). Similarly, in Spain, gender is a factor associated with unemployment, as the number of jobless women (62%) is almost a third higher than that of men (38%; APM, 2024).

Warnings from professional associations about the impact of journalists' work on their mental health have gained momentum since the pandemic (González et al., 2022; Posetti et al., 2021; Ramos, 2024; Selva & Feinstein, 2020). Seventy-five percent of Spanish journalists acknowledge that mental health is a serious problem in the sector, linked to high insecurity, long working hours, and work stress (APM, 2024). Moreover, various studies show that media workers constantly feel exhausted, undervalued, anxious, disappointed, harassed, and intimidated, among other psychological problems (Araújo, 2024; Higgins-Dobney, 2024).

Given the growing concerns and voices suggesting that "the media is burning out its workforce" (Pico, 2024, para. 11) and advocating for greater visibility of this issue (Storm, 2024), this research explores the experiences of journalists facing precarity, overwork, and a mental health crisis.

Methodology and Corpus

To deepen understanding of work and emotional experiences within journalistic companies (Igartua & Humanes, 2004), this study conducted in-depth interviews with 48 journalists, balanced by gender and age, across Mexico (24) and Spain (24) (see Table 1). Participants were selected based on factors shaping their personal and professional trajectories, such as gender, age group, professional role, type of news outlet, and media ownership. The sample included professionals from newspapers (16), television (6), radio (8), news agencies (1), web (7), multimedia working for more than one type of media (7), and press offices (3), representing both public (7) and private (41) media.

Table 1. Interviews.

Age	20–34		35–50		More than 50	
Gender	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Mexico	4	4	4	3	4	5
Spain	4	4	4	4	4	4

Source. Own elaboration.

The selected journalists were based in eight Spanish and six Mexican cities, ranging from national headquarters to regional and local newsrooms. This broad territorial scope was essential to include different journalistic realities and enable a comprehensive analysis of how contextual factors shape journalists' emotional well-being.

Between July 2023 and October 2024, interviews were conducted either online or in person. We used snowball sampling to identify profiles that matched the criteria described above. A semistructured script guided the conversations, covering four thematic blocks: (1) general perceptions of mental health in the journalistic profession; (2) personal or colleagues' experiences of work anxiety; (3) contributing causes of emotional distress; and (4) the role of employers and unions in addressing these issues. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was fully transcribed. Each transcript was anonymized using a coded system based on the interviewee's number, country, and gender (I [Interviewed] × [number of the interview] C [country, S = Spain or M = Mexico] G [gender, W = woman or M = Man]).

The analysis followed a thematic approach, employing an iterative coding process. This involved multiple readings of the transcripts to identify recurring themes and subsequently categorizing and refining codes into broader thematic areas. Key themes emerging from the analysis included precarious employment conditions—such as low salaries, temporary contracts, reduced staff sizes, extended working hours, heavy workloads, and constant technological connectivity—which contributed significantly to job insecurity. In exploring journalists' responses to these precarious dynamics, we developed codes for categories such as internal communication with management, peer conversations, and unspoken or taboo topics within the newsroom.

Results

Findings are divided into four thematic sections, which are the outcome of the aforementioned coding process.

Perceptions of Mental Health Among Journalists

The results reveal that all 48 interviewees perceived a deterioration in their mental health over the past five years. Although the participants pointed to various factors affecting their mental health, two main causes were consistently identified. First, the burden of becoming "digital slaves" (ID25SW, ID42SM) in increasingly understaffed newsrooms—struggling against immediacy while producing content for multiple platforms (e.g., recording a podcast for radio while simultaneously writing a web article)—aligns with the literature on digitalization and multitasking (Carr, 2019; González Fernandes & de Mendonça Jorge, 2017). Second, as Márquez-Ramírez et al. (2022) note, the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, such as falling ill, being required to work while infected, enduring salary cuts or layoffs, noncompliance with timetables in alleged collective dismissal procedures, and having to work without adequate technological support.

> During Covid-19, I even had to see a psychiatrist because it triggered a lot in me. I think it was a combination of Covid-19, hospitalization, and being laid off at that time. This process put a lot of pressure on me. I'd never been laid off before. (I25MM)

> The pandemic brought this issue to the surface. I recognize that, since the problem was raised in other professional sectors by many people and citizens who denounced it, we journalists have also started to apply it to ourselves, asking, "Hey, how are we mentally doing?" (I38SM)

However, while stress is widely acknowledged as an intrinsic component of the profession—particularly in news agencies and audiovisual media outlets—participants reported a notable recent worsening of their emotional well-being. Beyond their own experiences, many journalists knew two or three colleagues who had taken medical leave for mental health reasons in the past year or had personally witnessed incidents of anxiety during professional duties. For Mexican journalists, "the level of stress involved magnifies certain coverages or boosts certain traumatic events. Besides, many journalists suffer from post-traumatic stress, which triggers anxiety and panic attacks" (I23MW). However, in that country, it is "not common" (I30MM) for journalists to leave work even when they are sick.

> When I have visited my doctor, I have never asked him for paid medical leave because I know that it would affect my colleagues, but he wanted to give me Lexatin [benzodiazepines]. What is the problem? I'm overworked. What I can't do is take pills to relax because that doesn't reduce my workload. (I25SW)

When asked which age group was perceived to suffer the most from mental health issues, participants pointed to both ends of the professional spectrum. On one hand, junior profiles were identified as particularly vulnerable, as they are frequently entrusted with significant responsibilities without adequate preparation or institutional support (I26SM, I30SW). On the other hand, senior professionals appeared to be at high risk after years of cumulative, extremely stressful work. "Sometimes the pressure is so intense that when a difficult situation arises, it just breaks you—it's the last straw" (I39SW). This pattern was also observed in public media organizations, where senior journalists who no longer aligned with the dominant ideological line were marginalized or pushed aside, further exacerbating their emotional distress.

Journalists experiencing mental health problems often avoid formally or publicly disclosing their situation. In most cases, knowledge emerges only indirectly through the prolonged absence of the affected individual. This delay is largely attributed to the silence surrounding such cases, which stems from the stigma that continues to associate mental health struggles with personal weakness in the eyes of employers. However, there are signs of a gradual shift, as discussions about emotional distress and psychological discomfort are becoming more common and accepted within informal spaces. In this sense, there is a generational shift in the perception and expression of emotional distress in newsrooms.

> You see a change in young people. I think it's the youngest one who works with us who says: "Dude, you told me I leave at 6, and even if the news is not published, I leave at 6" and they don't care about it. (I4MW)

> I think more and more young people are starting to realize that it's not normal to feel overwhelmed all the time or to live with constant stress and shouting. We talk more about this atmosphere, usually between peers. We usually go to one of the terraces, called "the crying terrace." (I37SW)

Parallels With High-Risk Reporting Symptoms

Mental health problems manifest both physically and emotionally, as various authors have indicated (see González, 2020; Posetti et al., 2021). The most common are episodes of crying, either openly in the newsroom or privately outside the office. Other reported symptoms include loss of vision, breathlessness, or other physical effects. As one interviewee explained, "Fortunately, it doesn't happen as often now, but what happened to me once—and to many other colleagues—was to reaching such a level of anxiety that I spent several weeks crying before going to work" (I27SM). Another emphasized the cumulative strain: "A colleague and I went to the park to cry—'what the fuck!' [sic]. This is never going to change: censorship, precarity, and people's stories. They shake you; they really shake you" (I18MM).

> We have seen people covering a live radio electoral debate who suddenly lost their eyesight due to stress. There was a colleague who had to leave the studio in tears because she was overwhelmed with work. She couldn't cope with it anymore. (I26SM)

In Mexico, alongside PTSD, many journalists also experience moral injury resulting from certain types of coverage, especially when they witness horrific crimes, report emotionally devastating stories, or face direct threats because of their work. As one journalist explained, "it's a very strong psycho-emotional drain for me. I cover the entire victim issue, having to listen to families and hear how they suffer when a family member disappears or when someone close to them is murdered" (I17MW).

Concerning gender differences, Mexican male journalists believe their female colleagues are more likely to express their feelings and speak openly about seeking psychological help, a situation echoed by the female interviewees. In Spain, although most reported cases of emotional breakdowns involved women, sick leave for mental health issues was found to affect both men and women. Another additional issue concerns the treatment women receive because of their gender, as reflected by one Mexican journalist who stated that "female journalists are a more vulnerable group than men; the violence perpetrated by different actors varies depending on whether you are a man or a woman" (I6MM).

Contextual Factors Affecting Working Conditions and Well-Being

All interviewees unanimously agreed that the widespread psychological distress is mainly caused by the precariousness of work in journalistic companies. Currently, journalists feel overwhelmed by increased workload for two reasons: first, downsized newsrooms—positions are not replaced when someone

retires, and only long-term medical leaves and "maternity leave in the strict sense, not breastfeeding leave" (I27SM) are covered—and second, the constant demands of digital and multiplatform journalism: "You have constant information pressure for everything: 'fast to the web, the headline has to go fast to the web'" (I34SM), because "you must beat other media to the story" (I20MW).

> More and more things are being asked of you. You are asked to write, to make a video, and to take a picture. There is pressure on your work, and the newsrooms are getting smaller and smaller. Now we also have to present events. On one hand, newsrooms have become news generators, and, on the other hand, advertising platforms. (I32SM)

> We could call it 24-hour slavery. It never really ends because the website is always running. Furthermore, it's no longer only about writing traditional journalistic content. There is a lot of material produced specifically to be highlighted by search engines. (I42SM)

These findings are consistent with the literature on the various characteristics of precariousness (Besbris & Petre, 2020; Cohen, 2016; Ekdale et al., 2015), such as long working hours, high demands for low wages, and contemporary pressures linked to metrics. These factors affect both the professional and personal lives of journalists, creating deeper labor fragility.

Another contributing factor frequently cited as a trigger for mental health-related medical leave is toxic leadership. Specifically, journalists who are promoted based on their previous work—or who have close ties with senior management—often abuse their subordinates. This mistreatment typically manifests through aggressive communication, insults, and, in some instances, workplace bullying or mobbing. "In radio, shouting is really widespread—it's somewhat normalized. Stress, frustration, and bad moods . . . they are all seen as something natural, almost as if they were an inherent part of the medium" (I37SW).

> Last year I was sick all the time because I couldn't perform, I couldn't sleep, or I fell asleep excessively. The news can't wait. My boss changed my schedule to 5:00 to 10:00 in the morning. I was under pressure all the time, I was incredibly stressed about everything, and I had sleep problems that led to a mental breakdown which made me quit my job. (I22MM)

> We have tolerated attitudes and behaviors that are detrimental to mental health. I have witnessed very cruel practices in the newsroom. When they want to dismiss someone, I have seen them abuse people by removing them from their section, and waiting to see when you finally decide to leave on your own. (I42SM)

In the performance of their duties, senior and mid-level managers primarily experience political pressures, which they report handling with relative ease: "I don't usually worry about it too much because, in the end, you also realize that they are the ones walking a tightrope" (I36SW). In contrast, economic

pressures are felt throughout the newsroom, evident in the obligation to turn press releases into news stories and produce sponsored content disguised as journalistic information.

> Nowadays, there is so much dependence on advertisers that you can't really afford to be too reluctant. I'm going to set my principles aside and be practical: Since I know that some content has to be included, I will simply include it and move on. Since I'm not the one making the decisions, I just follow orders here. (I25SW)

For Mexican participants—regardless of age or gender—exposure to violent contexts emerged as another factor affecting mental health. Although not all interviewees work in areas considered unsafe, many described forms of violence that generate anxiety, fear, and stress: police harassment and censorship in Mérida; political pressure in Guadalajara; and threats from criminal groups in Tijuana. Additionally, certain types of coverage—particularly those related to insecurity, lack of governance, and human rights violations such as femicides and disappearances—are also perceived as emotionally harmful. In this regard, several male participants note that their female colleagues are more exposed to gender-based violence affecting their mental health, such as sexual harassment, stalking, and segregation.

> The media's demand for re-victimizing content reporting deteriorates journalists' mental health, because it normalizes violence. I know many journalists do this automatically and don't consider the risk involved. They're only there because it's their job, and they enter into a never-ending cycle of violence. (I10MM)

In addition to these daily stressors, structural factors weigh heavily on younger generations. Most participants highlighted job insecurity and significantly reduced salaries that "don't even allow them to live independently" (I36SW). In Mexico, low salaries do not even guarantee daily food:

> The precarious conditions give you a certain hopelessness, like, "Damn! [sic], I don't have anything to eat. I don't have any money left. What am I going to do tomorrow? How will I write news if I'm thinking about how I will pay my rent?" This obviously causes anxiety. (I18MM)

All participants acknowledged that salaries have lost purchasing power since they were cut or frozen by approximately 26% in Spain, following the 2007–2012 economic crisis (I28SM, I32SM), and by approximately 14.6% in Mexico over the last six months, according to government data. However, there are no official salary scales. Nevertheless, employees in large media companies highlighted the significant salary differences between junior and senior staff within the same newsroom, even for similar roles. As one interviewee noted: "There's a lot of opacity around salaries in the company. For instance, I recently got a raise, but only on the condition that I didn't tell anyone" (I37SW).

Despite the factors mentioned above, interviewees referenced their vocation or passion for the profession, particularly on those days "when the adrenaline makes up for the weariness" (I42SM). "Our profession is wonderful," they emphasized, while regretting that journalists were not very assertive.

> That's part of the challenge of this profession: because we love it and it's a vocation, there are people willing to endure hardships that, with all due respect, someone working in another field—say, assembling parts at Ford—would never even consider. (I34SM)

Nevertheless, some leave the profession in search of better working conditions. Three out of the 48 interviewees (I31SW, I35SW, and I40SM) specifically mentioned that they were seeking greater stability in working hours, higher economic compensation, and relief from work overload. The other participants were aware of additional cases around them. Their common destinations were secondary school teaching and corporate communication departments.

> I believe there are more women, especially in communication departments and corporate communication, mainly because working hours tend to be better. Since we women still bear most of the caregiving responsibilities, this ultimately influences how we develop our professional lives. (I36SW)

Disclosure and Organizational Response

Only three out of the 48 interviewees (I29SW, I36SW, and I4MW) reported that their companies had conducted a mental health survey among their staff, although none were aware of the results. An employee at a public media organization mentioned the existence of a psychological support department, "but they don't really investigate the situations or report them" (I29SW). Another interviewee stated that a psychological intervention only occurred "because there was a case of sexual harassment that went viral" (I4MW).

Similarly, a Mexican journalist referred to strategies designed to help employees relax while demanding more productivity from them, such as installing a football table to "de-stress": "With such a workload and working double shifts, when will I have time to play? It makes me laugh a lot" (I17MM).

Interviewees believed that the stigma of weakness still prevailed from the employer's perspective. "Media companies operate under the logic that the more pressure they apply and the less they spend, the better—everything else is secondary" (I34SM). One participant noted: "I don't think managers understand the mental health issue" (I9MW). These findings align with the stigma and taboo surrounding mental health (Markiewitz & Jungblut, 2023; Storm, 2020).

Generally, journalists feel that their mental health issues go unnoticed because "there isn't much empathy" (I5MM), and this is "socioculturally rooted" (I21MM). Media owners "don't even look at us" (I13MM); thus, participants feel unprotected and experience a climate of uncertainty, where their mental health seems to increasingly deteriorate.

The downsizing of editorial teams has weakened workers' representation within workplace committees (I25SW, I48SW). These committees now focus primarily on recovering lost purchasing power and enforcing work-hour regulations—particularly in Spain, where since 2019, the law requires companies to implement systems for recording employees' working hours. Both I27SM and I28SM emphasized the need

for increased labor inspections, which they believe could help draw attention to stress-related medical leave and broader mental health concerns within newsrooms.

Differences were observed across contexts. In Mexico, most media outlets lack unions, and when they do exist, their priority is not mental health. "No, the union is not doing anything to ensure the mental health of journalists" (I1MM). In contrast, there are no professional bodies or groups organized by journalists. Interviewees mention some social media movements (i.e., #TenemosQueHablar) that seek labor improvements, but these rarely extend beyond virtual spaces. Ultimately, the perception is that journalists' mental health is of little interest to anyone.

Discussion & Conclusions

Precarious employment in the media industry is a global phenomenon (Örnebring, 2018; Rick, 2024). However, recent studies have begun to analyze its impact on mental health (Plotner & Ferrucci, 2024) and professional well-being (Bélair-Gagnon et al., 2024; Deuze, 2023). This research reinforces the assumption that job degradation, resulting from a multifactorial crisis, decisively impacts journalists' mental health by showing that psychological distress in the profession extends beyond conflict reporting, which has received sustained attention.

The comparative study reveals that the relationship between precariousness and mental health is reproduced in similar terms in countries like Mexico and Spain, despite having different professional cultures and regulations (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2020). These results confirm quantitative reports (APM, 2024; Pearson et al., 2022) and align with professional associations and journalists' warnings about the convergence of factors that create a "perfect storm" for journalists' mental health (Storm, 2020).

The deterioration of journalists' mental health has emerged since the COVID-19 outbreak because of the emotionally difficult and prolonged coverage of the pandemic (Hoak, 2023; Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2022) and increased hyperconnectivity promoted during this time, combined with the progressive declines in working conditions. These factors result from the crisis of the media business model and workforce downsizing, which have led to work overload and multitasking demands, as well as from the consequences of digitalization, such as 24/7 working schedules and difficulties separating from a creative and vocational profession (Bélair-Gagnon et al., 2024; Deuze, 2023; Rick, 2024).

Additionally, there is a set of effects fostered by pressure from political, economic, and social actors, as well as from news outlets themselves (APM, 2024). This spiral leads journalists to experience a culture of violence, boosted by both toxic work cultures (Goyanes & Cañedo, 2023) and harassment from audiences on social media (Araújo, 2024). In Mexico, the culture of violence against journalists transcends the traditionally violent areas where criminal organizations operate and becomes a source of permanent fear derived from political pressure and police abuse. In the Spanish case, although there are economic (Macnamara, 2016) and political pressures, media business pressures are the most prevalent (APM, 2024). Along this line, the effects of toxic management are clearly identified—particularly in Mexico, where bullying and workplace harassment point to a globalization of these behaviors in the cultural industries (van Raalte et al., 2025).

Participants' responses show that, despite working under normal conditions, they exhibit symptoms of anxiety and post-traumatic stress similar to those described in war reporting or other situations of extreme violence (Flores et al., 2014; Hughes et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of extending the focus on news workers' mental health care to their daily activities. This finding underscores the need to broaden the focus on journalists' mental health to include their routine professional activities. This is particularly relevant in a vocation-driven profession marked by a strong sense of duty, which often compels journalists to submit to the demands of hyperconnectivity. The lack of rest, combined with dwindling material resources, has resulted in a gradual deterioration of their physical, psychological, and emotional well-being.

From a generational perspective, young people view precariousness as a barrier to pursuing autonomous life projects, linking job uncertainty to existential anxiety, disillusionment, and frustration (Nölleke et al., 2022). Furthermore, they do not have the resources to afford psychological treatment. Access to mental health care marks an important gap between the older generation in Spain and Mexico. While the former enjoy employment that allows paid medical leave, access to social resources is more limited for the latter.

The results of this study invite reflection on the consequences of a precarious, exhausting, and stressful profession. Job dissatisfaction leads to career redirection toward better-paying, more beneficial fields such as PR (Viererbl & Koch, 2021), as seen with at least three of our interviewees. However, this job shift has a broader impact on journalism, namely the decrease in watchdog-oriented stories (Gollmitzer, 2014).

Conditions of stress, anxiety, and burnout, coupled with significant pressures, affect not only the quality of work but also journalists' professional values, fostering tendencies toward cynicism (Lukan & Čehovin Zajc, 2024). Such attitudes are particularly evident among the older profiles, a perspective vividly reflected by one interviewee, who referred to the older journalists as "the concrete generation." However, this expression also reflects the lingering stigma around mental health in a profession where weakness is a disadvantage, a phenomenon that, until recently, prevented the visibility of mental health problems among journalists.

Despite being a consequence of working conditions, mental health is far from being structurally addressed by companies. In fact, actions taken are more motivated by fear of reputational consequences than by a genuine willingness to respond to demands for a healthier culture within the media industry (Biehlmann, 2024; Miret, 2021; Pico, 2024). This raises a debate about the responsibility of media companies for how their inaction affects the mental health of journalists and how it degrades their work to the production of mere commodity content. Furthermore, romanticization (Zelizer, 2017) does not contribute to making the problem visible within corporate structures as a first step toward effective action. The weakness of trade unionism in both countries (Beneyto et al., 2016; Zepeda, 2009) is not a revulsive factor either, although the seriousness of the situation promotes informal actions linked to the revitalization of the trade union movement in other countries to combat precariousness (Assmann, 2024).

This research has several limitations that could be addressed in future studies. First, its comparative focus limits the depth of analysis and attention to the situation in smaller communities or alternative media

outlets. Second, the study could be complemented by quantitative approaches, such as surveys, and by including other countries to attain an international dimension of this issue within the profession. Third, focus groups are proposed to qualitatively explore the causes of the mental health deterioration. Future studies could also pay more attention to issues such as the romanticization of the profession and its abandonment, the loss of attractiveness for future professionals, and the long-term consequences for media organizations that cannot maintain quality journalism with mentally distressed journalists.

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