

## Original Article

# Relationship Between Resilience, Social Support and Job Burnout among Journalists in Greece

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### Abstract

**Background:** Journalists experience high levels of job burnout. However, little is known about the factors that affect job burnout among journalists. **Aim:** To investigate the relationship between resilience, social support and job burnout in a sample of journalists. **Methods:** We conducted a cross-sectional study with a convenience sample. We performed our study in Greece during April 2023. We used the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, the Brief Resilience Scale and the single item burnout measure to measure social support, resilience and job burnout, respectively. We measured the following demographic variables: gender, age, chronic disease, educational level and job experience. **Results:** Among our sample, mean age was 50.4 years (standard deviation = 11.4). More than half of our

journalists were females (57.3%). Our journalists experienced moderate to high levels of social support, and moderate levels of resilience. Mean job burnout score was 5.99 (standard deviation = 2.22). In our sample, 58.7% (n = 88) of journalists had a job burnout score  $\geq 6$  indicating high levels of burnout, while 41.3% (n = 62) had a job burnout score  $< 6$  indicating low levels of burnout. Both multivariable linear and logistic regression models showed a negative relationship between resilience and job burnout (linear regression model: adjusted coefficient beta = -0.585, 95% CI = -1.133 to -0.038, p-value = 0.036), (logistic regression model: adjusted odds ratio = 0.575, 95% CI = 0.330 to 0.999, p-value = 0.049). There were no statistically significant relationships between social support and job burnout in both models.

**Conclusions:** Our sample experienced high levels of job burnout. We found that more resilient journalists experienced lower levels of job burnout. Social support did not affect levels of job burnout among journalists.

**Keywords:** journalists; social support; resilience; job burnout; Greece

## Introduction

Journalists cover traumatic major events such as disasters or smaller incidents as part of their job (Smith et al., 2018). Broadcasting distressing events can have negative psychological implications for them such as burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression, sleep disorders and social dysfunction (Greenberg et al., 2009; MacDonald et al., 2016; Simpson & Boggs, 1999).

According to Smith et al., (2018) between 86% and 100% of journalists are exposed to traumatic work-related events over their careers. Journalists are frequently exposed to distressing situations, react promptly, and can be considered first responders akin to emergency personnel (Frey, 2023). As first responders, journalists often encounter traumatizing scenes and face the risk of injury or death, frequently without having adequate training (Smith et al., 2018).

Journalists frequently experience also indirect exposure to traumatic events, such as interacting with survivors of trauma, or handling tasks like editing news

Coverage (MacDonald et al., 2016; McMahon & Lyall., 2019).

Journalists may report on the same story multiple times, leading to continuous interactions with the victims. This emphasis on obtaining stories from distressed individuals play a key role in the development of burnout symptoms (Maslach et al., 2001). Burnout is a syndrome of being worn out, caused by prolonged exposure to chronic stressors, and is characterized by symptoms of emotional exhaustion and a sense of reduced professional efficacy (Maslach et al., 2001).

Journalists operate within an organizational context that is largely unaware of the psychological risks associated with their work (MacDonald et al., 2016).

Journalism has undergone a variety of changes including reduced costs and staff size. Therefore, this change is associated with higher workload, constant deadlines and irregular hours for journalists. These demands on journalists diminish their ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance, which in turn worsens their psychological effects

and leads to job burnout (MacDonald, Saliba, Hodgins, et al., 2016).

Another aspect of journalists' burnout is that regardless their experience, they are at risk of burnout when they strive to uphold high standards in an environment with limited control, insufficient staffing and tight budgets (Newman, 2018).

Numerous studies examining the work of journalists and its impact reveal alarming levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout among these professionals (Gascón et al., 2021; Monteiro et al., 2016). According to a systematic review of the literature relating to the experience of burnout in journalists, most studies assessing burnout in journalists have used the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (MacDonald, Saliba, Hodgins, et al., 2016). Several studies have reported that young females with fewer years of journalism experience working in small circulation size newspapers are most at risk of burnout whereas editors and reporters seem to experience higher levels of burnout than those in other roles (Jung & Kim, 2012; Reinardy, 2011, 2013).

Other work-related factors contributing to burnout include limited workplace autonomy, low perceived organizational support, insufficient income, lack of involvement, weak peer support and inadequate physical comfort in the workplace (Reinardy, 2013). Acknowledging the emotional pressures of journalism, our study examines the relationship between resilience, social support and job burnout among journalists.

Resilience refers to how one acts during a traumatic event and the subsequent capacity to adjust effectively (Frey, 2023). Being resilient entails having the capability for positive adjustment, enabling an individual to

live a good life following a traumatic experience. The study of resilience has gained significant scholarly attention among professionals in occupations characterized by high levels of stress and burnout such as nurses (Delgado et al., 2021) and police officers (McCraty & Atkinson, 2012). While studies in journalism and specifically in the topic of resilience are underdeveloped, existing rare studies suggest that activities that promote well-being, such as maintaining a good diet and regular exercise, enhance resilience and, consequently, better prepare individuals to handle job burnout (Šimunjak, 2023; Youssef-Morgan & Dahms, 2017).

Journalists' resilient behaviors may include avoidance strategies, such as withdrawing from dangerous situations, which help with self-protection and maintaining emotional control (McMahon & Lyall., 2019). Literature suggests that experience and being confident in their role are important elements for managing burnout and enhancing self-care (Hughes et al., 2021). Resilience may affect not only the quality of media output but also journalists' job satisfaction, well-being and mental health (Thomson, 2021). According to Smith et al., (2018), journalists may experience fewer psychological consequences with better psychological preparations and a supportive organizational environment.

Social support is linked to experiencing more positive psychological effects (Weinberg, 2017) and it is a protective factor for journalists' mental health (Hatanaka et al., 2010; Newman et al., 2003). The two main types of social support are formal and informal support. The first one refers to support from healthcare professionals, government agencies and the media organizations, while informal support is given

by family, friends, and coworkers (Weinberg, 2017). Literature suggests that journalists, regardless of their experience levels, are at risk of burnout when they have insufficient staffing support and organizations are liable if they do not provide appropriate support (MacDonald et al., 2016).

Reinardy (2008) found that perceived organizational support was not associated with emotional exhaustion whereas Reinardy (2013) reported that journalists experiencing low levels of organizational support had significantly greater levels of fatigue. Journalists who feel confident that they receive organizational support for their work and well-being are found to be happier experiencing less stress (Šimunjak & Menke, 2023). Instead, the perceived lack of organizational understanding and support is related with higher stress levels (Holton et al., 2023).

Moreover, Pyevich et al. (2003) highlighted the importance of social support as a way of handling and reducing professional stress and Weinberg (2017) found that significant informal social support minimizes negative psychological effects and serves as an important resource linked with positive well-being. Research also suggests that peer support in terms of practical advice and emotional support, is helpful in lessening emotional stress and handling work-related feelings (Hughes et al., 2021; Thomson, 2021). Consequently, both organizational and social support have been found to contribute to journalists' well-being.

However, to the best of our knowledge, no study until now has investigated the relationship between resilience, social support and job burnout in journalists. Thus, our aim was to investigate the relationship between

resilience, social support and job burnout in a sample of journalists in Greece.

## **Methods**

We conducted a cross-sectional study with a convenience sample. We performed our study in Greece during April 2023. We followed the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki to perform our study ('World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki', 2013). We obtained license from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Nursing, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (reference number; 420, October 2022) to perform our study. Personal data from our participants were not collected. Written informed consent from journalists was obtained.

We used the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, the Brief Resilience Scale and the single item burnout measure to measure social support, resilience and job burnout, respectively. We measured the following demographic variables: gender, age, chronic disease, educational level and job experience. In particular, levels of social support among our journalists were measured with the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988). The Greek version of the MSPSS was used in our study (Katsiroumpa et al., 2023). Three factors were identified in the MSPSS: family support, friends support and significant others support. Each factor takes a score from one to seven. Higher scores on the MSPSS are indicative of higher social support.

Levels of resilience among our journalists were measured with the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) (Smith et al., 2008). In particular, the Greek version of the BRS was used in our study (Kyriazos et al., 2018). Score on the scale ranges from one to five. Higher scores on BRS indicate higher resilience.

We used the single item burnout tool to measure burnout among journalists (Hansen & Pit, 2016). We used the valid Greek version of the tool (Galanis et al., 2024). The single item burnout ranges from zero to ten. Higher values indicate higher levels of burnout. We use numbers and percentages to present categorical variables with. Moreover, we use mean, standard deviation and median to present continuous variables. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that continuous variables follow normal distribution. We performed linear and logistic regression analysis to identify the net impact of resilience and social support on job burnout among journalists. We present unadjusted and adjusted coefficients beta and odds ratios, 95% confidence intervals (CI) and p-values. P-values less than 0.05 were considered as statistically significant. We used the IBM SPSS 21.0 (IBM Corp. Released 2012. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 21.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.) for the analysis.

**Results**

Among our sample, mean age was 50.4 years (standard deviation = 11.4). More than half of

our journalists were females (57.3%, n = 86), while 42.7% (n = 64) were males. One out of three journalists (33.3%, n = 50) had a MSc/PhD diploma. In our sample, 36.0% (n = 54) reported a chronic disease. Regarding job experience, mean number was 25.1 (standard deviation = 10.6) with a median of 25 years.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for social support, resilience, and job burnout scores. Mean score for family support score, friends support score, and significant others support score was 5.82, 5.78 and 6.33, respectively. Therefore, levels of social support in our sample were moderate to high.

Regarding resilience, mean score was 3.37. Thus, our journalists experienced moderate levels of resilience. Mean job burnout score was 5.99 (standard deviation = 2.22).

In our sample, 58.7% (n= 88) of journalists had a job burnout score  $\geq 6$  indicating high levels of burnout, while 41.3% (n = 62) had a job burnout score  $< 6$  indicating low levels of burnout.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics for social support, resilience, and job burnout scores.**

Scale	Mean	Standard deviation	Median
Family support score	5.82	1.29	6.25
Friends support score	5.78	1.19	6.00
Significant others support score	6.33	0.84	6.75
Resilience score	3.37	0.68	3.33
Job burnout score	5.99	2.22	6.00

We present the impact of resilience and social support on job burnout in Tables 2 and 3. In particular, results from linear regression analysis are shown in Table 2, while results from logistic regression analysis are shown in Table 3. Both multivariable linear and logistic regression models showed a negative relationship between resilience and job burnout (linear regression model: adjusted coefficient beta = -0.585, 95% CI = -1.133 to -0.038, p-value = 0.036), (logistic regression model: adjusted odds ratio = 0.575, 95% CI = 0.330 to 0.999, p-value = 0.049). There were no statistically significant relationships between social support and job burnout in both models.

**Table 2. Univariate and multivariable linear regression analysis with burnout score as the dependent variable.**

Independent variables	Univariate model		Multivariable model	
	Unadjusted coefficient beta (95% CI)	P-value	Adjusted coefficient beta (95% CI) <sup>a</sup>	P-value
Resilience	-0.751 (-1.268 to -0.235)	0.005	-0.585 (-1.133 to -0.038)	0.036
Family support	-0.137 (-0.416 to 0.141)	0.332	-0.080 (-0.454 to 0.295)	0.675
Friends support	0.065 (-0.238 to 0.369)	0.671	0.276 (-0.119 to 0.670)	0.170
Significant others support	-0.262 (-0.688 to 0.165)	0.228	-0.347 (-0.979 to 0.285)	0.279

CI: confidence interval; <sup>a</sup> p-value for ANOVA 0.034; R<sup>2</sup> for the final multivariable model was 5.9%; multivariable model was adjusted for gender, age, educational level, chronic disease and job experience.

**Table 3. Univariate and multivariable logistic regression analysis with burnout score as the dependent variable (reference category: low levels of burnout).**

Independent variables	Univariate model		Multivariable model	
	Unadjusted odds ratio (95% CI)	P-value	Adjusted odds ratio (95% CI) <sup>a</sup>	P-value
Resilience	0.512 (0.306 to 0.858)	0.011	0.575 (0.330 to 0.999)	0.049
Family support	0.859 (0.660 to 1.116)	0.255	0.807 (0.546 to 1.192)	0.282
Friends support	1.026 (0.780 to 1.348)	0.856	1.178 (0.799 to 1.737)	0.408
Significant others support	0.860 (0.579 to 1.277)	0.455	0.958 (0.515 to 1.783)	0.892

CI: confidence interval; <sup>a</sup> R<sup>2</sup> for the final multivariable model was 13.2%; multivariable model was adjusted for gender, age, educational level, chronic disease and job experience.

## **Discussion**

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that examined the impact of resilience and social support on job burnout among journalists. Our journalists experienced moderate to high levels of social support, moderate levels of resilience, and high levels of burnout. Multivariable analysis identified that increased resilience is associated with reduced job burnout in journalists. Moreover, we did not find relationship between social support and job burnout.

The levels of resilience and social support among journalists have not been extensively studied in the literature. In our study, journalists stated that they received more support from significant others and less support from family and friends. This aligns with findings from other studies indicating that journalists receive significant support from colleagues, even if they work for different organizations (Frey, 2023; Hughes et al., 2021; Idås et al., 2019; McMahan & Lyall., 2019). Literature also describes that journalist do not received formal support concerning professional stress and require greater support from media organizations (Frey, 2023). In line with research in other fields, lack of access to formal support is also common among emergency personnel (Hight et al., 2004; R. Simpson & Côté, 2006). These findings suggest that media organizations need to provide more effective support for their reporters covering violent events.

In our study, journalists reported moderate levels of resilience. In the field of journalism, only Smith et al. (2018) have concluded that most journalists demonstrate significant resilience when faced with traumatic situations. One occupation that has gained

attention in the literature related to resilience is first-responders (Kronenberg et al., 2008). Our findings are supported by studies with first responders which report moderate to high levels of resilience among them (O'Neil & Kruger, 2022; Steinberg & Kornguth, 2009). Research on resilience in other occupational groups suggests that higher resilience levels are linked to increased use of adaptive coping behaviors (Chen et al., 2023). As Walsh (2003) has stated, strong relationships and social support by colleagues could foster resilience. Another study recommended that mindfulness-based meditation can help journalists build resilience to post-traumatic stress (Pearson et al., 2021).

Existing research has revealed that inadequate staffing, increased workload, constant deadlines and irregular hours reduce journalists' ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance and leads to job burnout (MacDonald et al., 2016). Consistent with the literature, we found concerning levels of job burnout among this occupational group (Gascón et al., 2021; Monteiro et al., 2016). It is not uncommon for journalists to have ongoing contact with victims and develop burnout symptoms (MacDonald et al., 2016). Burnout originally pertained to human services personnel and specifically healthcare professionals (Alkhamees et al., 2023; Dulko & Zangaro, 2022). Burnout is a widespread problem reaching concerning levels among healthcare professionals, with more than 50% of physicians and one-third as many as 80% of nurses reporting symptoms (Dulko & Zangaro, 2022). The person-focused nature of journalists' work parallels the experiences of human services workers, making journalists a key group to consider regarding burnout. However, unlike human services personnel,

journalists do not receive training for this. These results suggest the necessity for exploring ways to enhance journalists and media organizations understanding of well-being and develop solutions to burnout.

A significant aspect highlighted by the findings of our study is that increased resilience is associated with reduced job burnout in journalists. Recent studies in journalism have shown similar evidence for the effect of resilience on self-care, emotional status and mental health of reporters (Smith et al., 2018; Thomson, 2021). As described in previous studies, activities that promote well-being, such as maintaining a good diet and regular exercise, enhance resilience and in turn decrease job burnout (Šimunjak, 2023; Youssef-Morgan & Dahms, 2017). These findings are consistent with studies in other fields suggesting that resilience limits job burnout among nurses (Delgado et al., 2021) and police officers (McCraty & Atkinson, 2012). This information can help media organizations and journalists themselves create suitable strategies to address job burnout more effectively.

**Limitations:** Several limitations occurred in our study. We used a convenience sample and, thus, selection bias can arise in our study. Moreover, our sample size was small. Future studies with random and bigger samples of journalists can add valuable information. Also, we measured resilience, social support and job burnout with valid but self-reported tools. Thus, information bias is probable in our study. Additionally, although we eliminated confounding from several demographic characteristics several other variables may act as confounders. Finally, as it is the case in all cross-sectional studies,

causal relationships between resilience, social support, and job burnout cannot be inferred.

**Conclusions:** Our study showed high levels of job burnout among journalists. We found that more resilient journalists experienced lower levels of job burnout. Social support did not affect levels of job burnout among journalists. Our findings suggest that journalism is a stressful occupation with increased burnout and effective measures should be put in place to enhance the well-being of journalists. Therefore, it is crucial to expand our understanding of the stress factors affecting journalists, the coping mechanisms they employ and the effects on their physical and mental health. Further research should focus on the importance of building resilience strategies and the potential relationship between burnout and negative physical health implications.

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