

Risks and Threats in the Journalism Profession in Spain: Stress and Its Prevalence Factors*

Beatriz Herrero-Jiménez
Carlos Rodríguez-Crespo
Rosa Berganza

Universidad Rey Juan Carlos

beatriz.herrero@urjc.es

carlos.rodriguezc@urjc.es

rosa.berganza@urjc.es



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Abstract

Various international programs currently focus on the psychosocial risks affecting the journalism profession, with stress being a prominent concern. However, there is little empirical evidence available to provide a comprehensive diagnosis of the situation. In this article, based on the holistic global safety model proposed by Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023), and through a representative survey of Spanish journalists, the main threats identified as stress factors in the journalism profession are analyzed at three levels (micro, meso, and macro). The results show a statistically significant relationship between stress levels and gender, although the meso level is the best predictor of stress factors, in terms of professional routines and workloads. Additionally, digitalization also impacts the prevalence of stress.

Keywords: stress; journalism profession; mental health; predictive factors; threats; global safety model

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Resum. *Riscos i amenaces en la professió periodística a Espanya: l'estrès i els seus factors de prevalença*

Diferents programes internacionals actualment paren esment als riscos psicosocials que afecten la professió periodística, entre els quals destaca l'estrès. No obstant això, gairebé no existeix evidència empírica que permeti establir un diagnòstic de la situació. En aquest article, partint del model holístic de seguretat global plantejat per Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023) i mitjançant una enquesta representativa a periodistes espanyols, s'identifiquen les principals amenaces que es configuren com a factors estressors en la professió periodística a partir de tres nivells d'anàlisi: micro, meso i macro. Entre els resultats obtinguts es demostra una relació estadísticament significativa entre el nivell d'estrès i el gènere, si bé el mesonivell és el que prediu millor els factors estressors en termes de rutines i càrregues professionals. La digitalització també afecta la prevalença de l'estrès.

Paraules clau: estrès; professió periodística; salut mental; factors predictors; amenaces; model de seguretat global

Resumen. *Riesgos y amenazas en la profesión periodística en España: el estrés y sus factores de prevalencia*

Distintos programas internacionales prestan atención actualmente a los riesgos psicosociales que afectan a la profesión periodística, entre los que destaca el estrés. No obstante, apenas existe evidencia empírica que permita establecer un diagnóstico de la situación. En este artículo, partiendo del modelo holístico de seguridad global planteado por Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023) y mediante una encuesta representativa a periodistas españoles, se identifican las principales amenazas que se configuran como factores estresores en la profesión periodística a partir de tres niveles de análisis: micro, meso y macro. Entre los resultados obtenidos, se demuestra una relación estadísticamente significativa entre el nivel de estrés y el género, si bien el mesonivel es el que mejor predice los factores estresores en términos de rutinas y cargas profesionales. La digitalización también afecta a la prevalencia del estrés.

Palabras clave: estrés; profesión periodística; salud mental; factores predictores; amenazas; modelo de seguridad global

1. Introduction

Mental health in the journalism profession has been the subject of attention by international organizations (Posetti et al., 2020 and 2021), including UNESCO, which is currently funding the second phase of research in Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela to determine the state of the question and develop preventive strategies (UNESCO-UTPL, 2023). The Council of the European Union identifies among the threats and risks of the profession physical harm, but also psychological harm, especially for women, and calls on the European Commission to improve through research the knowledge—and preventive practices—of emerging risks (Council of the EU, 2022). From a general perspective that addresses all sectors and branches of activity, the new EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021-2027 considers the reduction of psychosocial risks as a priority line of action. In line with

this framework, The 2023-2027 Spanish Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health (EESST) pays attention to workplace stress. For its part, the Ministry of Health has been promoting the Mental Health Strategy of the National Health System (NHS) since 2006. The latest update covers the period 2022-2026.

However, despite the importance given to this problem by national and supranational bodies, research on the mental health of journalists in Spain is still lacking, although the few professional and official reports that have described the map of psychosocial risks in the sector point to a worsening in the evolution of the main indicators, as in the case of stress (APM, 2023).

Among the reference sources to establish an initial diagnosis of the situation of psychosocial risks at work is the Special Module 2020 of the Spanish Labour Force Survey (EPA), which defines a set of occupational factors with negative effects on mental health, such as time pressure or work overload, harassment or bullying, job insecurity, and lack of autonomy over the pace or productive procedures (INSST, 2023). According to this report, 39.9% of employees in the Information and Communications sector (activity section J of the EPA) are exposed to time pressure and work overload (INSST, 2023: 16), which is 8 points higher than the average of the other sections of the National Classification of Economic Activities (CNAE). The prevalence of stress, anxiety, or depression also present values above the average: 1.8% compared with 1.0% of the national average. In the case of women, this value stands at 2.2%, compared with 1.2% of the national average for women (INSST, 2023: 21). Nevertheless, extrapolation of the data to the journalism professions must be carried out with caution because of the great diversity of the occupations that make up section J of the EPA.

There are other reports produced by professional associations, including the successive editions of the Annual Report on Journalism by the Madrid Press Association (APM, 2023), the one prepared by the Professional Association of Journalists of Galicia and the Official College of Psychology of Galicia (CPXG, 2017), and the Guide to Psychosocial Risks in the Media of the Association of Journalists of Aragon (APA, 2018).

According to the 2022 Annual Report on Journalism (APM, 2023), 70% of respondents state that the mental health status of the collective is a serious or somewhat serious problem and that their own mental health status is of some concern. Moreover, 78% of the journalists surveyed reported stress, at least 65% reported problems with fatigue, and 54% reported anxiety or difficulty concentrating on their work. Comparing these data with others available nationally and internationally (Gascón et al., 2021; Renzulli, 2019), it is possible to affirm that journalism is positioned as a field of activity with a high risk of suffering health issues derived from stress and burnout.

An analysis of the international academic production on mental health in the journalism profession shows that situations related to post-traumatic stress have been studied, such as the coverage of natural disasters (Dworznic-Hoak, 2020), war conflicts (Feinstein and Ösmann, 2023), and events of a similar

nature (Backholm and Bjorkqvist, 2012; Lee, Ha and Pae, 2018; Seely, 2019; Shah et al., 2022). The stress suffered by journalists as a result of the pandemic has also received scholarly attention (Hoak, 2021; Šimunjak, 2022). Nonetheless, these types of situations are not those commonly experienced (during daily work routines) by those in the profession. Yet there are hardly any studies on the prevalence of stress in conventional work performance, which excludes extraordinary or “dramatic” news events (Gascón et al., 2021: 1).

For this reason, the present study has two main objectives in order to fill this gap in the academic literature. The first is to research the levels of self-perceived stress among Spanish journalists working under normal working conditions. The second is to identify the factors that influence such stress.

2. Explanatory factors of risks and threats caused by stress in the journalism profession

The few recent studies and reports published in Spain on mental health and the impact of stress in the journalism profession do focus, however, on the practice of ordinary journalism. Nevertheless, these studies lack, in some cases, a national geographical scope (APA, 2018; CPXG, 2017; Gascón et al., 2021) and, in others, a methodology that is subject to conditions of reliability and validity, so that the results can be scientifically extrapolated to the entire journalism profession (APA, 2018; APM, 2023).

The theoretical framework of the reports with a psycho-sociological perspective is based on the concept of psychosocial risks coined by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1984, where they are defined as “interactions between and among work environment, job content, organizational conditions and workers’ capacities, needs, culture, personal extra-job that may, through perceptions and experience, influence health, work performance and job satisfaction” (ILO, 1984). Work-related stress, in turn, is understood as “a set of emotional, cognitive, physiological and behavioral reactions to certain adverse or harmful aspects of the work content, organization, or environment”, which are characterized “by high levels of arousal and distress, with a frequent feeling of being unable to cope with the situation” (INSHT, 2016: 36). In other words, work-related stress occurs when subjects perceive a mismatch between potential job threats and the resources available to them, that is, when they consider their ability to avoid or ameliorate such threats (Robinson, 2018).

Much of the specialized literature analyzes psychosocial risks from perspectives limited to the experiences of the subjects considered from an individual point of view, without taking into account the socio-historical context. An approach that moves away from desocialized and ahistorical perspectives must consider the characteristics of the media system, the peculiarities of the productive routines and the organization of news work inside and outside the newsrooms, the conceptions of journalistic roles and the legal characteristics of the political system. That is, a holistic, comprehensive and

interdisciplinary perspective consistent with that proposed by Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023), in whose model the stress of journalists derives from threats arising from societal (macro level), institutional or organizational (meso level) and individual (micro level) risk factors.

Based on the classification of risk factors developed by Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023), within the societal (macro) level there are political, cultural and economic risks. The former refers to the existence (or not) of guarantees of the rule of law and press freedom. The trend towards the politicization of journalism (Casero-Ripollés, García Santamaría and Fernández-Beaumont, 2015), especially in Spain as part of the polarized pluralist model formulated by Hallin and Mancini (2004) and where there is a high degree of influence between journalists and politicians (Casero-Ripollés and López Rabadán, 2019), can be understood as a stressor linked to the loss of independence. The second, cultural risks, refers to the presence of racism, sexism, and homophobia in the field of journalistic practice. Finally, the third block of macro-level risks, economic risks, depends on the structure of the media and the collusions with the State (Garcés-Prettel, Arroyave-Cabrera, and Baltar-Moreno, 2020), as well as the characteristics of the labor market (O'Donnell and Zion, 2019). The latter situation is particularly complex in Spain given the precariousness of employment and staff cuts (APM, 2022; Gascón et al., 2021).

The meso level includes risks arising from the journalistic routines common to the profession and the culture of particular media organizations (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023). While factors that contribute to the prevalence of stress at this level include working conditions, previous international studies specifically point to time pressure, multitasking, excessive working hours or low salaries as the most relevant variables (Heloani, 2005; Huda and Azad, 2015; Reinardy, 2006), but also the treatment of the audience (Post and Kepplinger, 2019) and the relationship with sources. All these factors may vary depending on the type of media (press, audiovisual, digital, etc.) (Gascón et al., 2021) and the professional support received from the news company.

The consequences of digitalization on journalistic work are also at this level, but the effects of digital transformation on production routines are ambivalent. While the positive effects include greater flexibility in planning, the negative effects encompass the pressure to deal with the unpredictability of current news, which translates into a constant availability of journalists and the difficulties for digital disconnection in the profession, as well as working in hostile digital environments. These factors contribute to the emotional discomfort of journalists, promoting stress and the phenomenon of burnout (Binns, 2017; Ninaus et al., 2015; Šimunjak, 2023). In any case, the effects of the emergence of the digital ecosystem on emotional well-being are receiving intense attention from the academic community (Šimunjak, 2023).

At the micro level, Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023) categorize individual risk factors. These factors encompass personal and professional background, including the presence of a work addiction profile, as identified as a stressor by Burke and Matthiesen (2004), as well as gender-related factors. Specific-

ly, Reinardy (2009) found that women suffered higher levels of burnout, and among the youngest women, 30% reported intended to leave the profession. Furthermore, Posetti et al. (2021) emphasize the digital environment’s particularly hostile nature towards women journalists. Also at this level, the work and political orientations of these professionals, along with the perception of their journalistic role, are identified as risk factors (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023). Regarding the latter aspect, stress derives from the conflict between conceptions of non-economic professional ideals—also linked to journalistic ethics—such as telling the truth or changing reality, and certain interpretative frameworks contrary to these ideals, imposed by the editorial lines of some news companies (Berganza, Lavín and Piñeiro-Naval, 2017; Roses and Humanes, 2019).

Therefore, the conceptual model of journalists’ safety proposed by Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023) identifies the risks that compromise the occupational safety of journalists, considering the particularities of the productive routines that define this type of professional activity and the four dimensions that constitute the concept of occupational safety: physical, psychological, digital, and financial. This theoretical proposal, which seeks to become a methodological tool, assumes a correlation between threats and stress, positing that they serve as indicators that allow an understanding of this pathology related to journalistic work (see Table 1). The three levels into which Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023) subdivide the risk factors (micro, meso, and macro) that threaten the occupational safety of journalists are thus

Table 1. Dimensions of journalistic safety and related threats

Occupational safety			
Personal safety		Infrastructural safety	
Physical	Psychological	Digital	Financial
Killings	Verbal aggression	Threats to journalists’ digital privacy and phishing attacks	Threat to job stability
Torture	Hate speech	Digital surveillance	Threat to execution of basic journalistic practices/routines (sourcing, verification, producing)
Beatings	Dissemination of personal information (sexual, gendered)	Limiting access to information	Normative role conception (fourth estate) threatened to be replaced by market-based, neo-liberal ideology
Abductions	Harassment	Hacking or blocking digital contents	Threat to topic and workforce diversity
Arrests	Citizen vigilantism aimed at disciplining and silencing journalists	Criminalization of digital whistle-blowing	
Detentions	Stalking		
Imprisonment	Intimidation		
	Coercion		
	Workplace bullying		
	Office raids		
	Seizures or damage to equipment		

Source: Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023).

used as a basis in this research to group the possible predictor variables of stress in the analysis.

As a consequence of the identification of threats and risks that may influence stress levels, and the perceived gap in the studies on Spanish journalists, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1. What is the self-perceived stress level of journalists in Spain?

RQ2. What threats and risks at the three levels (macro, meso, and micro) correlate with the self-perceived stress of Spanish journalists?

RQ3. Which of the threats and risks influence the variation in Spanish journalists' self-perceived stress?

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

In order to answer the research questions, a survey was conducted among Spanish journalists employed in the media sector (written press, television, radio, magazines, news agencies, and digital natives), within the framework of the international project Worlds of Journalism Study (<<http://www.worldsofjournalism.org>>). The telephone interviews, which guarantee the reliability of the responses, were carried out between March and July 2023. The sample size was determined using a probabilistic selection method ($n=391$), which was designed to represent the entire population of Spanish journalists. This selection method involved a multistage sampling procedure, initially by clusters, then stratified in a second stage. Finally, a simple random method was employed to select the participants. The sample size was calculated with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, based on the estimated population ($n=18,000-20,000$) for 2023 (Herrero-Jiménez, Beranza and Ortíz-González, 2024).

A list of national media outlets was compiled from the *Infoperiodistas* media guide, subsequently filtered to eliminate inactive media sources and the delegations of the prominent Spanish radio stations. From the media population ($N=624$), 151 were selected by stratified random sampling, proportionally allocated according to the variables of media size (large: 5 journalists; small: 3 journalists), media type and geographical location. The only exception was the digital media, whose population was multiplied by 0.6 to calculate their sample size, since in the exploratory phase of the project it was found that 40% of the digital media listed had less than 3 journalists working in them. Within each medium, the selection of journalists was random, taking into account the need to interview journalists of different ranks. The response rate was 65.71%.

The survey contained a large number and variety of questions, covering demographic questions (e.g., age, level of education, gender, ideology), questions of an economic nature and position within the media, as well as questions regarding journalists' self-perception of roles, ethics, safety, autonomy, influ-

ences, all of which were related to the work environment, organizational issues and journalistic routines. Most of these variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 means the lowest level and 5, the highest). The dependent variable of the study, the level of self-perceived stress, was measured on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant never; 2, rarely; 3, sometimes; 4, frequently; and 5, very frequently. This scale was based on the following question: In the last six months, how often have you felt stressed in your work as a journalist?

3.2. Analysis

The surveys were anonymized, transcribed and coded in IBM-SPSS software (version 22). Specifically, to study the correlation between stress and perceived influences, a principal component analysis (PCA) was performed, which reduced the variables to six. All the items studied presented a significant loading in one of the six dimensions (explained variance=65.27%, KMO=0.82 – Barlet's test $p < 0.001$) (organizational, political, economic, professional routines, groups of influence, and sources of information influences). The internal consistency of each factor, measured by Cronbach's Alpha, showed adequate reliability in each of the types of influence (> 0.7), except for that of professional routines ($\alpha = 0.548$).

A descriptive analysis was carried out to answer the first question, as well as an inferential one for the second, based on the Chi-Square test and Spearman's correlation coefficient. To answer the third question, an ordinal logistic regression in R was performed.

4. Results

The results show that the average level of stress self-perceived by Spanish journalists, on a scale ranging from 1 (no stress) to 5 (a significant amount of stress), is 3.71 points. Consequently, 32.2% of the journalists feel stressed very frequently, 26.9% frequently, 25.3% sometimes, 11.3% rarely and 4.3% never.

At the micro level (individual risk factors), the Chi-Square statistic indicated a statistically significant relationship between the journalist's gender and the level of stress [$\chi^2 (4, N=391) = 20.855$ $p < 0.001$]. The standardized residuals showed that women are more likely to feel stressed very frequently ($|3.8| > 2.58$)—level 5 (maximum) of self-perceived stress—, while men are more likely to feel stressed frequently ($|2.2| > 1.96$)—level 4 of self-perceived stress—or to never feel stressed ($|2.3| > 1.96$) or feel it rarely ($|1.8| > 1.65$)—although this data is only trendy. The Phi value shows that this relationship, although significant ($p < 0.001$), is weak ($|\theta| = 0.231$).

Spearman's Rho statistic demonstrated a positive correlation between journalists' concerns regarding job security, physical integrity, emotional and mental well-being, and the impunity of those who harm journalists in Spain

with stress (see Table 2). In addition, a positive correlation was identified between the internal influence of personal ethics and the role of citizens' spokesperson—related to social journalism as formulated by Berganza, Lavín and Piñero Naval (2017)—specifically with the function of speaking on behalf of the marginalized. The correlation between stress level and the level of completed education was only tendential. However, self-perceived stress did not correlate with the journalist's age, political ideology, years of professional experience, the influence of reference groups (friends, acquaintances, relatives, or colleagues from other media), personal values and beliefs, or any other journalistic role indicator.

Table 2. Significant correlations at the micro level

		Level of education completed	'Citizens' spokesperson' role (marginalized)	Internal ethical influences	Physical concern
Self-perceived stress level	Correlation coefficient	0.090 ^t	0.131 ^{**}	0.143 ^{**}	0.120 [*]
	N	391	390	389	391
		Emotional concern	Concern about losing job	Concern about impunity	
	Correlation coefficient	0.387 ^{***}	0.125 [*]	0.120 [*]	
	N	391	391	391	

The correlation (Spearman's Rho) is significant at the level: ^{**} $p < 0.01$; ^{*} $p < 0.05$; ^t $= 0.05 < p < 0.1$

Source: Own elaboration.

At the meso level, where institutional or organizational risks stemming from journalistic routines are situated, the Chi-Square statistic revealed a statistically significant relationship between the level of stress and the type of media employer [$\chi^2(20, N=391)=39.165, p < 0.01$]. However, there is no significant relationship between the level of stress and membership in a professional association of journalists, category within the media, or thematic area of work. Specifically, standardized residuals showed that journalists working in magazines are more likely to never experience stress ($|4.3| > 2.58$) compared to those working in newspapers ($|-2.5| < -1.96$). The intensity of this significant relationship ($p < 0.01$) is intermediate-weak ($|\theta| = 0.316$).

In addition, the Spearman's Rho statistic (see Table 3) demonstrates a correlation between stress levels and various psychological threats to personal safety in the work environment, including experiences of degrading or hate speech, public disparagement of work, surveillance, hacking or blocking of accounts on social networks or websites, harassment or stalking, other forms of intimidation, sexual harassment or assault, and coercion. The Rho coefficient does not, however, demonstrate a correlative relationship with harassment at work, employment in a COVID-19 environment, arrests or detentions, physical attacks, or legal action against journalists.

Table 3. Correlations at the meso level: threats to personal safety in the workplace

Self-perceived stress level		Hate speech	Public disparagement of work	Surveillance	Hacking
	Correlation coefficient		0.139**	0.167**	0.125*
N		391	391	388	391
Self-perceived stress level		Sexual harassment	Other forms of intimidations	Harassment	Coercion
	Correlation coefficient		0.148**	0.129*	0.122*
N		391	390	388	391

The correlation (Spearman's Rho) is significant at the level: *p<0.01; p<0.05; t=0.05<p< 0.1.
Source: Own elaboration.

Also at the meso level (see Table 4), journalists' stress levels correlate with the influence of professional routines and practices, organizational influences—derived from the rules and structures of media companies—economic influences—pressures perceived from commercial imperatives, among which is the audience—and sources of information, although only in a tendencial way. The study also found a correlation between stress and the number of hours dedicated to work, the production of content specifically for social media and instant messaging apps, and the use of social media to seek information. Nevertheless, it does not demonstrate a correlation with the level of autonomy in selecting or framing information, the financial compensation of journalists, hierarchical rank within the media sector, the utilization of technology for the monitoring and analysis of audience behavior, or the dissemination of information through social networks.

Table 4. Correlations at the meso level: organizational or institutional risks

Self-perceived stress level		Professional influence	Organizational influence	Economic influence	Influence of sources
	Correlation coefficient		0.264***	0.113*	0.116*
N		387	387	387	387
Self-perceived stress level		Working hours	Social media info search	Social media	Messaging App
	Correlation coefficient		0.223***	0.134**	0.141**
N		390	391	372	372

The correlation (Spearman's Rho) is significant at the level: ***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05; ^t= 0.05<p<0.1.
Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding societal level, Chi-Square tests revealed that there is no statistically significant relationship between journalists' stress levels and the type of contract they have, nor with media ownership, but with their scope [$\chi^2(8, N=391)=18.444$ p<0.05]. Specifically, the standardized residuals indicate that journalists from regional media are less likely to never feel stress

($-2.51 < -1.96$) and more likely to feel stress often ($2.61 > 2.58$), while journalists from national media are more likely to never feel stress ($2.51 > 1.96$). The Phi value demonstrates that this relationship, although significant ($p < 0.05$), is weak ($|\theta| = 0.217$).

Spearman's Rho statistic shows that there is an absence of correlation with the percentage of salary attributed to the exercise of their journalistic work, as well as with the influences emanating from the political system, those associated with media legislation, and the perceived freedom of the media system.

Finally, in the ordinal logistic regression model (see Table 5) to evaluate the effect of the variables of the three levels on the stress of journalists in Spain, the predictor variables explained 57.04% (Nagelkerke's $R^2 = 0.57037$) of the categories of the dependent variable. These predictor variables were: weekly working hours, gender, concern for emotional well-being, influence of senior editorial supervisors, deadlines and time constraints, frequency of content production for messaging applications and media reach (regional/national). Akaike's Information Criterion ($AIC = 836.3$) indicates that the model exhibits a satisfactory relationship fit to the data set and the variables considered. Among the variables examined, the influence of superiors in charge of editorial supervision was not statistically significant but exhibited a tendency to trend. The parallel lines test verified the proportionality of the odds ($p > 0.05$).

Table 5. Logistic regression model for the effects of risks and threats on stress

	Standard estimate	Error	t-value	p-value
Gender	-0.53808	0.21545	-2.498	0.013*
Concern for emotional well-being	0.5010	0.08984	5.577	0.000***
Working hours	0.06315	0.01338	4.721	0.000***
Senior editorial supervisors	0.17676	0.10117	1.747	0.08157 [†]
Deadlines and time constraints	0.52675	0.10683	4.931	0.000***
Production of content for messaging app	0.45592	0.09027	5.041	0.0000***
Media reach	-0.33982	0.15423	-2.203	0.02828*

Correlation is significant at the level: *** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$; [†] $0.05 < p < 0.1$.

Source: Own elaboration.

The findings reveal that factors such as gender, employment within regional media, increased weekly working hours, elevated concern for emotional well-being, heightened influence from both editorial supervisors and deadlines and time constraints, along with increased content production for messaging apps, contribute to the prevalence of stress among journalists in Spain.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this research was twofold: first, to ascertain the levels of self-perceived stress among Spanish journalists, and second, to identify the factors that influence this stress. To this end, the initial research question (RQ1) posed the following inquiry: What is the level of self-perceived stress among Spanish journalists? To address this question, the responses to a representative survey of journalists working in the media throughout Spain were examined. The results indicate that 59.1% of journalists frequently or very frequently experience stress, while only 15.7% rarely or never do so. These elevated levels of stress are consistent with other international, regional, and national findings (see, among others, APA, 2018; APM, 2023; CPXG, 2017; Renzulli, 2019). However, it should be noted that aforementioned national and regional studies did not meet the criteria for reliability and validity. These findings underscore a pressing concern that can lead to significant health issues among these professionals, who play a crucial role in the proper functioning of democracy.

Regarding the factors correlated with the level of stress, subdivided into the three levels of threats and risks determined by Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023), as questioned by the second research question (RQ2), the results indicated that, within the micro level, the factor with the highest level of significance was gender. Thus, 42.2% of female journalists reported feeling stressed very frequently (compared to 24.3% of male journalists), while 20.2% of male journalists reported never or rarely experiencing stress (compared to 9.8% of female journalists). These figures align with the trend observed in other international studies (Reinardy, 2009), as well as the perspective maintained by the European Union (2022), which acknowledges the heightened vulnerability of women journalists to the psychological challenges inherent in the profession. They also confirm the national data collected by the Spanish Labour Force Survey, within the Information and Communication sector (INSST, 2023: 21).

In addition to gender, only internal ethical influences and journalists' concern for their emotional well-being correlate with a certain intensity, which indicates an awareness of this situation among the group. Also correlated with stress is a variable linked to the journalists' work orientations: the role of citizens' spokesperson, in the specific function of providing a voice to the marginalized. The remaining roles, specifically those of watchdog, civic, or disseminator, which often become subjects of contention between journalists and organizations (Roses and Humanes, 2019), did not demonstrate a significant correlation. Similarly, ideology, personal backgrounds, and orientations did not show a substantial association with stress levels. A modest correlation was observed between concern about job loss and stress levels, a finding that may be unexpected in Spain, where widespread job cuts have been a persistent feature since the 2008 economic crisis (APM, 2022).

At the meso level, digitalization is identified as a significant variable in the prevalence of stress. It is notably associated with the creation or editing of content for messaging applications such as Instagram and WhatsApp. Additionally, although to a lesser extent, it is associated with the frequency of use of these applications to discover sources, information, or opinions related to news. These findings are consistent with other international research analyzing the impact of digitization on emotional well-being in the journalism profession (Huda and Azad, 2015; Ninaus et al., 2015; Binns, 2017; Šimunjak, 2023).

Also at this level, although with less intensity, stress is related to the type of media in which journalists work, as well as to having experienced hate speech, coercion, or public discrediting of their work. In this regard, the perception of stress is linked to psychological threats to personal safety in the work environment, though not to physical stress. These findings are consistent with those reported by the NGO Freedom House (2023) regarding Spain, which indicates that while the incidence of physical violence against journalists has decreased, harassment persists, predominantly in social networks.

Journalists' stress is strongly related to working conditions and workload, which is mainly defined in terms of working hours. These results are consistent with those reported in international studies (Heloani, 2005; Reinardy, 2006). For their part, perceived professional influences have a greater impact on stress than organizational influences (from owners and superiors who oversee the editorial line) and economic influences (among which are the company's economic profit considerations and audience research), although these were also correlated. Other variables that could seem to be key within working conditions, such as salary received—which did have an impact in other international studies (Heloani, 2005)—or the hierarchical position held within the media, were not linked to stress. Thus, it was found that financial threats weigh less than digital threats in the prevalence of stress among journalists in Spain.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that being affiliated with professional groups does not serve as a mitigating factor for stress levels. This suggests that the effectiveness of these journalists' associations in providing support in this area is questionable, as they do not offer specialized services in this domain (González Cortés and Paniagua Rojano, 2008).

At the macro level, political risks in terms of estimated press freedom or those in the form of perceived influences by politicians were not related to the prevalence of stress. Thus, the special relationship between journalists and politicians in Spain (Casero-Ripollés and López Rabadán, 2019) does not appear to result in elevated stress levels. However, the implementation of comparative international studies in the future will be crucial to ascertain this relationship with respect to other countries and media systems. With regard to economic risks, and more specifically within the media structure, a correlation was identified between media reach and stress, though not with ownership. Nevertheless, the survey instruments did not address the perception of cultural risks.

In order to respond to the third research question, an ordinal logistic regression model was developed that was capable of predicting 57.04% of the variation in self-perceived stress among Spanish journalists. At the micro level, the significant variables of the model were identified as gender (female) and concern for emotional well-being, while variables related to ethics and conceptions of the professional ideal were excluded. At the meso level, the predictor variables included the risks associated with common journalistic routines of the profession and the culture of each media organization, such as weekly working hours, deadlines and time restrictions, the influence of superiors in charge of editorial review, and digitalization. However, the psychological threats to personal safety postulated by Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023) were unable to predict the level of stress. Finally, at the macro level, only economic risks, defined within the reach of the medium (regional), and not political risks, influenced stress.

The aim of this research was to conduct the first representative and reliable study on the prevalence of stress among journalists working in the media throughout Spain. The study found that levels of self-perceived stress were notably high, underscoring the necessity for further research to understand its causes and develop effective solutions. To this end, this study has carried out an empirical analysis of the predictors of stress based on the model theorized by Slavtcheva-Petkova et al. (2023), in which the risks were divided into three main levels. In the context of Spain, the meso level, which pertains to professional routines, has been found to have the greatest impact. However, the study also identified gender, digitalization, and the scope of the media as variables that significantly influence stress levels in the journalism profession.

This research is not without its limitations. Firstly, the perceived frequency of stress, measured using a 5-point Likert scale, is subject to subjective interpretation. Secondly, sustaining the research on self-perceived stress may be subject to the same shortcomings, as it could potentially overlook stress and pathologies of which the practitioners themselves are unaware. Future research should propose questions on stress and mental health from established and clinically validated scales in the field of psychology, although adapted to the professional field of journalism. Likewise, while the predictor variables explained 57.04% of the variance of the dependent variable, there is a series of stressors that have not been controlled in the study and, therefore, not identified. Moreover, in the methodological section, the factor constructed by means of PCA relating to the influences of professional routines on stress presented somewhat low reliability, which could imply that the interpretations associated with this factor are less consistent than those related to other stressors.

Furthermore, the present study is constrained in its analysis to stress; however, there are other types of situations that affect the mental health and well-being of journalists, such as burnout or anxiety, which merit analysis in the context of this profession. Further research should provide deeper knowl-

edge on these issues, which are key to the sustainability of a profession that is fundamental for the optimal development of democratic societies. In addition, conducting comparative analyses between diverse countries and media systems can identify critical variables for the study of journalists' mental health. A scientifically positive approach to this last issue will facilitate the establishment of keys to promote well-being within the profession and the implementation of policies to protect it.

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