

Compassion fatigue in students in the context of media consumption

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Abstract. This study examines compassion fatigue in the context of contemporary media consumption, focusing on emotionally saturated news coverage related to war, human loss, destruction, and humanitarian crises. Using a mixed-methods design, the research explores the prevalence of compassion fatigue among Journalism and Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation students, as well as the relationship between their media consumption patterns and emotional exhaustion. Quantitative data were collected via *The Fatigue Assessment Scale (FAS)*, and qualitative responses were gathered through an online survey assessing emotional responses to media content, preferred platforms, content types, and self-regulation strategies. Results indicate a high prevalence of fatigue among participants, associated with frequent exposure to emotionally charged content, especially on platforms such as Telegram and Instagram. Students report cognitive and emotional overload, reduced empathy, and diminished concentration and motivation. These findings suggest that excessive media consumption during societal crises is a significant risk factor for compassion fatigue. The study underscores the importance of integrating media hygiene, critical thinking, and emotional resilience training into educational programs for journalists and healthcare professionals, and proposes preventive strategies to reduce emotional exhaustion.

Keywords: compassion fatigue, empathy fatigue, The Fatigue Assessment Scale, social media, emotional overload. media consumption.

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Емпатійна втома у студентів у контексті медіаспоживання.

Анотація. Це дослідження аналізує втому від співчуття в контексті сучасного споживання медіа, особливо емоційно насичених новин, пов'язаних з війною,

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людськими втратами, руйнуваннями та гуманітарними кризами. Використовуючи змішаний метод, дослідження вивчає поширеність втоми від співчуття серед студентів спеціальностей «Журналістика» та «Фізична терапія та реабілітація», а також взаємозв'язок між їхніми моделями споживання медіа та емоційним виснаженням. Кількісні дані було зібрано за допомогою Шкали оцінки втоми (FAS), а якісні – за допомогою онлайн-опитування, що дозволило оцінити емоційні реакції на медіа-контент, улюблені платформи, типи контенту та стратегії саморегуляції. Результати свідчать про високий ступінь втоми серед учасників, пов'язаний із частим переглядом емоційно напруженого контенту, особливо на таких платформах, як Telegram та Instagram. Студенти повідомили про когнітивне та емоційне перевантаження, зниження емпатії, концентрації та мотивації. Ці результати свідчать про те, що надмірне споживання медіа під час суспільних криз є значним чинником ризику виникнення втоми від співчуття. Дослідження підкреслює важливість інтеграції медіагігієни, критичного мислення та тренінгів з емоційної стійкості в освітні програми для журналістів та медичних працівників, а також пропонує превентивні стратегії для зменшення емоційного виснаження.

Ключові слова: втома від співчуття, емпатійна втома, соціальні мережі, емоційне перевантаження, медіаспоживання.

Introduction

Under uncertainty, emotional stress is higher in professions requiring constant engagement with human experiences, underscoring the need for psychological resilience and empathetic interaction. This paper focuses on definitions of key terms, such as 'empathic fatigue', 'compassion fatigue,' 'secondary traumatic stress,' and 'emotional burnout', as presented in Ukrainian and international scholarly literature. To provide a basis for discussion, we first review these definitions according to both international and domestic scholars. 'Compassion fatigue' was introduced by Joinson (1992) to describe the psychological state of nurses who may lose the capacity to care, later termed the "cost of caring."

Figley (1995) expanded on Joinson's concept. He defined compassion fatigue as "a state of exhaustion and impairment of biological, psychological, and social functioning resulting from prolonged compassionate stress and its consequences" among caregivers of individuals affected by traumatic events. This definition advanced scientific understanding of the phenomenon and its impact on professionals exposed to trauma.

Sullivan (2022) describes compassion fatigue as a state of exhaustion and dysfunction resulting from prolonged exposure to trauma. Closely related concepts include vicarious traumatization. This is characterized by profound changes in beliefs due to exposure to traumatic material. Secondary traumatic stress (STS) mirrors posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms such as hypervigilance, agitation, insomnia, emotional detachment, and self-

destructive behavior. Burnout is a chronic response to workplace stress characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of ineffectiveness. Sullivan distinguishes these terms based on their sources and specific effects.

Bushman and Anderson (2009) note that the principal psychological mechanism underlying compassion fatigue is desensitization. This emotional filter serves to protect individuals from suffering that would otherwise be so stressful or traumatic as to become overwhelming, thereby offering a psychological buffer.

Within professional contexts, Danyliuk and Tokhtamysh (2024) state that secondary trauma and compassion fatigue are common among those working in medical and humanitarian settings. These conditions result from exposure to psychological trauma and the suffering of others. However, recent research shows these phenomena are not exclusive to professionals. Notably, 'compassion fatigue' is most often seen in work environments that involve regular interaction with traumatized individuals. Scholars also studied the phenomenon of 'empathy fatigue'. Stebnicki (2024) notes that empathy fatigue is intensified by various stressors, with war being among the most significant.

Zhuravlyova (2007) emphasizes the higher socio-psychological level of empathic reflection on another person's experiences (personal-semantic empathy): the ability to analyze and evaluate the situation, engage in moral and personal reflection, experience emotional and cognitive decentration, form attitudes, and predict the development of events. Lazos (2017) focused on the fact that empathic involvement in a relationship with a person experiencing the consequences of trauma leads to changes in internal experience, manifested as various emotional reactions (states). Furman (2022) emphasizes the paradoxical nature of empathy. While empathy represents an effective means of identification, understanding, and personal acceptance of another's psychospiritual state, which is considered a crucial factor in mental health, an excessive degree of empathic concern may ultimately result in empathy fatigue.

In a society where the media regularly broadcasts news of wars, disasters, violence, and human grief, empathy fatigue can also occur during media consumption. The audience's experiences from the media are reflected in the body, even when they are not acted upon. Unexpressed feelings from media interactions can accumulate and harm emotional and physical well-being. Emotional overload from the media can lead to a deficit of emotional energy in real life (Voznesens'ka, 2024). Therefore, media consumption is considered one factor that can increase empathy fatigue among students. Audience media consumption in uncertain times and the impact on emotions are being studied by Ukrainian scholars, including Buchatska et al. (2024, media literacy skill building), Holitsyn and Frolova (2023, analysis of media trends during war),

and Yordan and Synorub (2024, impact of photo portraits due to emotional charge and information content), among others.

Visualization of war is a powerful tool that encompasses a wide range of forms and approaches for conveying images, emotions, and the realities of military operations in Ukraine. These include photography, videography, documentaries, infographics, and interactive maps. Each of these means reflects both tragic moments and heroism, affecting the audience's emotions, evoking empathy, and shaping public opinion (Yordan & Synorub, 2024). Accordingly, today, photojournalists sacrifice their own lives in order to capture reality in a photo and draw the attention of the world community to the war in Ukraine as much as possible. In addition, we emphasize that photographs can influence empathy as awareness of oneself in the place of those in the combat zone, military personnel, and civilians. The foundation of a portrait photo frame is the emotion on the basis of which the image is built. Such pictures may remind us of loved ones, acquaintances, or relatives, thereby enhancing the empathic component of contemplating them (Yordan & Synorub, 2024). It is precisely the war content systematically published across various information platforms that can lead to empathy fatigue. Scholars state that the mass media is the main factor in burnout in the face of social problems (Maier, 2015).

In addition to these media influences, the psychological information resource Positive Mind Works outlines a typology of audiences at risk of empathy fatigue: healthcare workers who are constantly exposed to traumatic events and human suffering; journalists and content moderators, i.e. those tasked with reporting or filtering disturbing information; caregivers and family members, constantly providing support to those in need, whether physically or emotionally; and active social media users who are regularly exposed to upsetting global events and personal stories of trauma (Positive Mind Works [PMW], 2024).

The principal symptom of secondary trauma is emotional exhaustion, defined as pervasive emotional depletion and fatigue resulting from professional activities. Harr and Moore (2011), in their study of students' emotional states, observed that, beyond the challenges of working with people and the pressures of field internships, students are at heightened risk of both burnout and empathy fatigue. This finding reinforces earlier discussions of at-risk groups and underscores the particular vulnerability of students within these contexts.

The escalation of the Russia-Ukraine war and the proliferation of traumatic media content render the issue of empathy fatigue particularly salient in Ukrainian society. Nevertheless, there is a marked scarcity of empirical studies within the domestic context that specifically address

empathy fatigue as a consequence of media consumption. Most existing literature focuses broadly on emotional exhaustion, professional burnout, and compassion fatigue, leaving the mechanisms by which media consumption induces empathy fatigue largely unexplored. This gap underscores the need for targeted research in this area.

It is essential to monitor media consumption during periods of conflict in order to understand the emotional responses, psychological states, particularly empathy fatigue, and informational needs of young audiences. The education of future professionals who work with people necessitates the development of empathy and compassion, which, while fostering sensitivity, also increases vulnerability to the effects of traumatic stress. Accordingly, meaningful interaction with individuals experiencing stress or heightened vulnerability requires an empathetic understanding of their subjective perspectives (Rogers, 1957). This orientation is especially critical for those entering the medical and social professions, including future physical therapists, rehabilitation specialists, and journalists.

Within the framework of this study, empathy fatigue is conceptualized as a psychological condition manifesting in young students as a result of systematic exposure to emotionally intense and traumatic media content.

The objective of this research is to examine the prevalence of empathy fatigue among higher education students specializing in Journalism and Therapy and Rehabilitation, and to determine its association with patterns of media consumption.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The empirical phase of this research was designed to investigate the manifestation of empathy fatigue during media consumption among young students. The methodology consisted of the following stages:

1. Measurement of fatigue levels using *The Fatigue Assessment Scale (FAS)*. The FAS developed by Michielsen et al. (2003) comprises 10 statements, each corresponding to a fatigue symptom, with possible responses: never, sometimes, regularly, often, and always. The scale evaluates both physical (e.g., items 3 and 5–9) and cognitive domains. Respondents are required to answer all items, even if they do not have current complaints. Scores for items 4 and 10 are reverse-coded. The cumulative score ranges from 10 to 50, with scores below 22 indicating no fatigue, 22 or higher indicating fatigue, and 35 or higher indicating severe fatigue.

2. Content analysis to identify the thematic and emotional characteristics of media materials across major platforms: Telegram (e.g., S. Sternenko, “Ukraine Now,” “Telegram News Service”), YouTube (“News Factory,” “24 Channel”), and Facebook (“TSN,” “Ukrainian Truth”) during the period from October to early November 2022. These platforms were selected for their informational richness, rapid updating, and widespread usage among youth audiences. The analysis identified emotionally charged content that may contribute to empathy fatigue.
3. Administration of an online survey to identify key features of students’ media consumption, specifically, predominant information platforms, content types, preferred formats, and emotional reactions to news content—and to determine possible associations between consumption patterns and manifestations of empathy fatigue. The survey was distributed electronically, facilitating efficient data collection, respondent accessibility, and automated data processing.

The survey was conducted online, adhering to the ethical principles of anonymity and voluntary participation. Respondents read the informed consent form before completing the questionnaire.

The sample included 75 students of the specialties (listed and encoded by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine) 061 *Journalism* and 227 *Therapy and Rehabilitation*. The socio-demographic characteristics of the sample included gender, age, course, and educational program. By gender, the sample was predominantly women (69.3%), with 29.3% men. The age range of respondents was mainly 17–20 years (55.4%) and 21–30 years (40.5%). Other age groups (31–40, 40–50, 50+) accounted for 1.4% each. The distribution of students by level of study was as follows: among bachelor's degree applicants, the largest share was second-year students (42.7%), followed by first-year (16%), third-year (1.3%), and fourth-year (8%). Among master's degree students, 30.7% were in the first year and 1.3% in the second. By educational program, 57.3% of respondents were students of specialty Therapy and Rehabilitation, and 42.7% were students of specialty Journalism.

Students are regarded as a professionally sensitive group with respect to emotional stress. The curricula of both specializations involve engagement with materials describing challenging life circumstances, traumatic events, and personal experiences. This educational environment fosters heightened empathic sensitivity. Identifying empathic fatigue at the training stage when professional identity is being shaped and essential skills for interacting with individuals and processing emotionally charged information are being acquired, facilitates the timely implementation of educational and psychological

strategies aimed at preventing professional burnout and promoting emotional resilience.

Results

Analysis of the FAS data indicates that 98% of respondents experience fatigue at least sometimes, with only 2% reporting no fatigue. The most common response, “regularly,” highlights a concerning trend in psychophysical wellbeing. The high prevalence of fatigue may be associated with disrupted daily routines, psycho-emotional stress, or health-related issues. The largest subgroup (46.7%) reported feeling tired “sometimes,” implying that fatigue is frequent but not necessarily chronic for all students.

Notably, 64 % of participants report feeling productive only intermittently during the day, indicative of periodic rather than chronic exhaustion for many. However, approximately 25 % experience persistent productivity deficits, underscoring fatigue’s significant impact on daily functioning. Taken together, these findings suggest that elevated fatigue levels substantially undermine productivity, although most students retain some capacity for periodic recovery (see Table 1).

Table 1

The Fatigue Assessment Scale, General Questions, Per Cent of Students

Responses	1 I am bothered by fatigue	2 I get tires very quickly	3 I don’t do much during the day
Never	-	5	9.3
Sometimes	28	46.7	64
Regularly	38.7	25.3	10.7
Often	25.3	20	9.3
Always	6	-	6.7

Empathic fatigue, exhaustion, and emotional burnout are evident in the participants’ responses, as summarized in Table 2. Only 12% consistently report sufficient energy (“always”), indicating that most students experience periodic deficits in vitality. This pattern may be attributable to high information loads, particularly from frequent exposure to emotionally charged media. Over 98% report some level of physical exhaustion—most commonly “sometimes” (46.7%), but also “often” (25.3%) and “regularly” (22.7%). Only 1 % are free from

physical exhaustion. These findings reveal persistent physical discomfort. Additionally, 88 % of students face difficulty initiating new tasks, and 78.7% report cognitive exhaustion (e.g., impaired concentration, awareness, or articulation), signaling psycho-emotional overload and empathic fatigue.

More than 65% of students report reduced motivation for activities, and nearly 29% experience a complete loss of interest, pointing to emotional burnout. A substantial 94.7% endorse some level of cognitive exhaustion, with nearly half describing it as persistent, a hallmark of information overload. While 68% maintain consistent concentration, 32% experience significant attention difficulties, likely due to empathic and cognitive fatigue. Collectively, these results reveal depleted internal resources and increasing demotivation among the student population.

Table 2

The Fatigue Assessment Scale Responses, Physical and Cognitive Aspects, Per Cent of Students

Responses	4 I have enough energy for every-day life	5 Physically, I feel exhausted	6 I have problems starting things	7 I have problems thinking clearly	8 I feel no desire to do anything	9 Mentally, I feel exhausted	10 When I am doing something, I can concentrate quite well
Never	–	1	21.3	21.3	8	5.3	–
Sometimes	28	46.7	46.7	46.7	45.3	42.7	32
Regularly	25.3	22.7	16	16	17.3	13.3	20
Often	34.7	25.3	14.7	14.7	24	32	34.7
Always	12	4.3	1.3	1.3	5.4	6.7	13.3

The FAS scale results further indicate that students experience varying degrees of psycho-emotional exhaustion, which may be regarded as a core manifestation of empathy fatigue (Michielsen et al., 2003).

To further investigate the origins of this fatigue, an analysis of students' media consumption patterns was undertaken. Survey findings reveal that the majority of participants regularly engage with sensitive content—especially

news related to war, societal issues, and violence. Such exposure stimulates persistent empathy, emotional strain, and information overload, cumulatively increasing fatigue. Accordingly, FAS scores can be interpreted not only as indicators of physical tiredness, but as manifestations of empathic fatigue arising from excessive emotional engagement with media. The elevated rates of mental fatigue among journalism students, relative to physical therapy students, reinforce the idea that professionally oriented exposure to sensitive content has a unique and pronounced impact on fatigue levels.

Because empathy fatigue stems from sustained empathetic engagement, the next stage of analysis addressed students' media consumption patterns and their emotional responses to content. This allowed assessment of whether general and mental fatigue levels correlate with systematic exposure to events eliciting strong sympathy, anxiety, or emotional tension.

For example, analysis of events surrounding the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (October–early November 2022) revealed several recurring themes in the digital space: nuclear threats, troop movements, energy disruptions, and the prevalence of terror. Social media channels, such as Telegram and YouTube, as well as Facebook, featured reports of destruction, torture, looting, and civilian suffering. Audiences encountered emotionally charged messages, images, and discussions, with comments often reflecting pain, trauma, disbelief, and exhaustion. Such content is emotionally devastating, fostering a sense of helplessness and retraumatization even among those not directly affected by the events. The persistent exposure to such media is a key factor contributing to the development of empathy fatigue among audiences, as repeated accounts of violence and grief erode emotional resources (Synorub, 2025).

The extent of empathy fatigue also depends on the types of media content most frequently consumed by young people. Audiences now expect content to be personalized to their interests, behaviors, and emotional states.

Respondents in this study overwhelmingly preferred photo and video content (83.8 %; see Figure 1). These media formats are particularly effective in capturing attention, conveying information, and fostering emotional engagement. Forty-three participants reported favoring brief messages, which, while improving readability and convenience, also sustain attention and encourage the consumption of greater quantities of content—potentially resulting in information overload and subsequent fatigue.

Among information platforms, Telegram (91.9%) and Instagram (67.6%) were the most commonly selected by participants (see Figure 2). Continuous news updates and persistent access to these platforms can exacerbate stress and anxiety; immersion in such events may further contribute to empathy fatigue.

Figure 1
Types of Content Popular with Youth Audiences

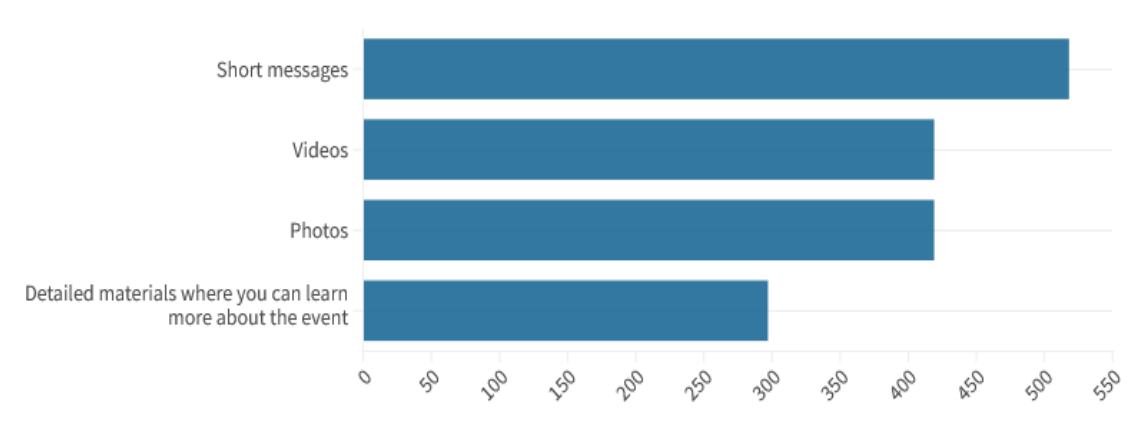
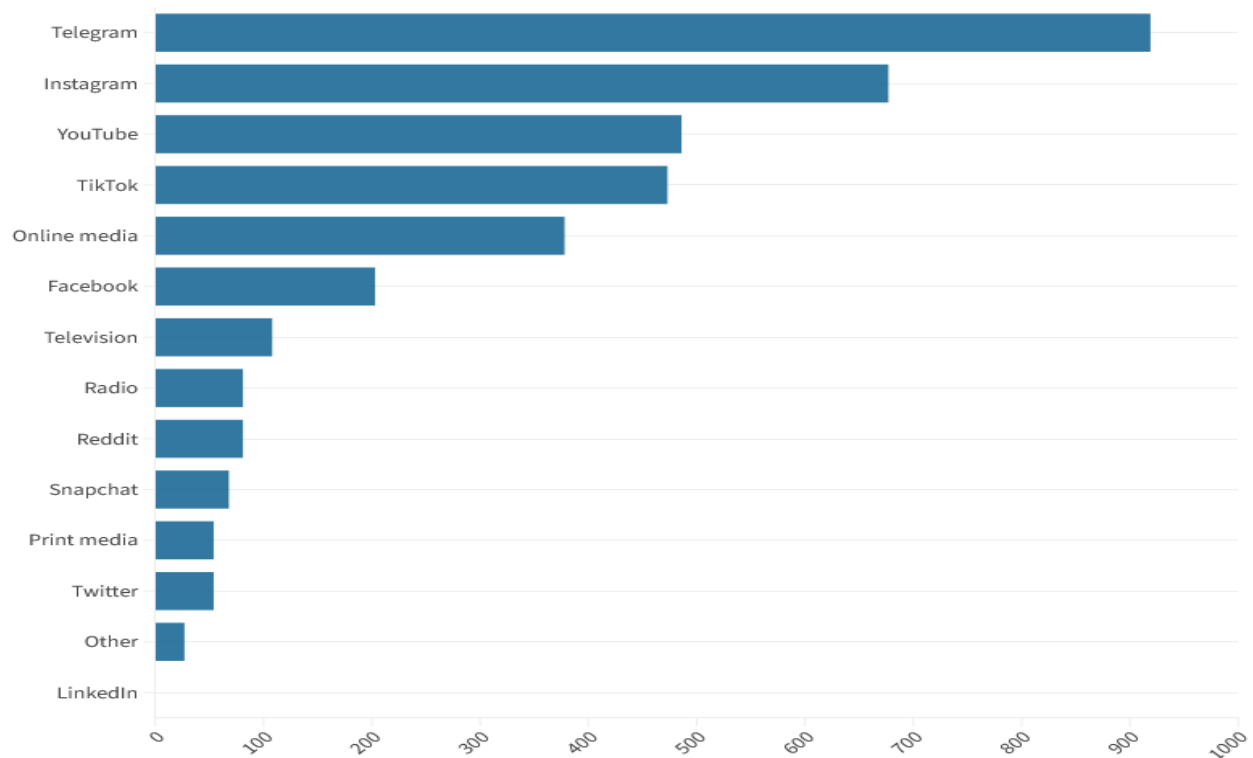


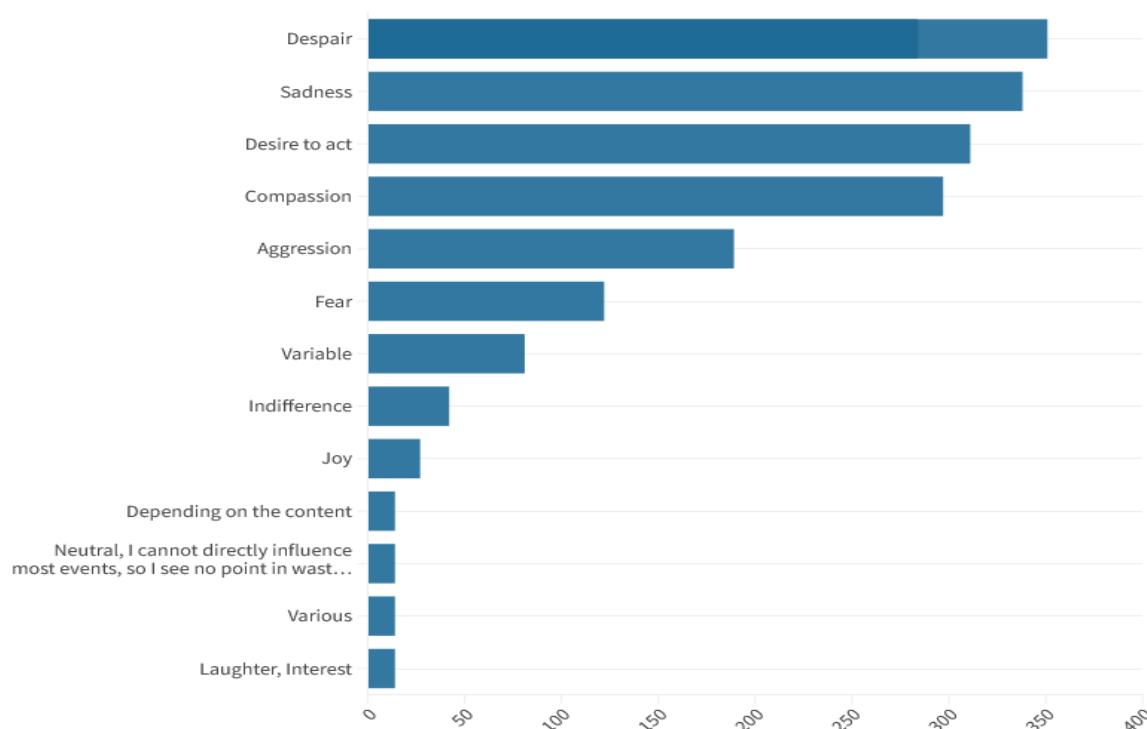
Figure 2
Information Platforms for Receiving News



The media-psychological approach enables the identification of various technologies and techniques that influence recipients' emotions and consciousness, including the most “effective” visual, auditory, and musical elements (Cherepovska & Umerenkova, 2021). Emotions can amplify or diminish the impact of media messages on audiences. In wartime, negative emotional states, such as sadness, despair, and disbelief, predominate among modern

Ukrainian audiences (97.3% of responses; see Fig. 3). Moreover, persistent empathy is difficult to maintain. The unrelenting stream of distressing news characteristic of the digital era contributes to empathy fatigue, as individuals become unable to process not only distant injustices but also those occurring nearby. Motivation for action during war remains a crucial factor in sustaining productivity and psychological well-being (31.1% of responses).

Figure 3
Emotions from Viewing Media Content



The use of specific lexical, stylistic, and grammatical features—along with non-verbal elements such as emojis, GIFs, images, and memes—in media content shapes recipients' emotional responses and expressions of sympathy. Such responses were consistently reported by 18.9% of participants and occasionally by 64.9%. Conversely, 16.2% of respondents intentionally avoid news to limit their emotional involvement in reported events.

Sensitive content exerts a significant impact on audiences, eliciting both positive and negative emotions and consequences. While individual reactions vary, exposure to such material can influence emotional states, psychological health, and behavior. In this study, 10.8% of respondents reported fatigue from emotional news, and 67.5% reported strong excitement and sadness—responses that, with regular exposure, may lead to exhaustion and chronic fatigue. In contrast, 17.6% reported little difficulty coping with these feelings,

while the remainder (1–2 % each) either endeavored to assist those affected or actively limited their exposure to sensitive content.

Among the various formats and genres of media content, photography is particularly distinguished for its ability to document reality, evoke a wide spectrum of emotions, and prompt audience feedback. Each photograph narrates a distinct story, records war crimes, elucidates the realities of current events, and preserves collective memory. For instance, photo portraits characterized by expressive mood are especially imbued with empathetic qualities and can elicit intense emotional responses from viewers. Examining respondents' reactions to images of people in pain or sadness, 50% reported feeling sympathy and a desire to help, but also sadness, prompting them to try to avoid thinking about the image; 39.2% experienced sadness. Such high levels of emotional involvement are typical precursors to empathy fatigue, as consistent exposure to painful imagery demands considerable psychological resources. Conversely, 8.1% of respondents avoided such materials, suggesting a protective response to emotional overload, while only 2.7% reported an absence of empathy.

The assimilation of specific information is significantly influenced by factors such as awareness of the subject, prior experience, emotional state (both during and after information reception), and the formation of worldview (including attitudes, stereotypes, beliefs, tastes, and ideals), as well as motivation for action. Accordingly, a majority of respondents (55.4%) believed that media content shapes attitudes towards social problems; 40.5% agreed sometimes, while only 4.1% disagreed.

The findings corroborate that emotional fatigue stemming from compassion is widespread, underscoring the need for diverse strategies—spanning individual approaches to professional support—to address it (see Table 3). Most respondents (29.7%) preferred independent recovery strategies, such as rest, physical activity, and hobbies. Although social support was also valued, it was considered less important than personal space. Only a small proportion sought professional assistance, which may signal limited psychological service awareness or a preference for self-reliance. Few participants reported not experiencing compassion fatigue, indicating its relevance for the majority and the need for targeted interventions.

To examine the relationship between fatigue levels among physical therapy, rehabilitation, and journalism students, a correlation analysis was performed (see Table 4 and Figure 4). Journalism students exhibited a higher concentration of responses in the “often” category (43.2%), whereas responses among physical therapy and rehabilitation students were more evenly split between “sometimes” (34.3%) and “regularly” (34.3%). Thus, moderate fatigue (“sometimes” or “regularly”) was most common among physical therapy and

rehabilitation students, while high fatigue (“often”) was more typical among journalism students.

Table 3
Ways to Overcome Compassion Fatigue

#	Way to overcome	Percentage of respondents
1	I rest and spend time alone to restore emotional balance.	29.7
2	I communicate with friends or family.	16.1
3	I immerse myself in a hobby or activity that brings me pleasure.	16.1
4	I watch or read positive/exciting content	13.5
5	I do physical exercise or sports.	8.1
6	I don't know.	1
7	I go to specialists (psychologist, coach, etc.)	1
8	I avoid difficult topics or emotional conversations.	13.5
9	I don't feel tired of compassion.	1

Table 4
Frequency of Feeling Tired Among Students

Version answers	Students – Physical therapists, Rehabilitation specialists Per Cent	Students – Journalists, Per Cent
Never	2.9	0.0
Sometimes	34.3	21.6
Regular	34.3	27.0
Often	20.0	43.2
Always	8.5	8.2

In summary, survey results on strategies to overcome empathy fatigue indicate that physical therapists are more likely to demonstrate active or passive compassion (a combined 62.1%), while journalists are more likely to exhibit professional-emotional blocking or neutrality (34.3%). This may represent a protective adaptation to ongoing exposure to sensitive content or signal the development of compassion fatigue.

Figure 4
Comparative Analysis of Fatigue Expression in Students of Both Specialties

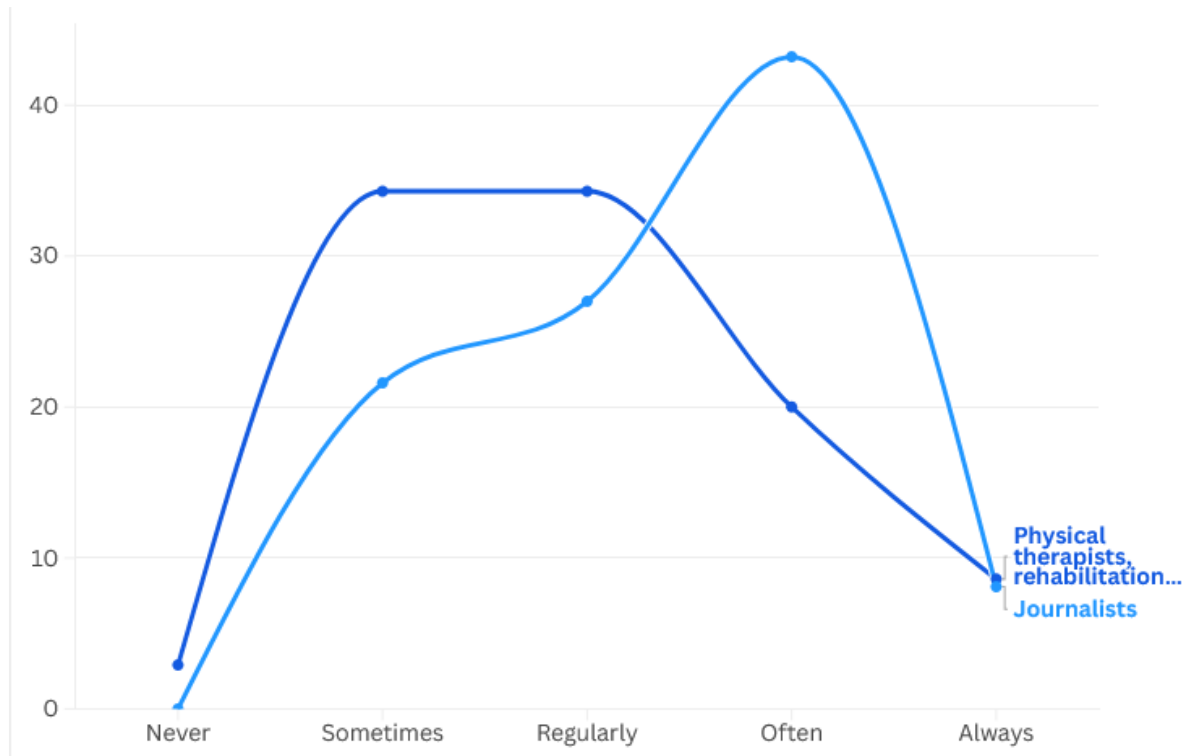


Table 5
The Relationship Between the Intensity of Consumption of Emotionally Charged Media Content and the Level of Empathic Fatigue

Group by type of media consumption	N participants	Average score for FAS	Fatigue level	Content characteristics
High consumption of emotionally charged content (news, tragedies, war)	25	35.8	High	High emotional involvement, frequent empathy
Moderate content consumption	28	27.4	Average	Moderate emotional involvement
Low consumption of emotional content (mostly entertaining or neutral)	22	20.1	Low	Low level of emotional involvement

Empirical data demonstrate a direct relationship between the intensity of consumption of emotionally rich media content and the level of empathy fatigue, as measured by the FAS scale (see Table 5). Participants with high exposure to traumatic content (e.g., war news, tragedies) exhibited an average score of 35.8, indicating a high level of fatigue. This finding is aligned with high emotional involvement and frequent empathic responses. By contrast, groups with moderate (27.4 points) and low (20.1 points) exposure to emotionally rich content displayed medium and low levels of fatigue, respectively.

Discussion

The primary aim of this research was to ascertain the extent of empathy fatigue among students majoring in Journalism and Therapy and Rehabilitation, and to explore its association with patterns of media consumption.

The results of the study confirm that empathic fatigue and psycho-emotional exhaustion are common among young students, especially those in majors that involve high emotional involvement and systematic work with information. According to the FAS scale, 98% of respondents experience fatigue to some degree, with a significant proportion demonstrating regular or frequent manifestations of both physical and cognitive exhaustion. Of particular importance is the relationship between the nature of media consumption and the level of empathic fatigue. Respondents who systematically interact with emotionally rich content, in particular news about war, tragedies, human losses, destruction, have the highest average score on the FAS scale (35.8). This confirms that the intensity of emotional interaction with the media is a significant factor in the development of empathic fatigue. This result is consistent with Figley's (1995) approach, which holds that repeated empathy for others' suffering depletes internal resources and reduces the ability to empathize.

Meanwhile, groups with moderate or low levels of emotionally charged content consumption exhibit fatigue levels that are similarly moderate or low. This suggests that the development of empathy fatigue among students is not solely an individual psychological phenomenon but is also directly influenced by the volume and emotional intensity of daily information exposure. In today's media landscape, the threshold for emotional sensitivity is lower, and emotional resources are depleted more rapidly.

Notably, fatigue levels are higher among journalism students than among those studying physical therapy and rehabilitation. Journalism students more frequently select the response "often," which may indicate heightened emotional involvement or a need for routine engagement with crisis-related

information. In the context of professional development, this trend is concerning, as the information overload experienced during training can shape future professional behavior and resilience to stress. While physical therapy and rehabilitation students also report considerable fatigue and empathy, they are more likely to employ active or passive empathetic responses, suggesting a retained capacity for compassion despite exhaustion. Conversely, future journalists more often adopt emotional distancing or professional-emotional blocking, which may serve as protective mechanisms in response to recurrent traumatic content. These group differences highlight distinct occupational risks: diminished empathy and professional sensitivity for journalists, and emotional overload and the potential for burnout among therapists.

An analysis of the types of media content consumed by respondents showed that the majority choose photo and video materials. Visual content has a much stronger emotional impact than text, as it creates a sense of presence and an instant empathetic response. Over 83% of respondents prefer these formats, which may explain the high emotional intensity of their experiences. The results regarding reactions to images of people experiencing pain or sadness also showed high emotional sensitivity: half of the respondents felt sympathy and wanted to help, and 39.2% experienced sadness and tried to distance themselves from thoughts about what they saw. The combination of emotional involvement and distancing is a typical marker of the development of empathy fatigue.

It is important to note that 8.1% of respondents avoid sensitive images, which may act as a psychological self-protection mechanism. Such reactions are consistent with scientific data on adaptive avoidance strategies in situations of informational and emotional overload.

The predominance of Telegram and Instagram as primary news sources reflects a preference for concise, dynamic, and frequently emotionally charged content, which can rapidly deplete recipients' emotional resources. Continuous access to updates results in persistent information pressure, thereby exacerbating anxiety, worry, and feelings of helplessness.

The study's results also confirm the importance of strategies to overcome compassion fatigue. Although the majority of respondents use individual self-regulation methods (rest, hobbies, physical activity), the low percentage of seeking professional help (1%) may indicate a lack of awareness or distrust of psychological services.

In sum, empathy fatigue among students emerges as a significant and multifaceted issue shaped by patterns of media consumption, the structure of professional training, and emotional responses to traumatic content.

Conclusion

The empirical results indicate that higher education students (both bachelor's and master's levels) specializing in Journalism and Therapy and Rehabilitation experience substantial empathy fatigue. Future journalists demonstrated a higher prevalence of psycho-emotional exhaustion than physical therapy students. The key factor contributing to elevated empathy fatigue is excessive media consumption, particularly of social network news feeds.

Several psychological strategies were identified to mitigate empathy fatigue, including mindful media consumption, the cultivation of critical thinking and media literacy, and the implementation of self-regulation and emotional resilience practices (such as relaxation techniques, physical activity, and attention refocusing) as integral components of professional education.

These findings underscore the need to incorporate media hygiene and psychological resilience modules into curricula for professions characterized by high emotional stress. Future research should focus on developing and evaluating effective preventative interventions for student populations.

Disclosure Statement

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