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## War Journalists Suffer on the Job

By Laura Pratt  
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Anthony Feinstein had been astonished to learn that there was no ready source of psychiatric help available to the war journalist the neurologist had referred to him — a woman whose troubling experience would spark in him an enduring interest in the connection between reporting on the atrocities of armed conflict and psychological damage in response to it. A bit of investigation into this topic revealed a further surprise for the neuropsychiatrist at Sunnybrook Research Institute: no one had ever done any formal research on it. Medical literature was sorely bereft of any reference to war journalists and their particular susceptibility to psychiatric distress.

Over the next several years, Feinstein's passionate and far-reaching work would address both of these oversights.

Endowed with financial support from the Freedom Forum, CNN, the BBC and the Dart Foundation, Feinstein began his investigation in 2000. Big-name news organizations like the BBC, CBC and Reuters opened up their books to this curious scientist, and in the months and years that followed, Feinstein provided a welcome sounding board for war journalists in Johannesburg, London, Barcelona, Paris, Madrid and New York who had never before been asked to reflect on this matter. For the journalists in the field, he established a Web site and did his interviews electronically.

The stories he heard burned his ears.

There was the British correspondent who told him of the woman who confronted him in Grozny, dragging a man's mangled body behind her, and waving his severed leg in the air. And the veteran freelance photographer, who shared his haunting memories of meeting an eight-year-old victim of a bombing attack on a Chechen farm who was crying blood.



### ***Dangerous Lives* explores them**

By the end of 2001, Feinstein and his team had interviewed 140 war journalists (including reporters, still photographers, videographers and producers). He published a book detailing the results (*Dangerous Lives*: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2003), two years later. When the Iraq conflict began in 2003, Feinstein returned to his research with new vigor; this new round of study is ongoing.

More than anything, says Feinstein, he's learned that, "War is not good for journalists. They suffer from it."

Specifically, they suffer post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse and anxiety disorders. One in five journalists, over the course of a long (15-plus-year) career, endures



*Dr. Anthony Feinstein and photojournalist Rita Leistner (photo by Doug Nicholson).*

significant PTSD, says Feinstein. That means, among other things, bad dreams, flashbacks, numbness, an overly sensitive startle response and an inability to get close to others emotionally. One in four experiences depression. "And a number drink very heavily as well," says Feinstein, "but I don't know how many, because I never know for sure what they're telling me."

The most surprising revelation of the research for Feinstein? "I didn't realize that the journalists were in such great danger. You see them when they report the news: cool, collected, with everything seemingly going on behind them. But these people are really right in the middle of it all."

He is particularly sympathetic to still photographers. More than anyone, he says, these professionals have no choice but to get into the thick of things to do their jobs well.

### **Research effects change**

Since Feinstein's findings were released, most news organizations have introduced access to confidential counselling services for their war journalists. Feinstein is also regularly called upon by news agencies to consult on what kind of traumatic effects their journalists have suffered or might suffer.

"I think my work has focused their minds on what the problems are," says Feinstein. "Six years back, when journalists had symptoms of trauma or PTSD, they didn't know what it was. They thought they were losing their minds. Now they're more informed."