

Media-Induced Stress in the Era of Permanent Global Crises

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Abstract

Contemporary societies are increasingly exposed to cumulative global crises, including pandemics, wars, climate threats, and geopolitical instability. Importantly, these stressors affect mental health not only through direct experience but also through their constant media representation. This research introduces the concept of media-induced stress and proposes an integrative framework to inform preventive strategies.

The study combines theoretical perspectives from psychology and media studies with empirical data from three population-representative studies conducted in the Czech Republic. Study 1 examined the relationship between media use and mental health during a prolonged COVID-19 lockdown (N = 1,777). Study 2 investigated links between belief in misinformation about COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine (N = 1,623). Study 3 explored risk and protective factors of media-transmitted traumatization during the first year of the war in Ukraine (N= 1,175).

Across studies, the way people consume media emerged as more important than the amount of exposure itself. Risk factors consistently included social-media-based news consumption, reading online comments, internalization of news content, and frustration or distrust toward mainstream media. These patterns were associated with higher anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and susceptibility to misinformation. Conversely, deep and contextual news reading and selective, practical news use showed protective effects.

Based on these findings, an integrative model of media-induced stress is proposed. The model positions uncertainty as a key transdiagnostic mechanism linking media exposure, belief rigidity, and mental health outcomes. Under prolonged crisis conditions, media environments may reinforce maladaptive coping, media-transmitted traumatization, and vulnerability to misinformation.

The findings highlight the urgent need to move beyond exposure-focused approaches and target media behavior, uncertainty regulation, and media literacy in prevention and public mental health strategies. Media-informed preventive interventions may represent a crucial tool for reducing psychological burden

in the context of ongoing global crises.

Keywords: Media, Stress, Uncertainty