

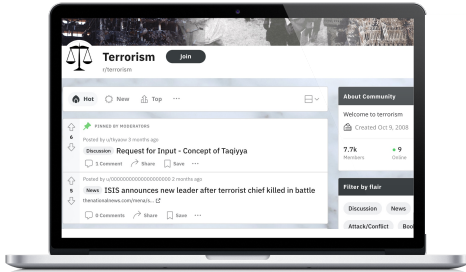


*Image from operation250

Psychological trauma and the observation of atrocities: Three studies to read

Outline of the Problem

Members of the DHS workforce and terrorism researchers are systematically exposed to the propaganda, ideologies, and psychologies of actors who seek to launch terrorist attacks. This content is inherently value-laden and possibly personally troubling. We examined over 13,000 research articles across multiple fields of work in which individuals are exposed to traumatic imagery or events. We found that there is a small body of extant research focused on a few key domains (namely digital forensic and internet child sex abuse prevention) that has explored the significant psychological trauma caused by exposure to extreme content.



For anyone looking to learn more about the psychological trauma that stems from exposure to traumatic images and the psychological factors that can impact this process, **we recommend these three research articles.** For more information, read the full report [here](#).

1: Perez et al. (2010): Secondary trauma in those who view disturbing images online

In this article, [Perez et al. \(2010\)](#) interview 28 federal law enforcement personnel who investigate internet child pornography cases and completed measures of secondary traumatic stress disorder (STSD) and burnout. Greater exposure to disturbing media was related to higher levels of STSD and cynicism. STSD and burnout scores were related to general distrust and turnover intentions.

2: Doyle et al. (2021): Moral injury and trauma in internet child sex abuse teams

In this article, [Doyle et al. \(2021\)](#) interview six members of Internet Child Sex Abuse Teams in the U.K. Findings indicated that the participants' moral injury and trauma were predominantly attributable to excessive workloads and stigma in relation to mental health within policing. The participants also often used maladaptive coping strategies for preventing the effects of their trauma.

3: Sollie et al. (2017): Mental resilience of crime scene investigators (CSI)

In this article, [Sollie et al. \(2017\)](#) observed five CSI teams and conducted semistructured interviews with the investigators. They found that by employing strict management of thoughts, visualization, focus on sensemaking, sharing of emotions and responsibilities, and avoiding potentially distressing working situations, CSIs overcome the strain of forensic investigations.