

# Understanding the Trauma-Related Effects of Terrorist Propaganda on Researchers

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This report examines how exposure to terrorist propaganda may lead to trauma in online extremism researchers. The study is based on two research methods—an online survey and a novel experiment—to measure the short and long-term impacts of exposure to terrorist propaganda. The online survey was completed by 95 recognised extremism researchers who were asked about their opinions and experiences related to the impact of their research activities on mental health. The experiment used a biofeedback device and an eye-tracker to measure the short-term psychophysiological response of online extremism researchers to certain types of terrorist propaganda.



83% of surveyed terrorism researchers have never been supported by their employing institutions to reduce the risks to their mental health.

Scenes of death and dying, expressions of extreme, raw emotions and the suffering of civilian populations are potentially the most harmful types of violent extremist content for the mental health of researchers.

Researchers with significant experience in terrorism studies are usually more aware of the risks involved in viewing terrorist content compared to junior researchers.

The biofeedback data indicate that terrorism researchers manifest more unstable psychophysiological reactions to terrorist propaganda than those exposed to ordinary internet content.

There is an urgent need to introduce new standards within Higher Education Institutions to protect the wellbeing of researchers including (but not limited to): improvements in the working culture, formal and supervised procedures for analysing terrorist content, the availability of free mental health services and specialised training for junior researchers.