

DIGITAL DETOX AND SELF CARE

JOURNALISTS AND RIGHTS ACTIVISTS



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Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) is a feminist, not-for-profit organisation based in Pakistan working on digital freedoms since 2013. DRF envisions a place where all people, especially women and gender minorities, can exercise their right of expression without being threatened.

DRF believes that a free internet with access to information and impeccable privacy policies can create safe online spaces for not only women but the world at large.

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WHY IS SELF CARE IMPORTANT?

Journalism and human rights activism are high-pressured professions. Both have to work under a lot of pressure, often long, and sometimes unpredictable hours. They have to work on issues, stories and topics that can take a mental toll and are hard to leave behind at the office. They are also expected to do more with little resources and scanty work conditions. For journalists, on top of everything, the media industry is in a state of uncertainty, which means that job security, and workplace morale aren't so great. Many journalists haven't received compensation for months and continue to work without salaries. With the advancement in digital technology, journalists and rights activists are faced with increasing challenges to keep pace with the skills required for digital media. The COVID-19 situation has further accentuated the challenges faced by journalists and human rights defenders.



The difficult work conditions are met with increased usage of digital spaces, which has intensified their stress and can have a toll on their mental health.

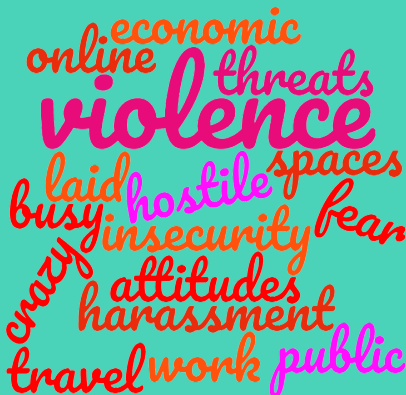
From the moment they turn their alarm off in the morning until the last glimpse at their accounts before bed, an important part of their work - and life - takes place on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. The excessive use of digital spaces and their habit around the use of social media affect their mental health. Social media have long been hotbeds of misinformation and targeted harassment of journalists as well as human rights activists, both of which can lead to fatigue and even burnout. The challenges discussed above are further exacerbated for women journalists and activists who face double binds for the specificity of their gender and profession.



UNDERSTANDING STRESS, BURNOUT AND ACTIVISM FATIGUE

STRESS

Stress is how our body responds to pressures, threats and certain situations in life. While a certain amount of stress is healthy and motivating, such as looming deadlines, too much can lead to crashing, breakdowns or burnout. Long term stress can have consequences for the body and mind which is why it is important for individuals to not overwhelm themselves and look out for symptoms of stress early. It is important to note that stress is a response to a threat in a particular situation, however, anxiety is in turn a reaction to that stress.



A word cloud of stress-related terms in various colors and orientations. The words include: economic, online, threats, violence, spaces, laid, hostile, busy, insecurity, bear, crazy, attitudes, harassment, travel, work, and public. The word 'violence' is the largest and most central, while 'bear' is the smallest and least central.

FATIGUE

Burnout is a state of exhaustion which can be mental, physical and emotional in nature and can happen due to prolonged long term stress. Most individuals associate burnout to work related stress and tasks which can be too overwhelming at times. Burnout can be due to long working hours, workload, toxic work environments and lack of support at workplaces.



The term fatigue is used to describe the feeling of tiredness or lack of energy. Fatigue is a common symptom of various medical problems that individuals face and has adverse effects on one's mental and physical health. Fatigue is not only when the body feels tired but is also when an individual isn't motivated and has no energy. There are various causes of fatigue which can be due to lifestyle factors, mental health issues or physical health issues.

BURNOUT

ACTIVISM FATIGUE

It is never easy to create change. There are bounds of obstacles that need to be overcome to create change. Activists face unique challenges, as they are emotionally invested in and understand the implications of injustice within marginalized communities. Thus, there may come a point when even the most hardworking individuals feel overwhelmed in their efforts, which is the result of activist fatigue or social justice fatigue, a type of burnout that occurs when one is working towards a goal that involves emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion, all of which can become a chronic condition over time.



Zoom fatigue is a term that describes the worry, tiredness and burnout associated with the use of digital communication platforms. Ever since the emergence of COVID19 most professionals have switched their work to online spaces and have relied on various digital platforms for communication. The reliance on these platforms and working during a pandemic has caused many individuals to experience zoom fatigue. Zoom fatigue is a completely new concept and is considered by many mental health experts as widely prevalent and intense for individuals.

ZOOM FATIGUE





IDENTIFYING AND ASSESSING BURNOUT

It is important to know your signs and know what we can cope with and what we can't. Make a note of your stressors and use them to plan a self-care regime. Three sets of signs of burnout and some of the symptoms associated with each that need to be seen together and as a combination to assess if you are burned out. The list of symptoms is not exhaustive as different people can have different symptoms under each category.



Sense of lack of efficiency

All achievements seem trivial

New tasks and projects seem too much

Nothing seems worth the effort

Change seems impossible to cope with

Depersonalisation and disconnection

Minimising engagement with colleagues, friends, family and people in general

Ignoring the needs of others

With regards to work, the dominant feeling of being a machine

Emotional and psychophysical

(found in many other mental and physical health issues as well)

Lack of energy

Insomnia

Seems impossible to regenerate

Depression

Below is a Burnout Scale adapted from The Freudenberger Burnout Scale for you to assess if you are burning out. Use it as an early warning but always consult a professional for proper diagnosis and treatment.

ARE YOU BURNING OUT?

Have you noticed changes in yourself over the past 6 months? Assign a number from **0 (for no or little change)** to **5 (for a great deal of change)** for each of the following questions. (This test is not meant to replace a clinical assessment.)

_____ 1. Do you tire more easily?
Feel fatigued rather than energetic?

_____ 2. Are people annoying you by telling you, "You don't look so good lately"?

_____ 3. Are you working harder and harder and accomplishing less and less?

_____ 4. Are you increasingly cynical and disenchanted?

_____ 5. Are you often invaded by a sadness you can't explain?

_____ 6. Are you forgetting things (appointments, deadlines, personal possessions)?

_____ 7. Are you increasingly irritable? More short-tempered? More disappointed in the people around you?

_____ 8. Are you seeing close friends and family members less frequently?

_____ 9. Are you too busy to do even routine things like making phone calls, reading reports or spending time with friends?

_____ 10. Are you suffering from physical complaints? (e.g., aches, pains, headaches, a lingering cold)

_____ 11. Do you feel disoriented when the activity of the day comes to a halt?

_____ 12. Is joy elusive?

_____ 13. Are you unable to laugh at a joke about yourself?

_____ 14. Does sex seem like more trouble than it's worth?

_____ 15. Do you have very little to say to people?

_____ TOTAL



SCORING

0-25: You're fine.

26-35: There are things you should be watching.

36-50: You're a candidate for burnout.

51-65: You are burning out.

Over 65: You sound burned out; a situation that may be threatening to your physical and mental well-being.

Don't let a high total score alarm you, but pay attention to it. Burnout is reversible, no matter how far along it is.



WHAT IS SELF-CARE?

Self care is defined as any activity or set of activities that individuals undertake deliberately in order to take care of their mental, emotional, and physical health. As journalists and activists, it is important to flatten your stress curve by implementing a self-care and self-compassion regime. Journalists and activists see the doom and gloom every day as they work on and cover stories of injustice and marginalisation, natural disasters and violence. They work on these loaded issues and read about them, and especially during the Coronavirus pandemic, they have also been exposed to the virus while covering it. It's extremely crucial for them to implement self-care in their daily lives.



TYPES OF SELF CARE

PHYSICAL

Sleep
Walking
Nutrition
Stretching
Exercise
Yoga

EMOTIONAL

Stress
Management
Coping Skills
Compassion
Therapy
Journaling

SOCIAL

Boundaries
Support System
Positive
Social Media
Communication
Friends

SPIRITUAL

Time Alone
Meditation
Prayer
Nature
Sacred Space

PERSONAL

Hobbies
Creativity
Goals
Identity
Authenticity

SPACE

Safety
Health
Environment
Stability
Clean Space

FINANCIAL

Saving
Budgeting
Money
Management
Paying Bills
Boundaries

WORK

Time
Management
Work
Boundaries
Breaks

DIGITAL

One screen
Tech free hours
App limits
Grey screen



HOW CAN SELF-CARE HELP YOU IN THE LONG-TERM?

Practicing self care and mindfulness can have reaping benefits for journalists and activists especially in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. The most obvious benefits of self care are good energy levels and mood which are two very important components in intense jobs of journalists and activists alike.

Some long term benefits of practicing self care are mentioned on the next page.

it's okay to
feel your
feelings

take care
of your mind

you are
enough

- **IMPROVED PHYSICAL HEALTH**

Self care makes an individual feel more fit in terms of their physical health since it leads to an overall better mood that also has effects on one's physical health and immune system. With more positive energy, individuals also feel better in terms of their health internally if they practice self care.

- **BETTER PRODUCTIVITY**

Self care also improves productivity for journalists and activists. Working in high risk jobs workplaces require one to always be at the top of their game in terms of work. Practicing self care helps to keep mood elevated which in turn keeps one motivated and not reach burnout at workplaces.

- **BETTER SELF-ESTEEM**

Being good to oneself and looking after one's own needs also has good effects on one's subconscious and personal wellbeing. This results in less negative talk and self doubt and has huge benefits un one's self esteem and growth.

- **INCREASED SELF AWARENESS**

Practicing self care also requires one to get in touch with one's inner self more. It makes an individual understand their likes and dislikes along with a better understanding around key issues that cause confusion and doubt in one's mind.

- **MORE EMPATHETIC AND CARING**

Caring for oneself more results in being able to handle stressful situations better and also being more empathetic and understanding towards others situations and circumstances. Journalists and activists belong to a profession where empathy is very important because of interacting with different segments of the society. Individuals who are good to themselves can help empathize and sympathize with others in a better manner.

- **WORKING ON DIFFICULT TOPICS WITH SELF-CARE**

Pakistan ranks as 145 in the 2020 World Press Freedom Index out of 180 countries according to Reporters without borders. Journalists and activists work on difficult and complex topics in their field such as political violence, human rights and natural disasters. Job insecurity in the field along with underlying stress related to the different themes that journalists cover can have adverse effects on their mental health and physical well being. According to Natalee Seely, an assistant professor of journalism at Ball state university, "Like therapists — who through the process of 'transference' can vicariously experience their patients' emotional pain — reporters may also experience a type of indirect, secondary trauma through the victims they interview and the graphic scenes to which they must bear witness," she mentions in a 2019 study on the impact of covering trauma published in Newspaper Research Journal.

Covering difficult topics can result in burnout, stress, anxiety and can sometimes also result in post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In order

for journalists and activists to keep a check on their well being there are certain constant reminders that they need to give themselves:

- **IDENTIFY THE SIGNS**

Whenever one is experiencing stress and anxiety the signs are always there. When an individual is experiencing fatigue on a regular basis and dealing with day to day tasks is becoming a problem that means one's mind and body are giving them signs. It is important to acknowledge these signs and act on them for one's safety and wellbeing.

- **NO ONE'S IMMUNE TO EMOTIONAL IMPACT**

It is important to note that just because one has covered sensitive topics in the past in their work that they'll be immune to keep on doing it again and again without being triggered. Emotional impact can be triggered with the slightest of things and it is important to acknowledge that some beats and some incidents are difficult to digest.

- **TAKING TIME OFF TO DE-STRESS**

It is equally important to de-stress and take time off when one feels too overwhelmed. Digital detox from devices and one's workplace is extremely important and should be a practice for both journalists and activists.

- **CREATE A SELF CARE PLAN AND HAVE ASSERTIVE BOUNDARIES**

Creating a self care plan and having boundaries is extremely important for journalists and activists. Self care can vary from one individual to another and it is important to make a plan that one is comfortable with and that is also easily implemented in one's daily routine. Taking that time out for small self care activities is equally important and ensuring no one intrudes that time. Having assertive boundaries at one's workplace and being candid about these boundaries is extremely important for one's well being emotionally, mentally and physically.



WHAT IS DIGITAL DETOX?

While digital detox has been described as the period of time an individual refrains from using digital technologies, it is important to know that complete shutdown of technology is not possible for journalists and human rights activists.

So, digital detox for them can mean slowing down and maintaining work-life balance in a hyperconnected world by adopting healthy and sustainable habits around the way digital technologies are consumed.





STRATEGIES FOR A HEALTHY TECH RELATIONSHIP

Here are 10 practical strategies that can help journalists and human rights defenders to establish a sane and healthy relationship with technology.

1.

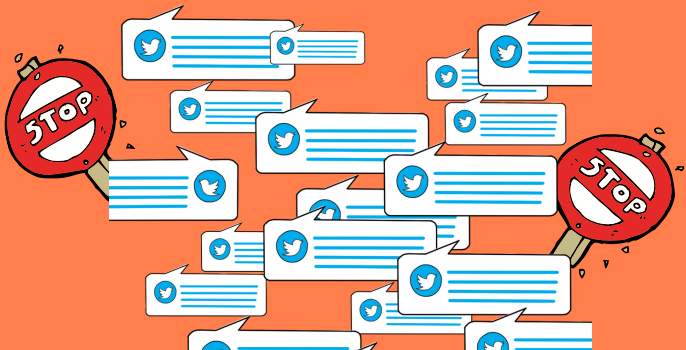
PROTECT YOUR BODY: EXCESSIVE USAGE OF THE SCREEN STRAINS OUR BODIES

- a. To combat digital eye strain, which can cause dryness, blurred vision, and headaches, follow the 20-20-20 rule. For every 20 minutes you look at a screen, look up and at an object 20 feet in the distance for 20 seconds. Also, don't forget to blink!
- b. To fix "text neck," skip the bent neck and hold your phone higher so you can look at it straight on.
- c. And avoid "smartphone thumb" — that perma-bent texting position can cause inflammation, irritation, and pain — by taking regular breaks from your phone and mixing up the way you type, using different fingers.

2.

TURN OFF PUSH NOTIFICATIONS

Turning off as many push notifications as you can live without is one way to get less distracted and less exhausted. Getting constant updates on what's happening in the world is informative and very important for you as a journalist or an activist so pick and choose which notifications you'd want to receive and turn off all others.



3.

DESIGNATE TECH-FREE HOURS

Many of us feel disconnected and lost without our smartphones and/or laptops but we need to realise that our jobs make it ever so important for us to have designated tech-free hours each day for our well-being and health. Start by designating a certain time each day that's tech-free and map the change — like while you're eating lunch, and particularly make your bedroom a no-tech zone. It's best if you can leave your phone outside the bedroom at night and yes, we did use alarm clocks before smartphones were an invention so don't give yourself the excuse of using your phone as an alarm clock.



4.

CLEAN YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA HOUSE

Social media platforms show a heavily curated version of your social connections' lives, which can be toxic or unhealthy for some people depending on their mental health and individual life circumstances. Some people also share triggering content without any warnings. The key here is to be proactive about who and what to follow. Clean your social media house—don't be afraid to block, mute, unfollow, or delete people, pages and stories that you find triggering, toxic or exhausting.



5.

USE ONE SCREEN AT A TIME

We might be great at multitasking but it is not good for us to keep switching between screens. It not only impacts our productivity and focus, but also takes several minutes to recalibrate our brains back to the original task. Make a habit of only looking at one screen at a time to improve concentration and by all means, you can get work done in less time and then enjoy whatever you want to read, scroll, watch in the other window without the stress of work!





6.

UNSUBSCRIBE FROM EMAIL BLASTS

Declutter your inbox, which is like your virtual home! Sometimes, we inadvertently give permission to websites to send us promotional materials when accessing them online and these land in our inbox. It is advisable to set aside some time and clean your virtual home by manually unsubscribing from the email lists. Word of caution about third party bulk unsubscriber tools: these apps require permission to access your inbox and have faced backlash for selling customer data.





7.

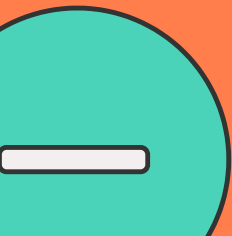
REDISCOVER THE USE OF PAPER

For notes and scribbling, consider rediscovering the use of paper! Not only will this lead to fewer distractions, but research suggests that when we read or write on paper, our minds process abstract information more effectively.

8.

DIY SELF RESTRICTIONS

You can also develop a series of self-determined restrictions for cutting bits and pieces of tech out of your lives depending on what distracts you more. For example, you can delete Facebook and Instagram from your smartphone so that you only use these applications from your laptop, or you can set them to 'only use wifi' so that these apps are only accessible when there is a wifi connection. These can be more tailored to your needs and circumstances, so be innovative!





9.

SET APP LIMITS

Smartphones allow you to set limits to the usage of applications. So, while working in particular, and also to reduce your usage of digital spaces generally, exercise setting limits to apps that cause a lot of distraction.





10.

GO GREY!

The vibrancy of our smartphones makes them so alluring. Changing the settings to grey, especially at night time allows you to use your phone less and also leads to better and less disturbed sleep. Screens' blue light tricks our brains into thinking it's daytime, which makes it harder to drift off. Try it yourself!



RESOURCES

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