



The Relationship between Incidental Exposure to Global Crisis Content, Hopelessness, and Secondary Traumatic Stress

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Abstract: The current research was to explore the connection between incidental exposure to content of global crisis, hopelessness, and secondary traumatic stress in young adults. The research design employed in the study was a correlational research design to examine how passive exposure to crisis-related information on social media has a significant impact on cognitive vulnerability and symptoms of trauma-related stress. A total of 191 participants were included in the study. The measure of Incidental Exposure to Global Crisis Content, Hopelessness Scale and the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (STSS) (measures intrusion, avoidance, and arousal symptoms) were used to collect data. The results showed that the accidental exposure to the global crisis material did not have significant relationships with hopelessness or total secondary traumatic stress. There was no significant correlation between incidental exposure and sub components of secondary traumatic stress. However, a statistically significant moderate positive correlation was found between hopelessness and secondary traumatic stress. Intrusion, avoidance and arousal symptoms were also associated with hopelessness with the strongest correlation with avoidance symptoms. The findings indicate that exposure to crisis-related content might not be enough to create psychological distress. Rather, internal cognitive vulnerability, especially hopelessness, seems to be much more central to the determination of stress responses related to trauma. The

results emphasize the significance of the mental processes to explain psychological responses to the crisis-related information in the modern digital landscape.

Keywords: *Incidental Exposure, Global Crisis Content, Hopelessness, Secondary Traumatic Stress, Cognitive Vulnerability.*

1. Introduction

The digital communication technologies were quickly developed, and it has changed the way people received information about what is going on in the world. Social media sites have become more important platforms on which individuals get real-time information about war, political conflict, humanitarian crises, and natural disasters (Nwogwugwu, 2021). Instagram, Twitter/X, and Facebook are algorithm-based tools that promote emotionally salient content, which subject users (mostly young adults) to crisis-related information even without the intention to pursue it (Ahmadi and Wohn, 2018). Emotional distress, hopelessness, and secondary traumatic stress were observed to be associated with recurrent exposure to traumatic content related to distress (Bride, 2004; Kellerman et al., 2022).

1.1 *Incidental Exposure to Global Crisis Content*

1.1.1 *Global Crisis Content*

Global crisis contents are digitally mediated contents of large scale events of enormous human suffering or instability, such as war, acts of terrorism, humanitarian crises, pandemics, and natural disasters (Volkmer, 2021). These are news, live feeds, graphic images, videos, and user-generated content, on social media. The presence of such content is enhanced through algorithmic systems, which prioritize emotionally evoking content and spreading it more in the feeds of users (Ahmadi and Wohn, 2018).

1.1.2 *Incidental Exposure*

Incidental exposure is defined as the accidental exposure to content when the user is doing other activities that are his/her main activity (Tewksbury et al., 2001). On the social media, users who scroll through content in search of entertainment or social interaction can be shown content about the crisis posted by their friends, recommended by algorithms, or listed in trending hashtags without intentionally seeking such material (Lee and Kim, 2017). In contrast to intentional news exposure, incidental exposure denies the user any control over the timing and frequency of

exposure, and diminishes emotional readiness which may lead to an amplification of the distress responses.

1.1.3 Theoretical Frameworks

Uses and Gratifications Theory is based on the idea that individuals prefer to use media to satisfy needs such as entertainment or socialization but may still be incidentally exposed to crisis content via mixed-content feeds (Ahmadi and Wohn, 2018).

Theory of Information Encountering (Erdelez, 2004) is the theory of how users encounter unanticipated, relevant information when they intend to achieve unrelated purposes, which is directly relevant to the unintended exposure to crisis in the context of social media.

The Algorithmic Gatekeeping Theory holds that engagement metrics are the new way content is determined to be visible by an algorithm, rather than a human editor (Bozdag, 2013). Crisis content is quite provocative and most of the time it is amplified whether the user intends it or not.

According to Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 2002), perceptions of social reality (which drives the world to be seen as dangerous and unstable) is an outcome of long-term repeated exposure to mediated content and this is part of hopelessness.

Emotional Contagion Theory (Hatfield et al., 1994) describes the process of the spread of emotions through the social network by observation. The repetition of crisis contents which are emotionally charged and the reactions of others to distress may result in emotional exhaustion and secondary traumatic stress.

1.2 Hopelessness

Hopelessness is a cognitive-emotional disorder that is defined as negative expectations concerning the future, a sense of powerlessness, and feeling that desirable results are impossible (Beck et al., 1974).

1.2.1 Beck's Cognitive Theory of Hopelessness

According to the cognitive model of Beck, maladaptive self-related, world-related and future-related schemas are the origins of emotional distress (Beck, 1967). Hopelessness is acquired when they have negative perceptions about the future that they have never given up on. The repetition of crisis imagery may support the beliefs in the world being dangerous and out of control and extend to the general hopelessness (Beck et al., 1974).

1.2.2 Hopelessness Theory of Depression

Abramson, Metalsky and Alloy (1989) hypothesized that hopelessness occurs when negative events are ascribed to causes which are stable, global, and personal. The repeated exposure to content of crisis situations across the world can cement the assumption that violence and instability are here to stay and become more susceptible to hopelessness.

1.2.3 Learned Helplessness Theory

Seligman (1975) theorized that, when faced with negative events over time, which are uncontrollable, there is passivity, low motivation and cognitive helplessness. Seeing massive suffering and not being able to do anything about it may lead to the feeling of powerlessness that is generalized into hopelessness.

1.3 Secondary Traumatic Stress

The term Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) can be defined as trauma-like symptoms that develop as a result of indirect exposure to traumatic events by observing or experiencing the traumatic experiences of others (Bride, 2004). Symptoms resemble PTSD, such as intrusive thoughts, avoidance and hyperarousal.

1.3.1 Bride's STS Model

Bride (2004) determined three clusters of symptoms (intrusion, avoidance and arousal) and created Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (STSS) to assess these symptoms. Constant exposure to graphic content of crisis can result in intrusive imagery, content avoidance, or emotional sensitivity in social media users.

1.3.2 Vicarious Trauma Theory

McCann and Pearlman (1990) hypothesized that exposure to the trauma of others could change fundamental cognitive schemas relating to the concept of safety, trust, control, and meaning. Repeated exposure to global crisis information in a social media setting can over time cause users to change their worldviews towards the world being perceived as unsafe and unpredictable.

1.3.3 Constructivist Self-Development Theory (CSDT)

CSDT was also formulated by McCann and Pearlman (1990), it is based on the notion that cognitive schemas in identity, worldview and emotional regulation are disturbed by trauma, either direct or indirect. Repeated exposure to the event may weaken beliefs related to safety and control, and lead to secondary traumatic stress both via emotional and cognitive mechanisms.

1.4 Operational Definition

1.4.1 Incidental Exposure to Global crisis Content

In the current paper, Incidental Exposure to Global Crisis Content can be defined as the degree to which people are exposed to crisis-related information (e.g., war, violence, natural disasters, humanitarian crises), unintentionally, when using social media platforms.

It will be assessed with the help of 7-item Incidental Exposure Scale according to Ahmadi and Wohn (2018) and Lee and Kim (2017). The participants give answers on a 5-point Likert scale of: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

An increase in the total scores implies an increase in the cases of unintentional access to the content related to global crisis on social media.

1.4.2 Hopelessness

Hopelessness in the current research is the pessimistic expectations in regard to future and that one is not likely to get what he desires or that he/she has limited power to change the future. The Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS) created by Beck and his colleagues (1974) will be used to measure hopelessness. The scale has 20 questions that measure the pessimism and expectation about the future. Participants will answer in a True/False format and the answers will be scored as per the manual. The higher the total scores, the higher the levels of hopelessness.

1.4.3 Secondary Traumatic Stress

The operationally defined secondary traumatic stress in the given study refers to the occurrence of the symptoms of trauma related to indirect exposure to distressing or traumatic material instead of direct personal experience of a traumatic event. It is a product of the psychological reactions caused by sympathetic involvement or direct or indirect exposure to crisis material.

The Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (STSS; Bride, 2004) is used to know the extent of secondary traumatic stress. The STSS is divided into 17 items evaluating how often the symptoms associated with trauma arise in three subscales, including intrusion, avoidance, and arousal. The responses are registered using a 5-point Likert-scale with the endpoints of 1 (Never) and 5 (Very Often). Greater summative scores represent increased secondary traumatic stress symptomatology.

2. Review of Literature

The information media has brought a radical change in the way young adults perceive global crises. People are constantly exposed to information on war, terrorism, pandemics, and humanitarian suffering, some of which is not consciously intended through algorithms in their social media feeds. This incidental exposure is now systematically encoded into the digital ecosystem, with algorithmic curation now having an active role in influencing what users see and hear, as opposed to it happening by chance (Thorson, 2020; Fletcher and Nielsen, 2018). It has been proved that such exposure has psychological implications - indirect observation of crisis events has been associated with acute stress, posttraumatic symptoms, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion (Holman et al., 2019; Monfort and Afzali, 2017).

Studies on trauma associated with conflicts also show that distress is not only confined to the direct victims. Media exposure to war and political violence has also been found to cause PTSD-like symptoms in even geographically displaced populations (Pfefferbaum et al., 2019). Recent research on the Israel-Palestine conflict was able to discover that young adults felt powerless, guilty, and emotionally exhausted (Baiga and Farooqa, 2025), and diaspora communities exhibited reactivated trauma due to the reminder of the conflict on social media (Rees and Moussa, 2024). These findings are supported by occupational literature on journalists, content moderators, and social workers - indirect exposure to traumatic material leads to secondary traumatic stress and burnout to a significant extent when repetitive (Feinstein et al., 2014; Cieslak et al., 2014).

Crisis fatigue - cognitive-emotional burnout due to prolonged exposure - is an equivalent and increasingly important issue. It has been demonstrated that doomscrolling, compassion fatigue, and repeated content on crises lead to cycles of distress, as media use contributes to additional exposure to trauma (Holman et al., 2024; Garfin et al., 2020). Specifically, fatalism and resignation, which are directly connected to hopelessness, have been noted as one of the most important mediating results of the given process (Ngien and Jiang, 2021; Shanahan et al., 2020).

Protective factors, albeit insufficiently studied, apply. Hope, future-looking, and mindfulness have also been found to be protective factors against trauma-related distress in indirectly exposed persons (Schaffer et al., 2022; Giray and Demirsoz, 2025). Nonetheless, there is still a lack of evidence related to intervention (Anderson et al., 2020).

Regardless of increased literature, there are major gaps. Although the issue of incidental exposure is core to the digital lives of young adults, it has undergone little research in the field of trauma. The outcome variable of hopelessness has seldom been studied. There is relatively little literature on sustained, algorithmically-mediated global exposure or on populations of professionals, and most studies concentrate on single incidents of crisis or on professional groups of people. The current research paper fills these gaps by considering the hypothesis of whether incidental exposure to global crisis material predicts hopelessness and secondary traumatic stress in young adults.

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to explore the connection between incidental exposure to exposure to global crisis content on social media, and hopelessness among young adults.

3.2 Objective of the Study

To explore the connection between the secondary traumatic stress and incidental exposure to global crisis information in social media among young adults.

To establish how incidental exposure to content of global crisis is a significant predictor of hopelessness and secondary traumatic stress.

3.3 Hypotheses

3.3.1 Null Hypotheses (H_0)

H 01: There is no significant correlation between incidental exposure to global crisis content in social media and hopelessness in young adults.

H 02: There is no significant correlation between incidental exposure to crisis content on social media around the world and the total secondary traumatic stress in young adults.

H 03: There is no significant correlation between incidental exposure to content of global crisis on social media and intrusion symptoms in young adults.

H 04: There is no significant correlation between avoidance symptoms in young adults and incidental exposure to social media content about global crisis.

H 05: There is no significant correlation between the incidental exposure to global crisis contents on the social media and arousal symptoms in young adults.

H 06: There is no significant global crisis content on the social media that occurs incidentally predicting hopelessness in the young adults.

H 07: Global crisis content that is incidentally exposed to via social media does not serve as a significant predictor of total secondary traumatic stress among young adults.

H 08: There is no significant predictive value of the accidental exposure to social media content about global crisis in intrusion states, avoidance symptoms, and arousal symptoms in young adults.

3.3.2 Research Hypotheses (H₁)

H 1 1: The incidental exposure to information about global crisis on social media is highly correlated with hopelessness among young adults.

H 1 2: There is no strong relationship between incidental exposure to global crisis content on the social media and total secondary traumatic stress in young adults.

H 1 3: The exposure to incidental content on social media associated with global crisis is an influential predictor of intrusion symptoms in young adults.

H 1 4: Incidental exposure to social media global crisis content is substantially connected to avoidance symptoms in young adults.

H 1 5: There is no significant customer contact with content related to crises around the world on social media that is incidental and consequently linked to symptoms of arousal in young adults.

H 1 6: Incidental exposure of social media to content related to crisis in the world is a significant predictor of hopelessness in young adults.

H 1 7: Incidental exposure to social media crisis content is a significant predictor of a total secondary traumatic stress among young adults.

H 1 8: The presence of incidental exposure to social media content about crisis in the world is a significant predictor of intrusion, avoidance, and arousal symptoms among young adults.

3.6 Variables

3.6.1 Predictor Variable (Independent Variable)

Incidental Global Crisis Content on the Social Media.

3.6.2 Dependent Variables (Outcome Variables)

- Hopelessness
- Secondary Traumatic Stress

- intrusion
- avoidance
- arousal

3.7 Sample

The current analysis involved 190 young adults.

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. Structured questionnaire was used to gather the data via Google Form questionnaire.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Those between the age of 18 and 25 years.
- Active users of social media
- Those who made informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Young ones under the age of 18.
- Those who are not social media users.
- Unanswered or unanswered and incomplete answers.

The 190 sample size was deemed sufficient to make correlation and regression analysis as it fits the session requirement of the recommended sample size to conduct predictive statistical analysis.

3.8 Tool Description

3.8.1 Incidental Exposure to Global Crisis Content Scale

Incidental Exposure to Global Crisis Content Scale is based on Ahmadi and Wohn (2018) and Lee and Kim (2017). The scale will include 7 questions that will help to define the degree of exposure to the content related to crisis or news that an individual encounters unintentionally when using social media. The items are an accidental exposure to the information that was not sought by the users. The answers are recorded using a 5 items Likert scale awarded as 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). One item is reverse-coded. The increased scores denote increased rates of accidental exposure to crisis material internationally.

Table 1. *Reliability and Validity of Incidental Exposure to Global Crisis Content scale*

Subscale / Scale	No. of Items	Validity	Reliability
Incidental Exposure	7	Construct validity established (67.45% variance explained)	.72
Total Scale	7	Content and construct validity established	.72
Total Scale	7	Content and construct validity established	Acceptable internal consistency

3.8.2 Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS).

Beck, Weissman, Lester, and Trexler (1974) have created the Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS) to measure negative expectations of the future. The scale is made of 20 dichotomous items (True/False format). The scoring key will be used to award each item 0 or 1. It is a total score ranging between 0 and 20, and the higher the score, the more the levels of hopelessness.

The BHS assesses pessimistic beliefs, negative expectations of the future and demotivation. It is commonly applied in the clinical and research practice and is regarded as a significant factor of susceptibility to depression and suicidal thoughts.

Table 2. *Reliability and Validity of Incidental Exposure to Global Crisis Content scale*

Aspect	Details
Internal Consistency	Cronbach's alpha ranges from .82 to .93 across studies
Test-Retest Reliability	Ranges from .66 to .82 (1–2 week interval)
Convergent Validity	Strong positive correlation with measures of depression, suicidal ideation, and anxiety
Discriminant Validity	Low correlation with unrelated constructs (e.g., self-esteem)
Factor Structure	Primarily unidimensional, though some studies report minor subfactors
Clinical Validity	Demonstrates good sensitivity and specificity for identifying suicide risk
Cross-Population Validity	Validated across adolescents, adults, and diverse cultural groups

3.8.3 Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale.

The Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale developed by Bride et al. (2004) is a technique that is employed to determine the prevalence of the secondary traumatic stress symptoms in people who have been secondarily exposed to the trauma by virtue of the work they do or their

compassionate contacts with the trauma victims. The scale has its foundation on the diagnostic criteria of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as outlined in the DSM framework.

The non-clinical form of the scale is composed of 17 items split into three sub-scales, i.e. Intrusion, Avoidance and Arousal. The test is measured on the basis of 5-point Likert scale (4) based on 1 = Never to 5 = Very Often. The scores increase with increase in secondary traumatic stress.

Table 3. *Reliability and Validity of Secondary Traumatic Stress*

Subscale	No. of Items	Validity (Factor Loadings)	Reliability (Cronbach's α)
Intrusion	5	.63-.85	.80-.87
Avoidance	7	.60-.83	.85-.90
Arousal	5	.64-.88	.81-.89
Total Scale	17	Three-factor structure confirmed	.93-.94

4. Results

Table 4.1 *Mean and Standard Deviation of the Study Variables*

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Incidental Exposure to Global Crisis Content	191	18	32	24.43	2.59
Hopelessness	191	0	20	5.26	4.80
Secondary Traumatic Stress (Total)	191	0	84	36.15	17.76
Intrusion	191	0	25	11.07	6.09
Avoidance	191	0	34	14.01	7.53
Arousal	191	0	25	11.08	5.51

The descriptive statistics of all the variables in the study are shown in Table 4.1. The mean score of incidental exposure to crisis content in the world was moderate ($M = 24.43$, $SD = 2.586$). The scores on hopelessness were not high ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 4.799$) and there were few negative future expectations among the sample. There was also a lot of variation in total secondary traumatic stress ($M = 36.15$, $SD = 17.759$). The subscales with the highest scores were avoidance ($M = 14.01$, $SD = 7.534$), arousal ($M = 11.08$, $SD = 5.514$), and intrusion ($M = 11.07$, $SD = 6.093$) which indicated that participants were likely to avoid distressing thoughts than to experience intrusive or physiological stress reactions

Table 4.2. *Pearson Correlations among Study Variables (N = 191)*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Incidental Exposure to Global Crisis Content	—	.01	.09	.11	.06	.10
2. Hopelessness	.01	—	.48**	.44**	.54**	.33**
3. Secondary Traumatic Stress	.09	.48**	—	.91**	.96**	.91**
4. Intrusion	.11	.44**	.91**	—	.81**	.73**
5. Avoidance	.06	.54**	.96**	.81**	—	.82**
6. Arousal	.10	.33**	.91**	.73**	.82**	—

Pearson correlation coefficients of the variables in the study are shown in Table 4.2 (N = 191). Incidental exposure to global crisis content showed no significant correlation with hopelessness ($r = .008$, $p = .913$), total secondary traumatic stress ($r = .092$, $p = .204$), or any of its subscales intrusion ($r = .105$, $p = .148$), avoidance ($r = .061$, $p = .400$), or arousal ($r = .098$, $p = .179$).

Hopelessness, in its turn, had moderate positive correlations with total secondary traumatic stress ($r = .483$, $p = .001$) and all the three subscales: intrusion ($r = .444$, $p = .001$), avoidance ($r = .538$, $p = .001$) and arousal ($r = .330$, $p = .001$). All the subscales were also strongly correlated with total secondary traumatic stress ($r = .906-.956$, $p < .001$), which indicates a high level of internal consistency of the scale.

In general, incidental exposure did not correlate with any psychological distress outcomes, and hopelessness demonstrated consistent and significant correlations with secondary traumatic stress in all symptom dimensions.

5. Discussion

The current research paper investigated the connection between the incidental exposure to the content of global crisis, hopelessness, and secondary traumatic stress through a correlational design. The major results were that there was no significant relationship between incidental exposure and hopelessness or secondary traumatic stress. Nevertheless, hopelessness showed a considerable moderate positive correlation with secondary traumatic stress. The findings indicate

that psychological distress after exposure to crisis content can be less dependent on exposure frequency and more predetermined by inner mental processes and ideologies.

Hopelessness was not significantly related to incidental exposure to global crisis content ($r = .008$, $p = .913$). Although the participants noted moderate average exposure ($M = 24.43$, $SD = 2.586$), the hopelessness was low on average ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 4.799$). It is theoretically aligned with the cognitive theory of Beck that views hopelessness as a persistent and stable negative schema as opposed to a temporary emotional response to distressing stimuli. Incidental media exposure can thus be said to lack the personal salience to change deeply held cognitive schemas. It is reasonable that people may be involved in cognitive appraisal that would psychologically distance them to crisis content; this would not result in long-lasting cognitive vulnerability.

Similarly, incidental exposure showed no significant relationship with total secondary traumatic stress ($r = .092$, $p = .204$) or any of its subscales, intrusion ($r = .105$, $p = .148$), avoidance ($r = .061$, $p = .400$), or arousal ($r = .098$, $p = .179$). Symptoms of secondary traumatic stress in general and especially intrusion, avoidance, and arousal are normally linked to prolonged empathetic working with trauma survivors as outlined in the model by Bride (2004). Possibly, passive exposure to social media might lack the emotional immersion and connection required to elicit the clinically significant trauma reactions. There is also the possibility that there is habituation to content of digital crises that have led to a decrease in psychological reactivity over the years, and this has allowed them to be more detached when perceiving such material.

The hopelessness was statistically significantly and moderately positively related to total secondary traumatic stress ($r = .483$, $p < .001$), and to all the three subscales: intrusion ($r = .444$, $p < .001$), avoidance ($r = .538$, $p < .001$) and arousal ($r = .330$, $p < .001$). The most significant correlation was with avoidance, which implies that people with pessimistic cognitive schemas are especially likely to resort to the maladaptive behavior of avoiding distressing information and trying to avoid negative emotional state by evading distressing material. Correlations with intrusion and arousal also indicate the amplified cognitive and physiological reactions to perceived danger due to hopelessness. These results emphasize the fact that it is not exposure but the interpretive paradigm in which exposure is found that influences psychological consequences.

The theoretical basis behind these findings is the Hopelessness Theory by Beck where the sustained negative cognitive schemas predisposes one to an interpretation of negative stimuli as more threatening and uncontrollable. The substantial hopelessness-secondary traumatic stress

correlation establishes that cognitive susceptibility has the potential to exacerbate trauma reactions despite not being directly or immersively exposed. Cognitive appraisal wise, hopeless people can process crisis-related information as a more personal threat thus increasing emotional and physiological responsiveness.

These patterns are also enlightened by the descriptive data. Incidental exposure scores were relatively low in the variability of scores among the participants, whereas secondary traumatic stress scores were relatively high ($SD = 17.759$), which means that the level of psychological response varies considerably among people who have undergone equal exposure. This inconsistency indicates the importance of individual differences in cognitive style, appraisal tendencies and emotion regulation - indicating that individual differences have more explanatory importance than frequency of exposure does.

Taken together, the results suggest that it is the psychological effect of global crisis content that is more strongly connected with the internal cognitive processes than the extent of incidental exposure. Exposure can act as an informational trigger, however, it is the interpretive/cognitive framework that defines whether hopelessness or secondary traumatic stress is a result of the exposure. These findings emphasize the leading role of cognitive vulnerability in the trauma-related outcomes and the criticality of considering internal belief systems and environmental stressor in the description of psychological distress in young adults.

6. Conclusion

The current research examined the incidental exposure to global crisis material as a predictor of hopelessness and secondary traumatic stress among 191 young adults. Results indicated no significant association between incidental exposure and either hopelessness or secondary traumatic stress; nor its subscales of intrusion, avoidance, and arousal. This implies that unintentional exposure to crisis information in social media is not directly involved in cognitive vulnerability and symptomology of trauma.

Nevertheless, hopelessness was significantly, but moderately, positively correlated with total secondary traumatic stress ($r = .483$, $p < .001$) and all three subscales, including intrusion ($r = .444$), avoidance ($r = .538$) and arousal ($r = .330$) at the .01 level. The hypothesis that incidental exposure predicts hopelessness and secondary traumatic stress was thus rejected, and the results

confirm that cognitive vulnerability especially hopelessness is a huge correlate of trauma related stress symptoms.

6.1 Implications

The results underscore the significance of addressing cognitive vulnerability in the mental health interventions. Media restriction alone might not be as effective as cognitive restructuring and appraisal-based therapies. These findings can be used by mental health professionals to create psychoeducational interventions on media use and emotion regulation among young adults.

6.2 Limitations

The cross-sectional design causes limitations to causal inference. The study was also limited to young adults limiting its generalizability. Self-reports provide possibilities of bias in the response and moderating variables like resilience, coping skills and experience of trauma were not evaluated.

6.3 Future Scope

Longitudinal designs need to be used in future studies to identify cumulative or delayed crisis exposure effects. To enhance the mechanistic insight, mediation models that explore hopelessness as a mediating factor between media exposure and secondary traumatic stress would be valuable. They should also conduct studies that study moderating variables, different demographic groups, and differentiate between incidental and intentional content consumption of crisis in order to draw stronger causal inferences.

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