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## Consuming the News as a Military Psychologist

Taylor Zurlinden

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BLUF: Military psychologists need to consume the news to better serve their population, while also maintaining appropriate balance and boundaries.

Very few groups of people are more affected by the global news at large than US service members. The stories covered by the news are what dictate rapid deployments, changes in family plans, and periods of career uncertainty for service members and their families. The few memories I have of 9/11 are mostly centered on my uncle (ANG at the time) being activated and being on standby for a rapid deployment. I remember the worry that served as the undercurrent of our family conversations. I was too young at the time to understand the full ramifications of that day – but as someone who had a loved one in uniform, I was able to grasp that what was playing out on the television somehow affected my family.

Fast forward to when I first put on the uniform and began to realize just how much world events now impacted *my* life and the lives of all that I serve. Several times a patient has walked into my office, plopped down on my couch, and said, “Well, you saw the news...” The news in question has ranged from deaths of US service members, to policy changes, to fears over where the next war will be. Sometimes it has been shorthand for “I don’t know how to put this into words...” and other times it has meant, “This is something so very personal for me; I am really hurting.”

Having a vague understanding of the “news” they are referring to allowed me to maintain connection with my patient at that moment. It served as a cultural shorthand for their struggle and the myriad of emotions that they were experiencing. While some individuals may be able to completely disconnect from the news, I do not think

that military psychologists can do so and still effectively serve their population. We miss out on the richness of their cultural experience if we are not aware of both the history and current events impacting the population. We cannot help patients challenge their thoughts or examine their emotions without understanding the context that those occur in – especially on a global scale. Similarly, we cannot as effectively consult with leadership and shape policy if we don’t have an understanding of how this fits into the larger picture.

And yet – this can be hard. A quick search about the negative impacts of constantly consuming the news paints a dismal picture. How do we both engage in something that will help us serve our population, and maintain our own well-being?

A few quick tips:

- 1) Be intentional – rather than doom scrolling on social media, decide in advance how long you want to spend checking the news and what kinds of stories you plan to read. Most importantly, hold yourself to those boundaries.

- 2) Examine how you consume the news – There are many wonderful news round-up podcasts and daily newsletters that provide brief, bite-sized portions of the top news stories. Consider using these as quick primer on the daily news, and using them as tool to help guide which (if any) stories you want to dive further into.

- 3) Have a support system – It can be heavy to both see what is happening around the world, and then hold such personal stories of that pain from those you serve. Make sure you have someone you can talk about that with.