

Ethical Principles in the Portrayal of Death and Suffering: Finnish Photographers Covering the Russia–Ukraine War

Liia-Maria Raippalinna¹ , Suvi Mononen² , Markus Mykkänen² , and Turo Uskali² 

¹ Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

² Department of Language and Communication Studies, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Correspondence: Turo Uskali (turo.i.uskali@jyu.fi)

Submitted: 14 May 2025 **Accepted:** 15 September 2025 **Published:** 6 November 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue “Death Notice/Body Copy: Representations of Death in Global Journalism” edited by Kristin Skare Orgeret (OsloMet University) and Nechama Brodie (University of the Witwatersrand), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.i495>

Abstract

Since the full-scale Russian military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the war has been a central interest of the Western media. Eye-witnessing is considered vital, but to what extent is what is seen on site ultimately conveyed to the public? Regarding graphic images, publishing decisions are based on reconciling news value, privacy protection, and audience protection by adhering to formal media policies, informal organisational culture, cultural conventions, audience expectations, and the proximity of the object. However, little is known about the enactment of ethical principles in crisis journalists’ work and the filtering of suffering through the journalistic process. This article investigates ethical decision-making in Finnish newsrooms from orientation to photographing and publication. Based on 26 interviews with photographers reporting from Ukraine during the Russia–Ukraine war, we ask how central ethical principles—the duty to inform and the ethics of care—are reconciled and enacted in the portrayal of death and suffering. Our analysis shows that ethical principles are weighed differently depending on the phase of the process and the genre of journalism (conflict/feature) and are compromised by practical limitations: time, money, safety, and access. While ethical responsibility is distributed in newsrooms, tensions exist regarding the portrayal of suffering. Several journalists interviewed for this study perceived the conventional limits of violence representation as being too tight, distorting the audience’s perception of war. In addition, potential bias in the portrayal of suffering in the media imaginary, resulting from limited access and the cultural and political proximity of the war, causes ethical uncertainty.

Keywords

crisis photography; journalism ethics; portrayal of suffering; Russia–Ukraine war; visual journalism

1. Introduction

While the current Russia–Ukraine war started as early as 2014, it gained wider attention after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, ending a long period of stability and peace within Europe. For the Finnish audience, the war strikes a particularly emotional chord due to Finland’s geopolitical position and its history of wars with neighbouring Russia. As with many modern conflicts, the Russia–Ukraine war has stimulated global discussions about media practices (Mortensen & Pantti, 2024), including concerns about showing dead or injured civilians in graphic detail (Farhi, 2022; Greenwood et al., 2024).

A number of studies have already been published on the textual and visual framing of the Russia–Ukraine war in news media (Khaldarova, 2021; Martikainen & Sakki, 2024; Nygren et al., 2016; Ojala & Pantti, 2017; Ojala et al., 2017; Szulich-Kałuża & Wadowski, 2024; Young & Omosun, 2024), including research on framing the dead and injured (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Nygren et al., 2016) as well as on viewer preferences in relation to graphic images (Greenwood et al., 2024). Research also exists on visual framing and visual narratives (Männistö, 2024; Pantti, 2019; Tilton & Agozzino, 2023; Yarchi, 2025) and the visual framing of death (Hamarowski & Lompe, 2024; Tschirky & Makhortykh, 2024) on social media platforms. However, little is known about the journalistic process of filtering images and portraying death and suffering, at least beyond the editorial desk where final decisions on publication are usually made.

In this article, we examine these processes in Finnish newsrooms based on 26 interviews with Finnish photographers reporting from Ukraine between 2014 and 2024. We focus on the photographers’ ethical decision-making regarding portraying death and suffering and ask how central ethical principles—the duty to inform and the ethics of care—are reconciled and enacted in the journalistic process. To get a fuller picture of the process, we also consider the role of narrative and visual frames and practical limitations (such as access) in portraying war, death, and suffering.

The representation of war, suffering, and death in the news media is a common topic in journalism research (Fahmy & Kim, 2008; Fishman, 2017; Kratzer & Kratzer, 2003), but less research exists on the journalistic processes through which these representations are produced (e.g., Fahmy, 2005; Fahmy et al., 2024). Correspondingly, while graphic images are widely discussed in journalism ethics (Dahmen, 2015), little is known about the practical enactment of ethical principles in photographers’ work (Miller & Dahmen, 2020). Building on existing research on ethical decision-making in the journalistic process (De Smaele et al., 2017; Mäenpää, 2022; Miller & Dahmen, 2020), we contribute to the discussion on ethical principles in crisis journalists’ work and the filtering of death and suffering through the journalistic process.

Decisions concerning the publication of graphic images are typically based on ethical criteria and audience preferences. The traditional question is, “If the photograph violates the principles of compassion or taste, does its social or news value outweigh the other values it violates?” (O’Brien, 1993, as cited in Kratzer & Kratzer, 2003). Journalists feel a sense of duty to inform the public, which is linked to “people’s right to know”—while simultaneously being held back by concerns related to protecting the audience from violent and/or graphic images (Fahmy et al., 2024; Mäenpää, 2022). The media mainly make publishing decisions based on news criteria (see Galtung & Ruge, 1965), but their audiences also play a part in them (Mäenpää, 2022; Young & Omosun, 2024). Although journalists act as gatekeepers, in digital news ecosystems driven by media logic, audience preferences might influence image production (Mäenpää, 2022, p. 2245). Audience expectations and

acceptance of graphic images vary depending on culture and customs (Damanhoury & Saleh, 2025, p. 142), whereas the cultural, political, and geographical proximity define a conflict's newsworthiness and coverage (Damanhoury & Saleh, 2025, p. 152; Greenwood et al., 2024).

Perlmutter and Wagner (2004) state that photographs have sociopolitical significance, as the media's representation of issues and events can activate and establish mental schemas that subsequently influence what we consider to be newsworthy, shaping our perspectives. For example, victimisation portrayed in images makes the reader engage more with the story (Zillman et al., 2001, as cited in Coleman, 2010, p. 243). Contradicting the traditional perception of news photographs' significance as evidence, Perlmutter and Wagner (2004) suggest that photographs provide "cut-out frames of a fraction of a second" (p. 104). A photograph is a narrow view that has been affected by a multitude of factors and decisions: What events are witnessed by the photographer, what pictures are taken, of what section of the reality, which ones are sent forward, and which ones get published? (Perlmutter & Wagner, 2004, p. 104).

In the context of conflict, national interests, such as the level of military involvement and public opinion in the country, further shape news coverage (Cozma, 2021; Fahmy & Kim, 2008, p. 458). News frames reflect the media's cultural and political context (Ojala & Pantti, 2017) and indicate editorial and journalistic choices to provide a desired image of a conflict (Szulich-Kałuża & Wadowski, 2024). In media coverage of the war in Ukraine, visual frames are shown to be biased and provide a clear indication of victims and aggressors (Fernández-Castrillo & Ramos, 2025; Szulich-Kałuża & Wadowski, 2024). Suffering is one frame among many (Szulich-Kałuża & Wadowski, 2024), and Young and Omosun (2024, p. 31) suggest that instead of images of suffering, the Western media publish images depicting the human cost of war to make the justification of military and financial support in the West easier. According to Greenwood et al. (2024, p. 14), audiences prefer symbolic representations of death and injury. The audiences favour showing the impact of war on the living and images that convey resilience despite loss or injury.

War photographs can generate affective engagement with the pain of others, potentially leading to emotional investment or a call for an ethical response to suffering. Audiences become witnesses to wartime adversity, which compels them to acknowledge what is happening (Midberry, 2020, p. 4419). Visuals play an essential role in depicting humanitarian crises, and news professionals recognise that images of tragedy trigger moral engagement in audiences by bearing witness (Kamal, 2025, p. 12), appealing to the audience to share responsibility for others' suffering in a way that elicits affect and moves the body into participation (Tait, 2011, p. 1233).

The media's focus on the human cost of war aligns with the "emotional turn" (Pantti, 2010; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018) in journalism in the 2010s. Unlike reporting observed facts, touching stories and personal narratives appeal to audience emotions (e.g., Midberry, 2020). Emotions have increasing significance in journalistic texts and audiences (Kotisova, 2019) and guide journalists' situational ethical considerations in crisis contexts (Stupart, 2021). The role of emotions has been strengthened in journalism studies and is recognised as part of journalistic knowledge production (Kotisova, 2025).

The Finnish news media landscape is restricted with respect to graphic images (Mäenpää, 2022). The National Press Photographers Association's and Society of Professional Journalists' ethics direct journalists to report events accurately, be respectful of the subjects, and minimise harm to the subject and the public (Council

for Mass Media in Finland, 2024; Greenwood et al., 2024). Mäenpää (2022, p. 2245) argues that publication of graphic images may be prevented by media market logic, and as a result, journalism is failing in its key responsibility of showing the world as it is—even the gruesome reality of war. Images of death and violence are used infrequently, typically only when they serve an evidential role in informing the public, as demonstrated in the coverage of the Bucha massacre in March 2022, which featured unusually graphic imagery (see Korteniemi, 2025). Decisions on publication are made by newsroom editors when the obligation to inform outweighs audience protection (Mäenpää, 2022, p. 2237). There is a lack of industry-wide ethical policies (Greenwood et al., 2024), and the ethical framework is often decided upon within media houses while adhering to the laws of the country (Kamal, 2025, p. 8).

2. Theory: Enacting Ethical Ideals in Journalistic Practice

Journalism balances two ethical ideals: the duty to inform and the ethics of care (Mäenpää, 2022; Miller & Dahmen, 2020). In our analysis, we build on earlier research on these ethical principles and their enactment in journalistic work. In particular, we refer to Miller and Dahmen's (2020) work on photojournalists' ethical reasoning and decision-making and their three-tier approach to care ethics, and Mäenpää's (2022) and De Smaele et al.'s (2017) works on distributed ethics in journalistic production and the selection of graphic images.

Miller and Dahmen (2020, p. 20) propose that reporting graphic events includes decision-making reasoned by the ethics of justice (informing) and the ethics of care (avoiding harm). The duty to inform relates to the ethics of justice (truth and fairness)—a non-consequentialist ethical framework that photojournalists use, for example, to justify taking and publishing graphic images—and is counterbalanced by the ethics of care—a consequentialist ethical framework oriented to minimise doing harm to their subjects (Miller & Dahmen, 2020, p. 26). Miller and Dahmen (2020) investigate the work-related ethical reasoning and decision-making of prize-winning photographers and demonstrate that photographers view their role as two-faceted: to tell the truth and to facilitate the subject's story to be heard (p. 23). While believing that images have the power to impact, the photographers' primary motivation is to document and tell the truth—limited by their duty of care (Miller & Dahmen, 2020, p. 28). However, in the photographer's decision-making, care for their subjects outweighs both the duty to inform and the responsibility to protect the audience from shocking images; their focus is directed primarily to the subject and the process of taking photographs, and only secondarily towards the audience and market logic (Miller & Dahmen, 2020; see also Mäenpää, 2022, p. 2238).

Miller and Dahmen (2020, pp. 26–28) suggest that in photojournalists' work, the ethics of care related to graphic images comprise three levels of consideration. The first level is obtaining permission from the subjects to be photographed. Obtaining permission is a continuing negotiation, including ethical evaluation that also covers the post-publication stage. The second level entails assessing situated harm and uneasiness potentially caused to the subject when taking pictures. These considerations may result in refraining from photographing or affirming permission in a sensitive situation. The third level is selecting pictures for publication. Not all taken pictures can or should be published. Thus, photographers conduct part of the ethical consideration afterwards, before sending their images to photo editors. We apply Miller and Dahmen's three-level model (obtaining permission, assessing harm, selecting pictures) to analyse Finnish photographers' reporting from Ukraine during the Russia–Ukraine war to recognise ethical frameworks and analyse their on-site implementation in journalistic practice.

Photographers' work and ethical decision-making are shaped by the collaborative dynamics of the organizational context and the media production team—in our case including the writing journalist and the local fixer as well as editors and editorial chiefs. Therefore, we place the three-level approach within a wider analytical framework depicting the journalistic process in which the photographs are produced (Figure 1). Mäenpää (2022) and De Smaele et al. (2017) emphasise the processual in portraying death and graphic images. Ethical decision-making is distributed between different actors in the journalistic field: For instance, senior editors in news outlets make decisions on which events to photograph, (local) photographers take the pictures and choose which to send forward, picture agencies select pictures according to their customers' preferences, and the media outlet makes the publication decision (Mäenpää, 2022; see also Rupar, 2020). Ethical decision-making is also dispersed within media outlets. Journalists typically make their decisions in alignment with the organisational framework; the limits of graphicness are implicitly shared and internalised by employees through the process of professional socialisation (De Smaele et al., 2017; see also Gravengaard & Rimestad, 2014; Rupar, 2020). Ethical ideals are enacted situationally and contextually, guided by the understanding of the organisation's standard practices, outlet style, perceived audience expectations, cultural and political environment, narrative context, and market logic in the media ecosystem (De Smaele et al., 2017; Mäenpää, 2022). As noted by Thomson and Greenwood (2017), photographers only have full control over about one-tenth of the interaction during photographing encounters; for instance, decisions regarding location, time, and publication format are typically negotiated between the photographer, the subject, and the broader team. The analytical framework extends the focus beyond individual photographers' ethical decision-making to include the preceding orientation and the final publication decision. These elements filter what is seen from the war and define the conditions in which journalists make their ethical decisions.

We analyse the application and enactment of different ethical frameworks—the duty to inform and ethics of care—as taking place in three phases: orientation, on-site implementation, and publication. Drawing from De Smaele et al. (2017), Mäenpää (2022), and Miller and Dahmen (2020), we approach image production as a complex professional evaluation process, as described in Figure 1. The process starts with newsrooms determining coverage and the topics of news stories (1. Orientation), followed by photographers working on site with their teams and selecting the images to send forward (2. On-site implementation), and finally the newsroom producers' decisions on which images to publish (3. Publication). In the context of On-site implementation, we apply Miller and Dahmen's three-level model to examine the enactment of different aspects of care ethics: obtaining permission, assessing harm, and selecting images. However, in our framework, "assessing harm" covers both harm caused by the photographing situation and harm caused by publication. In addition, to emphasise that much of the selection is carried out while photographing, we integrated "selecting images" in the On-site implementation phase and reframed it as "considering representation," including ethical reflection related to producing "cut-out frames of a fraction of a second" (Perlmutter & Wagner, 2004, p. 104)—that is, authentic and respectful representations of death and suffering. These adjustments were made during the analysis process.

Ethical decisions about depicting death and suffering balance the duty to inform with the responsibility to care. These duties are weighed based on the situation, available resources, and limitations. In crisis journalism, the local context and insecure working conditions also strongly influence ethical decisions (see Fahmy et al., 2024).

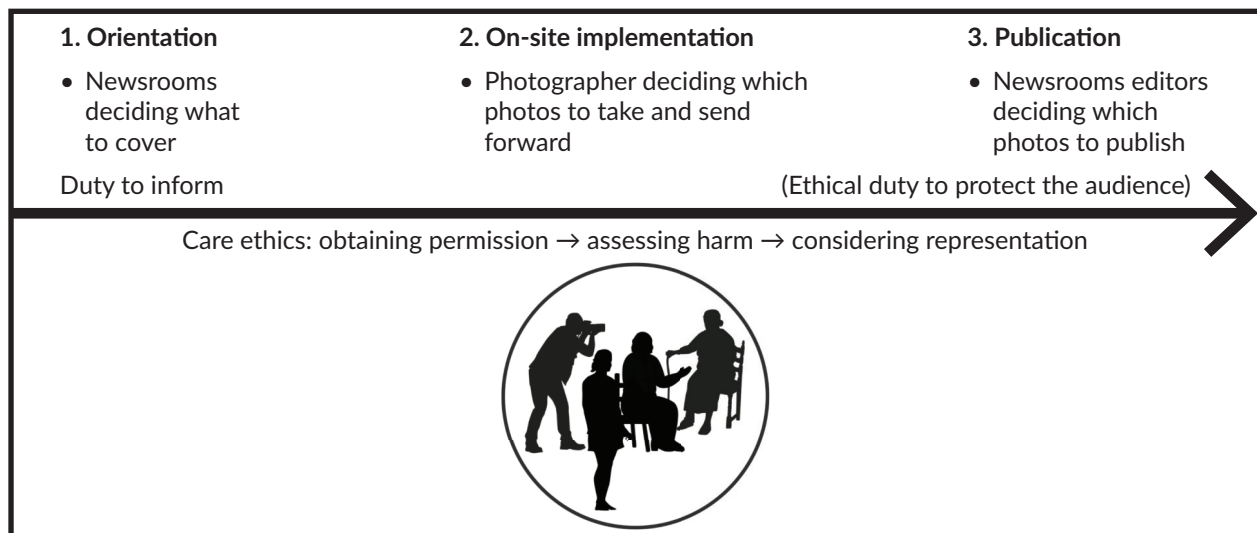


Figure 1. Analytical framework: The duty to inform and the care ethics in the image production process. Sources: Framework developed based on De Smaele et al. (2017), Mäenpää (2022), and Miller and Dahmen (2020).

3. Data, Method, and Research Ethics

The data used for this study are based on 26 interviews with Finnish photographers. The interviews are part of a larger data set consisting of 57 open-ended in-depth interviews conducted in 2023–2024 with Finnish war correspondents and photographers working in Ukraine during 2014–2024. The participants worked for Finnish broadcasting companies, news/picture agencies, tabloids, newspapers, and magazines. While concentrated, the Finnish media ecosystem is characterised by high levels of press freedom, public trust, and professional integrity (Lindén & Grönlund, 2024). Journalistic processes differ between media outlets, and they have been impacted by the ongoing process of digitalisation during the 2014–2024 timeframe covered by the data (see Lindgren, 2025). Regardless of media outlet, the photographers' work in Ukraine was marked by similar team dynamics: While some worked independently as multimedia- or photojournalists, typically they teamed up with writers and reporters, who usually led the process. Almost invariably, the journalists worked with fixers (Kotisova, 2025; Palmer, 2019) who possessed local expertise, organised practicalities, arranged and translated interviews, found protagonists, and worked as cultural mediators (Palmer, 2019).

The participants produced imagery across diverse media platforms in various forms, but for the purpose of this study, we refer to the participants as “photographers.” Most did not identify as crisis photographers, and many worked primarily with domestic news and/or portrait photography. Eight participants were women and 18 were men. A little over 65% of the participants had been assigned to work in Ukraine during the war from one to five times, 15% from six to 10 times, 8% between 11 and 15 times, and 12% had been assigned 20 times or more. Approximately 23% of the photographers had over 20 episodes of experience covering crisis events, 4% from 16 to 20 times, 11% from 11 to 15 times, 31% from six to 10 times, and 31% from one to five times. Their journalistic experience ranged from five to over 40 years, with an average of 21 years of experience. A third of the participants had worked in Ukraine for the first time after 2022, which reflects the news media's growing interest in the Russia–Ukraine war after 2022.

We conducted thematically structured in-depth interviews that lasted for approximately three hours and included topics such as perceptions of the war, working processes in Ukraine, ethics, emotions, safety, coping at work, and information and communication technology. The recorded interviews were transcribed using an AI transcriber provided by the University of Jyväskylä. After transcription, the recordings were reviewed and the transcripts were corrected, pseudonymised, and coded using the ATLAS.ti software. The initial codes were formed based on the data and refined as the analysis progressed.

The analysed data set consists of 81 text samples retrieved from parts of the interviews related to portraying death and suffering or associated ethical issues. The text samples were analysed using the template in Figure 1. We identified descriptions of how photographers apply different ethical frameworks in their decision-making and organised the samples into the corresponding process phases (Orientation, On-site implementation, and Publication). Furthermore, we applied the adjusted three-facet model of care ethics to examine the enactment of its aspects in the On-site implementation phase, which occurs in an interpersonal context. To get a better grasp of the practical limitations and the Orientation phase, in which the photographers rarely participated in initial decision-making, the analysis was complemented with observations of the whole data set (57 interviews), particularly the parts of the interviews characterising the Russian-Ukrainian war and its coverage, organisational and working practices, and the choosing of the topics of news reports.

The analysis is structured in the following three sections (Sections 4 to 6), covering the Orientation, On-site implementation, and Publication phases, respectively. On-site implementation is presented in two parts: (a) obtaining permission and avoiding harm, and (b) producing authentic and respectful representations.

Due to the sensitivity and emotional intensity of the topic, and potentially encountered trauma (Feinstein et al., 2018), the research was approved by the ethics committee of the university. The researchers were trained in the trauma-informed research approach (see Alessi & Kahn, 2023; Isobel, 2021). To protect the privacy of the research participants, limited background and contextual information is provided. The participants are referred to using AI-generated pseudonyms and the gender-inclusive pronoun “they.” With direct quotes, the type of media outlet (broadcasting, tabloid, magazine, newspaper) is mentioned. News/picture agencies are included in newspapers for privacy protection. Considering the small size of Finnish media ecosystems, directly indicating participants’ genders or media outlets would jeopardise their anonymity. To reduce the combinability of data (e.g., media publications), detailed descriptions of actual working conditions, processes, and outputs are avoided. Quotes are translated from Finnish, and some details have been changed or generalised.

4. Orientation: Driven by the Duty to Inform

The exceptional news value of the Russia–Ukraine war has resulted in intense media presence and coverage, as indicated by the number of Finnish journalists and photographers reporting from Ukraine ($n > 100$). Across media outlets, presence in Ukraine has been considered vital to witness and obtain first-hand accounts, provide trustworthy information, produce reliable and relatable news, and interpret the events for the Finnish audience:

In the history of Finland and the history of journalism, [it is] the biggest thing that has happened during my lifetime. How can such things happen in the 2020s in Europe, goddamn? (Rexo, newspaper)

Having taken the photos yourself, you can be sure they are trustworthy....Observing is important, that there is a professional journalist who observes what happens, documents it in notes, audio tapes, photographs, videos....Interviews on site, in the situation and in the moment are extremely important. You have gone on site and have first-hand knowledge. (Silo, tabloid)

The journalists' presence in Ukraine is driven by the duty to inform but limited by practical constraints and resources: safety, access, finances, and time. Journalists are obliged to ensure the safety of locals, their teams, and themselves, and newsrooms are reluctant to send their employees to risky environments. Access in Ukraine is restricted, and only reporters accredited by the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian armed forces are given permission to enter limited areas; the frontline and the border with Russia are out-of-bounds "red zones," while "yellow zones" are only accessible when accompanied by a press officer (Węglińska et al., 2024, p. 11). Not many Finnish journalists have sought to enter the yellow and red zones, and time spent in Ukraine is kept rather short, from three to 10 days, to reduce possible risks. These constraints influence how the war is covered and shape both what is witnessed on site and what is ultimately conveyed to the public.

Intensive reporting from Ukraine has resulted in "softening" the genre of war journalism and extending the category of war photography. Covering major news events, such as Russia's full-scale attack in February 2022, the liberation of Bucha in March 2022, and the breaking of the Kakhovka Dam in Zaporizhzhia in June 2023, was described as traditional conflict reporting, seeking to make sense of actual, ongoing news events. However, this kind of reactive, fast-paced crisis/news reporting has been coupled with human-interest and feature journalism focusing on the experiences of common people and seeking to create an understanding of the human costs of war. Close and diverse reporting on everyday life was considered vital to counterbalance the "strategic war game" consisting of war events, moving frontlines, and death tolls in daily news. However, maintaining the audience's interest and securing financial resources require finding new angles and shifting frames, as continuous reporting creates a fear of news fatigue (see Newman et al., 2022, 2023). Consequently, in Finnish media coverage, frames of death, destruction, and suffering have been coupled with hope, resilience, and agency:

There are some clichés that have developed during these two years. Like the crying granny. There must be something more in the story than just one crying granny. For example, a granny who is tilling a potato plot is much more descriptive than some indistinct sorrow....We must consider whether this is already too familiar. (Sivo, tabloid)

Reporting the ordinary in addition to war events resonates with the shifting practice of journalistic witnessing in crisis journalism discussed by Burchell and Fielding (2024). If meeting the obligation to inform traditionally meant mediating journalists' own observations to the audience—live or recorded—in Finnish reporting from Ukraine, the duty is being increasingly carried out by giving voice to people enduring the war and its multiple effects and bearing witness to these experiences. Here, bearing witness means communicating the accounts to the audience, providing them a way to understand what has been seen and experienced (Burchell & Fielding, 2024, pp. 134–135):

We must be at the average Joe's level. That is the meaning of the experience that people go through. Because it is unexpectedly easy to relate to when you think common people like you and me have lost everything. (Jeka, broadcasting)

The genre of war journalism/witnessing shapes the way photographers negotiate the duty to inform with care ethics. The interviewees agreed on the primacy of documenting breaking news events (see Rupar, 2020), particularly war crimes. Being the first ones on site, their photographs would bear witness for the future (Burchell & Fielding, 2024, p. 135). However, first-hand testimonies are increasingly distributed through user-generated content in social media (Chouliaraki, 2024; Chouliaraki & al-Ghazzi, 2022); journalists witness events and their impacts afterwards. Most of the interviewees had not encountered death directly in their work; instead, it was present and portrayed indirectly through the losses experienced by the protagonists. Freed from bearing witness to the original events, the photographers felt even more obliged to weight the consequences of their photographing and to select the images they produce: “We have to select, but the testimony comes from the people, social media, or the media that was first on the scene. It [the testimony] is just documenting the scenario” (Cami, broadcasting).

5. On-Site Implementation: Reconciling the Duty to Inform and the Responsibility to Care

The practical restrictions (safety, access, finances, and time) together with the genre of war journalism/witnessing are the first filters for what is seen on site, and they set the scene for ethical reconciliations. Broadly, when covering ongoing news and conflict events, photographers emphasised the straightforward documentation of events (the duty to inform) and shot more freely, leaving considerations of journalistic value and privacy for later. In contrast, when working on feature or human-interest journalism, or when covering a preplanned story, photographers placed a greater emphasis on the ethics of care. In situations involving close contact with people experiencing war, violent death, fear, suffering, grief, and potential trauma, the photographers were more likely to ask for permission to photograph, avoid capturing sensitive and graphic material, and highlight the subject's privacy. When they captured and selected pictures, they also weighed how the visuals related and added to the textual narrative of the news story.

5.1. Obtaining Permission and Assessing Harm

The first two levels of care ethics in Miller and Dahmen (2020) are obtaining permission and minimising harm caused to the subject during the shoot. In our data, obtaining permission and avoiding harm were closely interrelated, so they are discussed together, the latter including all potential harm caused to the subjects of photography during and after the photographing situation. While considered essential for justifying the act of photographing, assessing harm and permission proved complex and varied depending on the situation:

Everything in life can be photographed, even death and suffering. It is more about your own relationship with the topic. Do you have permission from the people you are surrounded by? You don't always need to ask for permission directly....It doesn't even need to be accepted. This is complicated, darn it. (Uino, newspaper)

The appropriate level of consent varies situationally and cannot easily be generalised, although the more sensitive the context, the clearer the permission needs to be. In crisis environments, journalists often work visibly, authorised by the legislated freedom to photograph in public spaces and other unrestricted areas (see Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2023, Art. 34). The task of a crisis photographer is to get as near to the event as possible (see Kamal, 2025, p. 8) without delimiting the photographing (Yero, newspaper). For a photographer, taking photographs constitutes the reason for being on site (Luma, newspaper), and in public places, consent is

based on subjects being aware that they are being photographed: “People will let you know if it’s not allowed, and we don’t push ourselves into their space. I don’t know how suffering should be photographed, but it must be; otherwise, reporting the war becomes just numbers” (Meko, tabloid).

In more intimate situations, obtaining permission may involve both verbal and nonverbal communication with the subject. Getting close to vulnerable subjects and photographing them without clearly given permission left some photographers feeling uncomfortable; one interviewee described themselves as a “bad photographer” for putting down the camera if permission was unclear (Rimo, newspaper). Some photographers had been given instructions to continue photographing despite the subject’s refusal: “It does not feel right” (Rila, magazine). In contrast, directly asking for permission provided journalists with the access and confidence to photograph situations otherwise deemed too private, such as a funeral. Sometimes permission was repeatedly reaffirmed (Velo, tabloid; Cami, broadcasting), particularly in intimate, sensitive, and emotional situations: “I always try to remind people that they can set their boundaries and tell us if they are uncomfortable....They can control the situation” (Cami, broadcasting).

A few photographers voiced their concerns that their presence may make people reveal things they otherwise might not want to share. Obtaining permission from people with trauma, in acute shock, or in an overwhelming emotional state was particularly tricky: Do these people understand what they are consenting to? While many Ukrainians were willing to share their stories and experiences, publishing photographs of sensitive circumstances required a situational evaluation (Nura, tabloid; Rimo, newspaper; Ysta, newspaper). People experiencing shock or acute trauma may relate to the journalist as a friend or a confidante rather than as a media professional publishing their personal story (Nura, tabloid). Children were considered especially vulnerable; caregivers can give permission without asking the children, who may not understand that they, too, have the right to reject the authority of a (adult) media professional (Velo, tabloid).

Images of death were considered challenging due to the lack of consent from subjects and possible harm to their loved ones, which often resulted in the editorial practice of excluding the images. Personal items were not regarded as fair game, either:

When I went closer [to a destroyed building] to take photos, I saw personal belongings, photographs and such....I had a feeling I didn’t want to show the picture, when there was someone who could be recognised....I felt like whoever it was...they also had a right to privacy, even if they were not there to stop me. (Cami, broadcasting)

Assessing emotional and psychological harm requires sensitivity and empathy towards people and their experiences. In news situations, the starting point for experienced crisis journalists is to photograph uncensored “anything at all, however horrendous” (Luma, newspaper), but this must be accompanied by respectful treatment of the subject. Being outsiders who were unfamiliar with the people and their past experiences, the photographers emphasised being discreet: “It is rude to push the camera right in their face; it makes people feel uncomfortable” (Velo, tabloid). Empathy provides access to protagonists’ experiences on an interpersonal level (Glück, 2016). Intruding on their subjects’ personal spaces (see Thomson & Greenwood, 2017, p. 632) raised questions about the justification of what they were doing; for example, whether the information could be acquired without doing harm to people already in a vulnerable position. Particularly when using a large video camera, giving space and interpreting subjects’

nonverbal communication was accentuated (Jeka, broadcasting). The appropriate approach was determined situationally, and the team's approach was adjusted:

We spent three days with an older person, as at times they were just crying, crying, crying [due to the loss of a loved one]. We had to understand it, drink tea for an hour, and just watch as they did their chores, and then we could continue, with extreme sensitivity. (Jeka, broadcasting)

The photographers adapted to sensitive situations in various ways, such as turning away from subjects, staying in the background, giving time, focusing on details (rather than the person), or putting aside the camera. Alternatively, they used their professional situational awareness to consciously foster the subject's trust and familiarise them to their presence, for instance, by snapping numerous photos, knowing that they would be of no use, in order to continue photographing in more emotional moments without seeming intrusive (Leno, newspaper).

The photographers explained that photographing dead bodies was not as emotional as seeing the grief of the living; for the dead, their suffering was already over (Luma, newspaper). However, photographing the dead in a dignified manner could be seen as a form of care. On a few occasions, reporters had to compromise their ethical perceptions, for instance when asked by the head of news to produce an Instagram story from a mass grave. A photographer pondered the ethical justification of pictures taken on an organised tour: While cruelty and violence had obviously occurred, their purposeful demonstration by Ukrainian authorities felt unnecessary, and the context had to be made visible to the audience. Describing the context, the organised tour, in the news text would not have been enough; it had to be shown in the photographs too.

In crisis circumstances, minimising harm also requires the ability to function in stressful situations and ensure both personal and team safety. Stereotypical "photographer-heroes" taking unnecessary risks were mentioned as examples of both "bad journalism" and unethical behaviour. Additionally, anonymous interviews and unrecognisable photos could be used to protect subjects' safety and privacy—dead or alive—and photographs could be edited to remove identifiers such as buildings or landforms indicating the location. Ignoring photography restrictions given by the Ukrainian authorities on, for example, military bases, industrial plants, and sites that had been targeted recently could result in military attacks and more deaths (see Shevchenko, 2024).

5.2. Producing Authentic and Respectful Representations

The third level of care ethics in Miller and Dahmen (2020) refers to selecting images to send to photo editors. Here, we include ethical considerations related to producing authentic and respectful representations of death and suffering. From this perspective, producing a considerate portrayal is a continuum of choices on what and how to photograph and which images to use for what purpose.

The participants in our study indicated that they considered journalistic photography to have high documentary value, representing reality as it is without exaggeration or sugar-coating (Fika, newspaper). To credibly fulfil a journalistic vision, the picture should be straightforward and make the message clear (Sivo, tabloid): "In that situation, we have a responsibility. We have to keep as close to the truth as possible, so you don't create something that doesn't exist. You don't make too much of it or belittle it" (Jeka, broadcasting). Simultaneously, journalistic photography must respect the privacy of the subject. Unjustified violations of

privacy when representing death and suffering were referred to as “war porn” (Luma, newspaper; Teka, tabloid) or “gluttony over grief” (Cami, broadcasting; Teka, tabloid; Sivo, tabloid; Leno, newspaper), “sensationalism” (Silo, tabloid), and “gory indulgence” (Jeka, broadcasting; Dara, newspaper). The more graphic, sensitive, and private the topic, the more symbolic presentation was preferred. Typically, death was represented from a distance or through carefully chosen details: Bloody shoes, a suitcase, or a watch provided a discrete portrayal of death, and unlike with the dead bodies, the audience could easily identify with these everyday objects.

Some photographers explicitly adopted the role of a gatekeeper, particularly those actively involved in editing videos and selecting images. Represented details were chosen based on the photographer’s overall understanding of the situation and the situational and contextual justification for showing violent or graphic images. Often, their decisions aligned with their organisation’s internalised limits of graphicness: “It is mostly our decision; I don’t remember a time I’ve needed to justify the purpose of an image. I did not capture the bloody baby strollers I saw; that crosses the line” (Jeka, broadcasting).

Images portraying loss in conflicts allow for the depiction of the human cost of war without traumatising audiences, while also giving voice to the ones who are grieving (Midberry, 2020). When the immediate threat is over, a representation of hope for the future becomes possible, despite the remaining sorrow (Burchell & Fielding, 2024, p. 145). While the human subject was often represented as a symbol of the population under attack, many photographers emphasised portraying subjects in a way that would respect their agency and gain their acceptance. The photographer’s job was to be present and depict the subject’s feelings discreetly and in the correct context, facilitating a subject’s agency and empowerment through visibility—a dynamic also identified by Miller and Dahmen (2020). However, giving a spotlight to people (ethics of care) did not necessarily contradict the willingness to show the harsh and violent implications of war: “When being in close contact with people [in Ukraine], it all becomes personally meaningful and important to show” (Ailo, broadcasting).

Photographic witnessing means balancing between documenting reality, giving voice to the protagonists, supporting the journalistic narrative, and fulfilling audience expectations. Journalists in a war context strike a balance between detachment and immersion (Kotisoa, 2025), as journalistic witnessing requires both experiencing the reality and delivering the facts (Cottle, 2013). Depicting protagonists’ subjective experiences and emotions was considered essential for a truthful portrayal of war. The photographers worked to access, capture, and mediate accurate moods, experiences, and emotions. They deployed their own emotions, embodied presence, and empathy to make the subject feel confident and enable them to show their emotions to the camera (Fika, newspaper).

Positioning the subject of photography in an authentic environment was considered important for producing genuine visual narratives. However, the sites of events were often far away, did not exist anymore, or had been renovated, or physical injuries had been healed and life had “normalised.” While past events turned easily into textual narratives, their visual presentation was considered tricky. Journalists rely on multiple witnesses and the verification of their accounts to establish credibility, whereas photographers record the informant recounting the events and capture their emotions as testimony. Capturing a subject’s gestures and facial expressions accurately and sensitively in a way that supported the story was demanding within the tight schedule determined by writing journalists and organisations’ prerequisites.

From both an ethical and a professional standpoint, the interviewees agreed that the amount of time they had to complete their work was insufficient. They stressed that journalists should be well informed and prepared to witness injuries, violence, or death, as well as to encounter people who have been traumatised. Some stories had been rejected because ethical integrity and informed consent could not be confirmed, and to encounter people with trauma and to mediate their experiences truthfully and respectfully would have required more time. Thomson and Greenwood (2017, pp. 634–635) found that photographers view time as essential for ethical and authentic representation, yet often lack control over their own use of time. Also, in our research, several photographers expressed that they lacked the time to make powerful visual journalism, commenting that capturing an authentic, respectful, and powerful image requires time, understanding, and devotion—“crawling through the crowd”, as Coro (broadcasting) described:

Making impactful war journalism means that you are ready to do, crawl, and live the everyday life to understand different sides....It is mainly understanding the wider frame and living there in particular. In my opinion, this is how good journalism is done. That we really understand in a concrete level, what we are talking about. (Coro, broadcasting).

Rimo (newspaper) stated it was all about time. Many interviewees would have preferred to stay longer to see real life and give people time to adjust; they felt they were not really able to capture and bear witness to people's experiences within the deadline-driven journalistic process.

6. Publication: Protecting the Audience From Graphic Material

In the publication phase, graphic images constitute a major ethical concern. Corpses or wounded bodies were shown only for exceptional reasons, balancing the duty to inform with audience protection on a case-by-case basis. Overall, the interviewees regarded Finnish media imagery as respectful, tasteful, and safe for the audience; it was deemed suitable to be presented in “family media,” viewed while eating breakfast or commuting to work (Luma, newspaper). However, many photographers felt that more graphic material should be published to accurately mediate the ugly realities of war:

War is boring as hell and ugly as hell; it is wrong to clean it up with decisions....Death, violence, and war, it is not like a videogame....I think it is extremely clean, the imagery....I'm not implying making a spectacle out of it....After all, a journalist does not flaunt. They put the image there, since it is justified, because it communicates the essential point. (Sivo, tabloid)

Some experienced crisis reporters produced and sent controversial material back to their newsrooms (e.g., Bari, broadcasting). Whereas editors trusted the professional and ethical quality of the photographers' work, photographers, knowing the limits of graphicness in the publication, trusted the editors to do the final filtering. On the other hand, due to these conventional limits, the photographers disclosed they were not able to present to the audience what they had witnessed on site, and this caused them both ethical and psychological distress. The interviewees considered some unconventionally graphic images as necessary and justified. For example, the prize-winning shots of a Finnish photographer, Sami Kero, of a wounded Ukrainian soldier on a field hospital's surgery table were frequently raised as capturing the pain, urgency, and critical nature of the situation. They were perceived as powerful images expressing human dignity and respect for individual privacy. Similarly, AP photos from Mariupol children's hospital in March 2022 were

perceived as iconic and compared to “Napalm Girl” by an unknown photographer in 1972 (see Mullin, 2025). This is exemplified by a participant referring to the prize-winning photograph of Irina Kalinina taken by AP photographer Evgeniy Maloletka:

It's crucial that the atrocity of war is depicted just as it is, all the horror. But if one becomes desensitised to it, does it still serve its purpose then? Or is it more important to present just that one image of a dead mother with a dead child inside them, which burns into one's memory?....It condensates the absurdity. (Velo, tabloid)

While suffering is too important a subject to take unnecessary photographs of (Sivo, tabloid), the photographers agreed that people must see war to understand its impact. Photos were assumed to affect political decision-making and public opinion; some claimed (Runi, broadcasting; Meko, tabloid) that the violent images from liberated Bucha in April 2022 impacted the way “the West” started to support Ukraine in the war. For many of the interviewees, Bucha, with its mass graves and dead civilians lying in the streets, represented a turning point where the incomparable cruelty created exceptional news value and broke the conventional limits of graphic representation while still protecting the privacy of the subjects:

It doesn't invade anyone's privacy if a photo [from a mass grave] where no one is recognisable is being published. It simply shows the cruelty and evil that have occurred. (Nura, tabloid)

The picture of the painted nails of a dead woman in Bucha, although there was some discussion about it, was a proper way to show the point. (Dovi, magazine)

The interviewees believed that ethical principles safeguard journalism from publishing harmful and unnecessary images. Accordingly, published images could be considered reliable, harmless, and justified by journalistic standards. Simultaneously, they perceived Finnish news media as responsible for the public image of the war, and that, to depict the realities of war, it is necessary to both publish graphic images and highlight the persistence of normal life amid the war. Cami (broadcasting) emphasised this by stating: “We need to give it some thought, what we leave out, what kind of reality our stories create for people!”

While it is generally acknowledged that the Finnish media omits graphic images for audience protection, the information gaps, due to cultural bias and absence of Russian representation, are often overlooked. A few photographers expressed ethical concern over partiality and bias regarding what is eventually shown in the news media. Finnish reporters work in Ukraine with local fixers, and there is no access to the Russian frontline or Russian-occupied territories. Life in the eastern parts of Ukraine remains rather invisible in the Finnish media, and the images of soldiers' lives and warfare on the frontline are predominantly determined by the Ukrainian authorities (Coro, broadcasting). It is recognised that Ukraine utilises the Western media as a form of soft power (see Männistö, 2024); even Ukrainian accreditation states that the task of foreign reporters and photographers is to report on Russian war crimes. In addition, for the Finns, the Russia–Ukraine war strikes close to home geopolitically, culturally, and historically; in the Finnish media and cultural imagination, the Russia–Ukraine war is often compared to the Winter War of 1939–1940, in which Finland fought against the Soviet Union.

The interviewees characterised the Finnish media as pro-Ukrainian. They noted that the Russia–Ukraine war is represented as clear-cut, and nuances are consciously downplayed in relation to the unjustified intrusion

into a sovereign state: “It is obvious to me that the side has been chosen. This is valid and justified, but it challenges the principle of objectivity” (Jeka, broadcasting). While perceived as justified, the situation evoked ethical concern: “Taking Ukraine’s side should not have too much effect on the reporting” (Meko, tabloid). In particular, the representation of dead soldiers raised ambiguity. As Silo (tabloid) observed: “Death is always a tragedy, and human dignity belongs to all bodies and sufferers.” However, equal representation of deceased Russian and Ukrainian soldiers was not consistently maintained:

Ukraine did not allow us [journalists] to photograph their dead or suffering soldiers. Here [in Finland], they [the media] mostly showed dead Russian soldiers, and at times, it took on a somewhat macabre tone. Whoever it is in that picture, they still deserve human dignity. (Dovi, magazine)

Bearing witness to suffering in mass media appeals to the audience through affect and emotion (Tait, 2011, p. 1233). As stated by Tait (2011, p. 1233), in this socialisation process, “empathy for the sufferer may be displaced by hatred for the perpetrator, reproducing the mechanisms of violence rather than facilitating processes of reconciliation.” The photographers were wary of the glorification of war, the militarisation of the public sphere, and a loss of sensitivity towards the human dignity of the enemy. Particularly on a personal, human level, the cost of war for Russians should be equally recognised. However, even if access to the Russian side existed, it was considered that, for example, an equal portrayal of *babushkas* grieving their lost ones would be problematic:

If we started to move in the middle [and produce more equal representations], it would be going against oneself, because the public opinion is what it is. Then we’d be [called] Russian bootlickers and whatever else, [which is ironic] considering we are those who shaped the public opinion [in the first place]. (Jeka, broadcasting)

7. Conclusions

Graphic images and decisions related to their publication have been a major topic of debate regarding both the representation of death and journalistic ethics. However, they are only one part of the processes that are involved in the portrayal of death and suffering in the media. Practical issues and news frames impact these depictions throughout the journalistic process, and major ethical choices take place as ethical principles are enacted situationally and contextually in the practice of doing journalism.

In this study, we investigated the portrayal of death and suffering in the context of the visual image production process by Finnish photographers reporting from Ukraine during the Russia–Ukraine war in 2014–2024. We adopted a processual approach to investigate how portrayals of death and suffering are filtered throughout the journalistic process, from orientation to on-site implementation and publication, and to examine how the dynamics between the duty to inform and the ethical responsibility to care play out situationally within the journalistic process (Figure 2).

In the Orientation phase, the dominant ethical principle was the duty to inform, which fuelled the presence in Ukraine and the search for new angles and frameworks to keep the audience interested. The historical, geopolitical, and cultural closeness of the Russia–Ukraine war has increased its news value, resulting in substantial coverage by the Finnish news media. It has also produced what may be described as a new

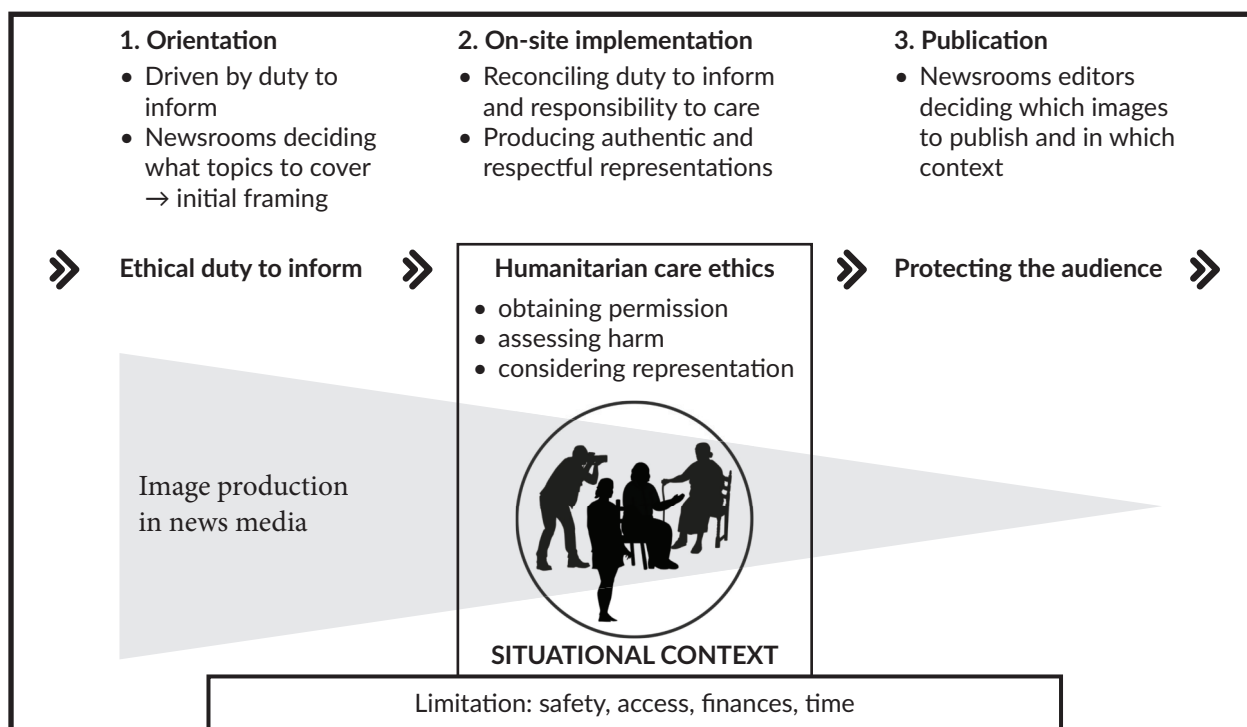


Figure 2. Ethical facets in the image production process.

generation of crisis journalists and transformed the traditional characteristics of war journalism as traditional war reporting has been accompanied with human-interest and feature journalism, covering the everyday lives of common people. Reporting is limited by safety, access, time, and financial constraints. There has been no access to the Russian side, and Ukrainian authorities have limited the media's access to, for example, military zones/hot spots and the frontline. Whereas large international news outlets and photo agencies have global reach, better access, and more resources than Finnish news media companies, Finnish journalists, who rarely directly witnessed violent or graphic scenes in the course of their work, contributed to the war reporting by interpreting and depicting the human cost of war and producing tailored content for the Finnish audience.

The dominant ethical principle during the On-site implementation phase was care ethics: obtaining permission, assessing harm to the subjects, and considering issues of representation to produce authentic and respectful images. The photographers applied various strategies to strike a balance between informing and care ethics, and two approaches emerged from the analysis. When producing news photographs in public spaces, photographers were less likely to limit their photographing, as for them, the absence of rejection was taken to imply consent. When concentrating on covering subjects' experiences, photographers emphasised obtaining and reaffirming permission, and they were also more likely to refrain from photographing in unsettling situations. On the other hand, clearly given consent enabled them to enter intimate situations. For both the news and feature photography approaches, assessing safety risks and photographing people who had been traumatised were central points of reflection, and truthful representations, including emotions, were considered vital when photographing suffering. However, truthful and sensitive representation of emotions presented substantial challenges because the images were produced in a limited timeframe and under high pressure.

In the Publication phase, the major ethical concern was graphic images. Only occasionally did the duty to inform exceed the conventional limits of protecting the audience. Even though the final decisions on publication were made by editors in the newsroom, the photographers followed the internalised cultural and organisational conventions of their news media companies in producing images. Generally, the symbolic representation of suffering was preferred, being perceived as both respectful and effective. However, some photographers did send forward graphic and violent images that they considered important. An obvious underlying tension existed between the published images and the reality of the war. Therefore, many interviewees stated that they would be willing to show more to increase public awareness of the true nature of war. Simultaneously, however, death and suffering were balanced with subjective stories on the human cost of war and the co-occurring resilience and hope evident in everyday life.

Many photographers were perplexed by the obvious partiality of the Finnish media, contradicting objectivity and impartiality as ethical principles of journalism. Limited access to the frontline and a black-and-white perception of the war can result in a biased presentation of the war, for example “humanising” Ukrainians and “dehumanising” Russians. While all human suffering and all dead soldiers and civilians should be treated with similar dignity, based on our interviews Ukrainians and Russians are not represented equally, and the recurring portrayal of Russian aggressors and Ukrainian victims has led to a one-sided portrayal of death and suffering in the Finnish news media. However, it is currently impossible to cover both sides of the war.

This study has several limitations. First, the data focused on photographers’ perspectives, leaving out, for instance, writing journalists’, local fixers’, and newsroom editors’ points of view. Including their perspectives would give a fuller picture of the journalistic process and interpersonal, team-related, situational interaction within the process. In particular, studying the context of a journalistic team is necessary to form a holistic view of the working conditions and dynamics of ethical decision-making on site. In addition, more attention could be given to differences across media outlets and distinct contextual factors, for instance the impact of gender. Heavily restricted by the primacy of protecting the privacy of participants, detailed exploration of working contexts might require a different research design. Second, the study did not explore the visual content of Finnish news media. Future studies should investigate whether analysing the visual news media content of the Russia–Ukraine war supports or challenges the results and insights of this study. Finally, further investigation should seek deeper insight into ethical decision-making concerning images and narratives of everyday life beyond suffering or death.

Acknowledgments

We express our gratitude to all the participants who dedicated their time to engage in discussions with us, MA Pasi Ikonen for participating in the data collection, MA Veli-Matti Hästbacka for helping in reviewing the interview transcriptions, Prof. Antero Holmila for involvement in the research project, and the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments.

Funding

This study was funded by the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation. Publication of this article in open access was made possible through the institutional membership agreement between the University of Jyväskylä and Cogitatio Press.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Due to the sensitive nature of the data, they are not publicly available. Upon completion of the research project, the data will be archived at the University of Jyväskylä for restricted access.

LLMs Disclosure

The AI transcriber used in this study utilises Whisper, which is an automatic speech recognition (ASR) model developed by OpenAI, trained on a large dataset of diverse audio.

References

- Alessi, E. J., & Kahn, S. (2023). Toward a trauma-informed qualitative research approach: Guidelines for ensuring the safety and promoting the resilience of research participants. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 20(1), 121–154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2022.2107967>
- Burchell, K., & Fielding, S. (2024). What hits me the hardest....The photojournalist blog: Genres and practices of journalistic witnessing. In M. Lithgow & M. Martin (Eds.), *Eyewitness textures: User-generated content and journalism in the twenty-first century* (pp. xi–xxiv). McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Chouliaraki, L. (2024). Truth and technology in the age of digital witnessing. In M. Lithgow & M. Martin (Eds.), *Eyewitness textures: User-generated content and journalism in the twenty-first century* (pp. 126–154). McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Chouliaraki, L., & al-Ghazzi, O. (2022). Beyond verification: Flesh witnessing and the significance of embodiment in conflict news. *Journalism*, 23(3), 649–667. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211060628>
- Coleman, R. (2010). Framing the pictures in our heads: Exploring the framing and agenda-setting effects of visual images. In P. D'Angelo & J. A. Kuypers (Eds.), *Doing news framing analysis* (pp. 233–261). Routledge.
- Cottle, S. (2013). Journalists witnessing disaster: From the calculus of death to the injunction to care. *Journalism Studies*, 14(2), 232–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2012.718556>
- Council for Mass Media in Finland. (2024). *Journalist's guidelines*. <https://jsn.fi/en/journalists-guidelines>
- Cozma, R. (2021). Covering international conflicts and crises. In D. V. Dimitrova (Ed.), *Global journalism: Understanding world media systems* (pp. 201–212). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Dahmen, N. S. (2015). Watchdog, voyeur, or censure? An eye-tracking research study of graphic photographs in the news media. *Journalism Practice*, 9(3), 418–432. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2014.950883>
- Damanhoury, K. E., & Saleh, F. (2025). Mediated clash of civilizations: Examining the proximity–visual framing nexus in Al Jazeera Arabic and Fox News' coverage of the 2021 Gaza War. *Digital Journalism*, 13(1), 136–158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2024.2332614>
- De Smaele, H., Geenen, E., & Cock, R. D. (2017). Visual gatekeeping: Selection of news photographs at a Flemish newspaper. *Nordicom Review*, 38(s2), 57–70. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0414>
- Fahmy, S. (2005). Emerging alternatives or traditional news gates: Which news sources were used to picture the 9/11 attack and the Afghan War? *International Communication Gazette*, 67(5), 381–398. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016549205056048>
- Fahmy, S., & Kim, D. (2008). Picturing the Iraq War: Constructing the image of war in the British and US press. *International Communication Gazette*, 70(6), 443–462. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048508096142>
- Fahmy, S., Salama, M., & Alsaba, M. R. (2024). Shattered lives, unbroken stories: Journalists' perspectives from

- the frontlines of the Israel–Gaza War. *Online Media and Global Communication*, 3(2), 151–180. <https://doi.org/10.1515/omgc-2024-0012>
- Farhi, P. (2022, March 9). How journalists decide which images from Ukraine are too awful to publish. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/media/2022/03/09/ukraine-war-photos>
- Feinstein, A., Osmann, J., & Patel, V. (2018). Symptoms of PTSD in frontline journalists: A retrospective examination of 18 years of war and conflict. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 63(9), 629–635. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743718777396>
- Fernández-Castrillo, C., & Ramos, C. (2025). Post-photojournalism: Post-truth challenges and threats for visual reporting in the Russo-Ukrainian war coverage. *Digital Journalism*, 13(1), 37–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2023.2295424>
- Fishman, J. M. (2017). *Death makes the news: How the media censor and display the dead*. New York University Press.
- Galtung, J., & Ruge, M. H. (1965). The structure of foreign news: The presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus crises in four Norwegian newspapers. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2(1), 64–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336500200104>
- Glück, A. (2016). What makes a good journalist? Empathy as a central resource in journalistic work practice. *Journalism Studies*, 17(7), 893–903. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1175315>
- Gravengaard, G., & Rimestad, L. (2014). Socializing journalist trainees in the newsroom: On how to capture the intangible parts of the process. *Nordicom Review*, 35(s1), 81–96. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2014-0105>
- Greenwood, K., Krantz, L., & MacNeil, C. (2024). Viewer preferences for publication of graphic images of war. *Digital Journalism*, 13(1), 80–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2024.2397091>
- Hamarowski, B., & Lompe, M. (2024). Digital witnesses to the crime: Visual representation of the Bucha massacre across social media platforms. *Media, War & Conflict*, 17(4), 578–602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352241243302>
- Ibrahim, M., Wang, B., Xu, M., & Xu, H. (2025). A multidimensional analysis of media framing in the Russia–Ukraine war. *Journal of Computational Social Science*, 8(2), Article 34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42001-025-00363-1>
- Isobel, S. (2021). Trauma-informed qualitative research: Some methodological and practical considerations. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, 30(S1), 1456–1469. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12914>
- Kamal, M. (2025). Factors influencing the journalistic circulation of traumatic images: The case of Alan Kurdi. *Journalism Studies*, 26(10), 1150–1168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2025.2492730>
- Khaldarova, I. (2021). Brother or “other”? Transformation of strategic narratives in Russian television news during the Ukrainian crisis. *Media, War & Conflict*, 14(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635219846016>
- Korteniemi, I. (2025, March 31). Butšän verilöylystä kolme vuotta—Suomi koki saman 300 vuotta sitten, muistuttaa Ylen Ukrainan-toimittaja. *Yle Uutiset*. <https://yle.fi/a/74-20152800>
- Kotisova, J. (2019). *Crisis reporters, emotions, and technology: An ethnography*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21428-9>
- Kotisova, J. (2025). Journalism and embodied knowledge: Conceptualizing affective epistemology and epistemic affordances of emotions and affect across news beats. *Journalism Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2025.2495726>
- Kratzer, R. M., & Kratzer, B. (2003). How newspapers decided to run disturbing 9/11 photos. *News Research Journal*, 24(1), 34–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/073953290302400104>
- Lindén, C.-G., & Grönlund, M. (2024). Finland. In S. Verza, T. Blagojev, D. Borges, J. Kermer, M. Trevisan, &

- U. Reviglio (Eds.), *Uncovering news deserts in Europe: Risks and opportunities for local and community media in the EU* (pp. 63–68). European University Institute. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2870/741398>
- Lindgren, S. (2025). *Digital media & society* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Mäenpää, J. (2022). Distributing ethics: Filtering images of death at three news photo desks. *Journalism*, 23(10), 2230–2248. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884921996308>
- Männistö, A. (2024). Ukrainan puolustusministeriön videoviestinnän käyttö, keinot ja uudet muodot. *Lähikuva – audiovisuaalisen kulttuurin tieteellinen julkaisu*, 37(2/3), 28–49. <https://doi.org/10.23994/lk.148182>
- Martikainen, J., & Sakki, I. (2024). Visual humanization of refugees: A visual rhetorical analysis of media discourse on the war in Ukraine. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 63(1), 106–130. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12669>
- Midberry, J. (2020). Compassionate horror or compassion fatigue? Responses to human-cost-of-war photographs. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 4406–4427.
- Miller, K. C., & Dahmen, N. (2020). “This is still their lives”: Photojournalists’ ethical approach to capturing and publishing graphic or shocking images. *Journal of Media Ethics*, 35(1), 17–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23736992.2020.1731313>
- Mortensen, M., & Pantti, M. (Eds.). (2024). *Media and the war in Ukraine*. Peter Lang. <https://doi.org/10.3726/b21210>
- Mullin, B. (2025, May 16). “Napalm Girl” was in the photo. But who was behind the camera? *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/16/business/media/vietnam-war-photo-ap.html>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Eddy, K., Robinson, C. T., & Nielsen, R. K. (2023). *Reuters Institute digital news report 2023*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://doi.org/10.60625/RISJ-P6ES-HB13>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., Eddy, K., & Nielsen, R. K. (2022). *Reuters Institute digital news report 2022*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://doi.org/10.60625/RISJ-X1GN-M549>
- Nygren, G., Glowacki, M., Hök, J., Kiria, I., Orlova, D., & Taradai, D. (2016). Journalism in the crossfire: Media coverage of the war in Ukraine in 2014. *Journalism Studies*, 19(7), 1059–1078. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1251332>
- Ojala, M., & Pantti, M. (2017). Naturalising the new cold war: The geopolitics of framing the Ukrainian conflict in four European newspapers. *Global Media and Communication*, 13(1), 41–56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766517694472>
- Ojala, M., Pantti, M., & Kangas, J. (2017). Whose war, whose fault? Visual framing of the Ukraine conflict in Western European newspapers. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 474–498.
- Palmer, L. (2019). *The fixers: Local news workers and the underground labor of international reporting*. Oxford University Press.
- Pantti, M. (2010). The value of emotion: An examination of television journalists’ notions on emotionality. *European Journal of Communication*, 25(2), 168–181. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323110363653>
- Pantti, M. (2019). The personalisation of conflict reporting: Visual coverage of the Ukraine crisis on Twitter. *Digital Journalism*, 7(1), 124–145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1399807>
- Perlmutter, D. D., & Wagner, G. L. (2004). The anatomy of a photojournalistic icon: Marginalization of dissent in the selection and framing of “a death in Genoa.” *Visual Communication*, 3(1), 91–108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357204039600>
- Rupar, V. (2020). Journalists as first responders. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, 15(2), 349–359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2020.1741405>
- Shevchenko, V. (2024, April 14). Ukraine war: Russian double-tap strikes hit civilians then rescuers too. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-68761490>

- Stupart, R. (2021). Feeling responsible: Emotion and practical ethics in conflict journalism. *Media, War & Conflict*, 14(3), 268–281. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352211013461>
- Szulich-Kałuża, J., & Wadowski, D. (2024). Representations of personal experience of the war reality in Ukraine in reports on the Onet.pl website. *Polish Political Science Review*, 12(2), 67–81. <https://doi.org/10.2478/ppsr-2024-0012>
- Tait, S. (2011). Bearing witness, journalism and moral responsibility. *Media, Culture & Society*, 33(8), 1220–1235. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443711422460>
- Thomson, T. J., & Greenwood, K. (2017). Beyond framing: Influences of subject–photographer interactions on visual journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 11(5), 625–644. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2016.1152908>
- Tilton, S., & Agozzino, A. (2023). The ultra lord of the Ukraine Special Operations' Agricultural Division: How memetic artifacts provides a foundation for the historical archiving of conflicts. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9(1), Article 2193440. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2193440>
- Tschirky, M., & Makhortykh, M. (2024). #Azovsteel: Comparing qualitative and quantitative approaches for studying framing of the siege of Mariupol on Twitter. *Media, War & Conflict*, 17(2), 163–178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352231184163>
- Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2023, No. 254к/96-BP, originally published 1996. https://hcj.gov.ua/sites/default/files/field/file/the_constitution_of_ukraine.pdf
- Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2018). *Emotions, media and politics*. Polity.
- Węglińska, A., Seklecka, A., Peszyński, W., & Węgliński, B. (2024). Transformation of a war journalist profession: The case of the full-scale Russo–Ukrainian conflict. *Media, War & Conflict*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352241307013>
- Yarchi, M. (2025). Fighting over international legitimacy: Testing Israel's image war strategies during the 2023–24 war between Hamas and Israel. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2025.2450848>
- Young, A., & Omosun, F. (2024). How does it look from where you are? A visual media framing analysis of the 2022 war in Ukraine. *Digital Journalism*, 13(1), 18–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2023.2296560>

About the Authors



Liia-Maria Raippalinna (PhD) is an ethnologist and a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä. Her research interests include crisis journalism, environmental issues, and sustainability.



Suvi Mononen (MA) is a PhD researcher of social anthropology at the University of Tampere, with research interests in war journalism, media, emotions, and communities. She has a background as a freelance journalist and a media worker. Her previous academic research focuses on the history of the Finnish public broadcast media and digitalisation.



Markus Mykkänen (PhD) is a senior lecturer in corporate communication at the University of Jyväskylä's School of Business and Economics (JSBE). His research has focused on organizations' media relations, crisis communication, and the political influence of news media.



Turo Uskali (PhD) is a professor and the head of the journalism studies program at the University of Jyväskylä. Currently, he heads research projects focusing on war journalism and innovations in journalism. He has published about 100 research articles and chapters.