

Resilience as Resistance: Mental Health and Well-being in Human Rights

**A New [openGlobalRights](#) Series scheduled to launch on April 7th,
World Health Day**

“Caring for myself is not an indulgence. It is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare.” - Audre Lorde

Human rights advocates can have a perilous task, whether working in their own community or with others. In addition to physical dangers they may face in exposing abuses, they can endure emotional hardship from working to end violence, persecution, extreme poverty, and injustice.

Through witnessing human rights violations directly or hearing about them second-hand, advocates are often exposed to trauma and human suffering, and the impact on an advocate’s mental health can be severe. A growing body of research suggests that while many human rights advocates find inspiration and meaning in their work, they are also at risk of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The mental health and well-being of advocates has often been neglected by human rights organizations, funders, and advocates themselves. Recently, however, activists and mental health professionals have begun giving the issue more attention, exploring what risks advocates face and how they might be mitigated. Human rights organizations increasingly want to bolster the resilience and creativity of their staff and constituents. Defenders increasingly see their own well-being as an imperative for sustainable movements.

To advance this vital discussion, [openGlobalRights](#) will publish and translate a series of 1000-word essays by leading human rights, psychology and social science scholars, funders, and practitioners from around the world.

Collaborating guest editors for the series include: [Fred Abrahams](#), [Farea Al-Muslimi](#), [Sarah Knuckey](#), [Douglas Mawadri](#), [Lucia Nader](#), and [Meg Satterthwaite](#)

The series will examine a range of critical questions and issues, including:

- The research conducted to date on the mental health impacts of human rights work;
- Lessons learned from research on war correspondents, medical professionals, humanitarian workers, and others;
- The ways in which specific experiences or work, such as with armed conflict, LGBTQ issues, or sexual violence, may have unique mental health effects;
- Obstacles to advancing mental health and well-being in the human rights field;
- Alternatives to “mental health” as a framework for understanding advocates’ well-being and resilience;

- The links between the direct trauma of victims and the secondary trauma of advocates;
- The links among advocates' well-being and economic justice, including their labor rights and basic needs;
- Whether focusing on advocates privileges those people to the detriment of others;
- The interconnections among physical, emotional and digital security (referred to as "holistic security");
- Innovative approaches to well-being by gender advocates, feminists, and intersectional approaches to empowerment and well-being;
- Strategies to prevent and alleviate harmful effects;
- Factors that may increase an advocate's resilience and well-being;
- Policies that organizations might implement to support their staff;
- Practical tips for activists and investigators so they can do their jobs effectively and sustainably over the long-term;
- Personal stories from advocates of coping with stress and PTSD.

Articles will appear on the front page of [openDemocracy](#) and be curated on a dedicated openGlobalRights page. openGlobalRights will also vigorously promote the debate through its multi-lingual social media channels.

Most published articles will appear in two or more languages, and **authors living in the global South can receive up to \$250 USD for their published pieces**. All authors may republish their texts at will, under the [Creative Commons license](#).

We invite submissions on these and related questions. Authors should send their drafts to openGlobalRights [Managing Editor Archana Pandya](#). Your article can be up to 1000 words with hyperlinks to open sources, rather than footnotes; use plain, broadly accessible language; and a minimum of technical jargon. Please explain any necessary statistical concepts. You may use up to two figures/graphs/tables. Please consult our general author guidelines are available [online here](#) prior to submitting your piece.

About openGobalRights

[openGlobalRights](#) (oGR) is a multilingual, online forum for debating human rights policy and strategy issues. It's currently hosted as a section of the London-based website, [openDemocracy](#) (oD), in London, which receives 750,000 unique monthly visitors. oGR is supported by the Ford Foundation, University of Minnesota, Open Society Foundations and University of Ottawa. Since its launch in June 2013, it has published over 1300 short articles and translations in 23 languages and launched [16 ongoing debates](#). These have been accessed over 2.7 million times by more than 440,000 readers in 140 countries and shared extensively on oGRs multilingual social media channels