

A Pocketbook for Journalists

Reporting GBV Responsibly

Nurturing Ethical and Comprehensive Journalism





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Message from the President

Global Neighbourhood for Media Innovation

Dear Esteemed Colleagues and Friends,

I am honored to introduce a valuable addition to the realm of ethical journalism "Reporting GBV Responsibly: Nurturing Ethical and Comprehensive Journalism", it is a Pocketguide for Journalists. In a world where information holds immense power, the responsible and ethical reporting of gender-based violence (GBV) cases is not just a duty, but a moral imperative.

Journalists wield an influential pen, shaping public perception and driving societal discourse. This pocketbook serves as a concise yet essential resource, enabling us to report with empathy, respect, and professionalism, ensuring survivors' dignity and rights are upheld.

Our commitment at the Global Neighbourhood for Media Innovation (GNMI) has always been to foster positive change through the power of media. This pocketbook aligns seamlessly with that vision, arming journalists with the tools they need to be agents of transformation in our society. By adhering to these ethical principles, we collectively pave the way for a world where GBV survivors are heard, respected, and supported.

We are grateful to the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) for their unwavering support, which has been pivotal in bringing this guide to fruition. Their dedication to fostering ethical reporting is truly appreciated.

As we embrace these ethical principles, let's amplify the voices of survivors and contribute to a more compassionate and informed society.

With profound regards,

Najia Ashar
President
Global Neighbourhood for Media Innovation (GNMI)

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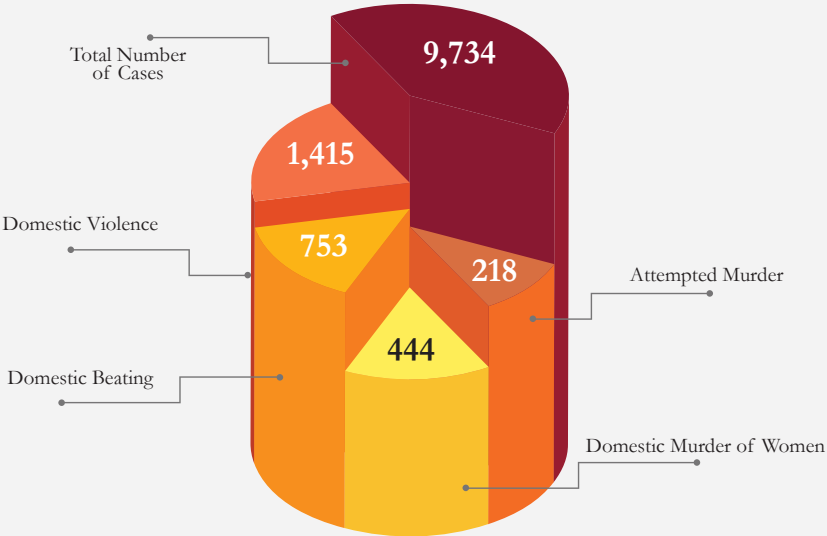
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Introduction

In Pakistan, Gender-based Violence (GBV) is prevalent and recognized as one of the major challenges, which hinders security and safety of women and girls across the country. According to data collected by the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women and compiled in the Punjab Gender Parity Report 2021, a total of **9,734** cases of violence against women were reported in 2021. This includes domestic violence, rape, gang rape, murder, attempted murder, acid burning, honor crimes, stove burning, wanni and cases of hurt. 1,415 reports of domestic violence were filed, which included 444 cases of domestic murder of women, 218 cases of attempted murder and 753 cases of domestic beating of women across the province.

More than one-third married women participating in a national survey reported having experienced domestic abuse in 2018. Domestic violence includes, but is not limited to, physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence that may occur in intimate relationships. It also covers threats to life, stalking, and cyber-crime. Also, sometimes violence can escalate to a point that results in death (Sustainable Social Development Organization, 2022).

The purpose of this Pocketbook is to build knowledge of Journalists and Editors on the nine principles of ethical reporting of violence against women and girls developed by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Reporters can add context to individual incidents by referring to the whole spectrum of sexual violence, reporting data on the prevalence of sexual violence and related issues in that region, counteracting myths and outdated attitudes and also contacting experts to educate public.



¹National Institute of Population Studies, 2019

Ethical Principles for GBV Reporting

Below are the nine ethical principles of reporting for cases of gender-based violence:

1. Accuracy

Getting your facts right should be at the core of all journalism, and this must be a paramount consideration when reporting on GBV. Whilst interviews should be sensitive, a Journalist must ensure that reporting is 100% correct factually. One must be specific when mentioning crimes committed, and not attempt to report on criminal proceedings unless an understanding of the legal processes involved exists. Some reporters try and use euphemistic language (e.g, 'had his way with her') rather than accurate language (e.g, 'he raped her'). This leads to misleading reports and creates an impression of "victim blaming" rather than adapting language that advocates for survivors' rights.

2. Fairness

As a Journalist, one must always be fair with people interviewed, especially survivors of GBV; bear in mind that you have an extra duty of care to protect vulnerable sources (revealed sources often tend to recant their statements or resile from testimony during trials involving GBV, thus should be treated as such).

In this context, the concept of 'informed consent' is particularly important: this means that the person you interview should be made fully aware of the consequences of appearing in the media. Many GBV survivors who have spoken 'on the record' have later faced a range of problems resulting from being identified, including social retaliation, physical attacks and family pressure to withdraw stories. For an interview to be fair, a Journalist must inform an Interviewee of these potential risks.

-  1. Accuracy
-  2. Fairness
-  3. Impartiality
-  4. Duty to inform
-  5. Respecting Privacy
-  6. Protect sources
-  7. Payment for interviews
-  8. Do no harm
-  9. Survivor-centered approach

3. Impartiality

It is not the job of a responsible reporter to judge or discriminate an Interviewee. It is particularly important to ensure that reporters do not mention details that can be interpreted as leveling any form of blame towards a GBV survivor. If clothes worn at the time of an attack are mentioned, for example, or other aspects of a survivor's appearance, these details can be interpreted as implied judgment towards them. This can be particularly true of features: some journalists may attempt to add detail and 'color,' which can unintentionally focus the onus of blame away from the perpetrator and add focus on the survivor.

4. Duty to Inform

When reporting on GBV, it is important to distinguish between what is 'in the public interest' and what is 'of interest to the public.' Some GBV stories feature high-profile figures and contain lots of personal detail: this tends to treat the subject in a sensational way, with no useful information given for GBV survivors.

5. Respecting Privacy

Principled, ethical journalism means respecting the privacy of both GBV survivors and bereaved families. A Reporter must always be wary of 'jigsaw identification' when granting anonymity. This happens where audiences piece together details - such as location, age, clothing, or family members - even though identification of the survivor is not explicitly mentioned or their face shown, audiences can gather enough information from the report to identify the survivor.

6. Protect Sources

A Journalist must always protect their sources. For reporters unfamiliar to the region, it is particularly important to gain relevant local knowledge as to how to ensure this, usually through local organizations and agencies. One must also ensure that this protection is extended to fixers, translators, drivers, interviewees, and others helping with the story. Some communities have been known to shun those who have spoken openly about GBV and, in some cases, so-called 'honour crimes' have been carried out in retribution for speaking out.

7. Payment for Interviews

It may seem tempting to pay cash or offer gifts in exchange for interviews. However, payment for this kind of interview is unethical; not only is this likely to influence the nature of the interview, but it can also make it harder for other journalists to get an interview. Offers made in cash or kind can also pressurize survivors into speaking to the media. It is recommended that journalists contact organizations working on GBV issues in the first instance before attempting to secure an interview. Officials at local and international NGOs may be able to talk more freely about GBV and are likely to have a useful overview of the topic. Rather than paying an interviewee directly, reporters may feel that a discreet donation to an organization working with GBV survivors is appropriate.

8. Do No Harm

As a general rule, Journalists should be guided by harm limitation principles; this includes showing sensitivity to people who have experienced grief or trauma and a respect for their privacy; an awareness that subjects and interviewees may be inexperienced in dealing with the media; and an understanding that there is a balance between the public's right to information and a criminal suspect's right to a fair trial.

9. Survivor-centered Approach

A survivor-centered approach seeks to empower survivors by putting them at the center of the healing process. It recognizes that each person is unique, reacts differently to GBV, has different strengths, resources, and coping mechanisms, has the right to decide who should know about what has happened to them, and what should happen next. GBV is a manifestation of power inequality: if people around survivors in a position of power (such as reporters and service providers) impose their perspective, they can unintentionally create another experience where the survivors feel further dis-empowered and re-victimized. Dealing with GBV survivors in a survivor-centered manner involves prioritizing their will, best interest, and applying the guiding principles of safety, confidentiality, respect, and non-discrimination.

Dos and Don'ts of GBV Reporting

While reporting GBV, media must avoid the following:

01

Mentioning identifying details of the victim (such as name, age/occupation)

02

Using/posting/publicizing pictures of survivors

03

Identifying the location of the incident or showing a photograph thereof

04

Describing the steps involved in the crime

05

Using judgmental language

06

Listing details regarding the survivor's history, clothes, whereabouts at the time of the event, etc. Mention of these details in the report may contribute to victim shaming besides providing clues to perpetrators

Other Helpful Additions to a GBV Report

While reporting GBV, media must avoid the following:

01. A prominent static message at the bottom of the screen highlights the words “gender-based violence is punishable by law”, similar to anti-tobacco health warnings.
02. Details of survivor support services such as hotlines, shelters, crisis centers, women protection centers, etc.
03. Prominent placement of reports may help in building awareness about the issue.
04. Interviews or statements by law enforcement agencies, supporting the survivor, cautioning the public and issuing warnings for perpetrators.

Values that Journalists Can Use to Help GBV Survivors

01. Confidentiality involves communication of private and personal information from the survivor to the journalist or vice versa, with the expectation that the journalist will not ordinarily disclose the confidential information to third parties
02. Care refers to the exercise of extreme caution when dealing with survivors of GBV and their stories
03. Empathy relates to display of the ability to understand and share feelings felt by the survivor
04. Sensitivity means quick appreciation for the survivors’ feelings
05. Security and safety involve the journalist providing the survivor with an atmosphere in which he or she feels completely safe and able to reveal his/her side of the story
06. Risk assessment is the process by which the journalist evaluates any present or future risk to the survivor

Media Reporting on GBV in Conflict Spaces

Physiologically, human beings respond to danger and shock in more or less the same way everywhere, regardless of their culture. Someone who has just been robbed, caught in a war-torn area, or one devastated by a natural disaster, will display similar physical responses, based on human physiology and the reflexes associated with it. Under the influence of culture, however, the way people express and interpret their behavior may differ considerably. It is therefore important to adopt a sensitive approach to survivors of severe trauma, because different cultural backgrounds may require different approaches. At the same time, one must never jump to conclusions based on knowledge about a given culture but be open and sensitive to meaning and values.

Gender-based violence in war often seems unpredictable or random but is used as a strategic weapon to defeat and humiliate opponents. It has been a feature of wars and conflict throughout history, and in that context today it is associated with ethnic cleansing, genocide, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, trafficking, kidnapping (mostly of young girls), dependency on male benefactors in refugee camps, etc. Rape is used frequently as a weapon of war to intimidate and humiliate families and communities and dehumanise those who are considered enemies. Women are often forced to provide sexual services to combatants.

Key Considerations in Conflict Areas

Survivors' foremost wish is to feel safe, to recover from the trauma of the crime, and regain control of their lives.

Protocols for Dealing with Domestic Violence Cases

01. Talk to the suspect and the survivor separately.
02. Inform the survivor about confidentiality and disclosure.
03. Do not tell the suspect the source of the information.
04. Listen calmly to the survivor as she tells her story.
05. Avoid making judgmental comments or conclusions.
06. Give them a chance to express the opinion.
07. Avoid telling your own story of violence.
08. Help them think through and consider the safety options for them.
09. Help them assess the risk.
10. Give them information about the available resources for abused person.
11. Refer them for further support.
12. Follow up on the story: Following up on reports for progression in GBV cases.