

A large, stylized orange graphic element on the left side of the slide, resembling a thick, curved arrow pointing downwards and to the right. It contains the text '9 Ethical Principles' in white.

9 Ethical Principles

A black rectangular text box with white text, positioned in the center of the slide. The text reads 'Reporting Ethically on Gender-Based Violence in the Syria Crisis'.

Reporting Ethically on Gender-Based Violence in the Syria Crisis





The media can amplify Syrian women's voices, counteract myths, and stimulate dialogue and action. I hope this Handbook on Reporting on Gender-Based Violence will help to shine a stronger light on these human rights violations and lead to greater support and services for survivors. It is important to ensure that perpetrators are not only brought to justice, but seen to be brought to justice by the wider community.



Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin,
UNFPA Executive Director

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will, and that is based on socially-ascribed (i.e., gender) differences between males and females.

Even for the most experienced and senior journalist, filing a story on GBV is likely to be one of the most challenging assignments. This is particularly true when attempting to adopt a survivor-centered approach, i.e., putting the best interests of GBV survivors first, and adopting a 'do no harm' strategy.

However, the ethical principles which underpin journalistic best practice should also guide the way in which gender-based violence is covered.



ACCURACY

Getting your facts right should be at the core of all journalism, and this is true of covering GBV as well. Whilst your interviews should be sensitive, you should also ensure that your reporting is factually correct. You should be specific when mentioning crimes, and not attempt to report on criminal proceedings unless you understand the legal processes involved. 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.



FAIRNESS

You should always be fair with people you interview, and when speaking to people who have experienced GBV; you have an extra duty of care to protect potentially vulnerable sources.

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 attacks and community rejection. For your interview to be fair, you need to inform your interviewee of these potential risks.

IMPARTIALITY

It is not the job of a responsible reporter to judge or discriminate. It is particularly important to ensure that you do not mention details that can be interpreted as implying blame towards the GBV survivor. If you mention the clothes worn at the time of an attack, for example, or other aspects of a survivor/victim's appearance, this can be seen to imply judgment of 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.





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 sensationalist way, with no useful information given for GBV survivors.

RESPECTING PRIVACY

Principled, ethical journalism means respecting the privacy of both GBV survivors and bereaved families. You should also 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 you don't name a survivor, or show their face.





SOURCES

You should always protect your 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. You should also ensure that you extend this protection to your fixers, translators, drivers, interviewees, and others helping you with your 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.

PAYMENT FOR INTERVIEWS

Many Syrian refugees are poor, so it may seem tempting to pay cash or offer gifts in exchange for interviews. However, payment for this kind of interview is considered poor ethics; not only is this likely to influence the nature of the interview, 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.



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, an understanding that there is a balance between the public's right to information and a criminal suspect's right to a fair trial.



A SURVIVOR-CENTERED APPROACH

A survivor-centered approach seeks to empower survivors by putting them at the centre 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 disempowerment.

Dealing with GBV survivors in a survivor-centered manner involves prioritizing their best interest, and applying the guiding principles of safety, confidentiality, respect, and non-discrimination.





United Nations Population Fund

UNFPA: Delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

UNFPA works to protect and empower women and girls and provide life-saving gender- based violence services.

UNFPA would like to acknowledge the generous support of UK aid from the UK Department for International Development for funding the development of this product.

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