

GUIDELINES
ON MEDIA
REPORTING
ON VIOLENCE
AGAINST
WOMEN



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Guidelines on Media Reporting on Violence against Women

Journalists against Violence against Women

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Introduction

The present Guidelines are a result of several years' analyses, discussions and work of the group Journalists against Violence against Women, as well as practical experiences gained through reporting on the phenomenon of gender-based violence. Journalists against Violence against Women are a group of women journalists and editors who fight violence against women in an organised, public and outspoken way, formed thanks to UNDP Serbia and the B92 Fund. Our actions are aimed at strengthening the media's preventive and educational role and ethical media reporting on violence against women.

Through discussion and experience sharing – both within the group and with peers with whom group members met, as well as by monitoring the media situation and reporting on the social issue of violence against women – we identified a personal, professional and social need for a document of this kind. The first edition of the *Guidelines* was published in 2019, with the intention to be useful to all media: print, electronic and digital, and to address journalists' dilemmas encountered when it comes to reporting on domestic violence, violence against women and children, intimate partner violence, as well as the specific features of violence against particular groups of women such as minors, Roma women, women with disabilities etc.

Since then, through the regular monitoring and analysis of media reports on violence against women, we have observed a rise in media interest in reporting on this issue and shedding light on different aspects and forms of violence; moreover, significant shifts have also occurred in reporting geared towards prevention and public awareness-raising. Beside the broadened scope of reporting, trust in the media was strengthened among women survivors, and victims' and survivors' stories have thus become more prominent in the media sphere, which has had a significant impact on public views about this phenomenon.

Historically, the media have in the past been important allies when it comes to raising awareness of the prevalence of violence against women, as well as its public recognition. In Serbia, even today, the media are the only publicly available source of data on femicide – the killing of women – on the basis of which women's organisations, gathered in the "Women against Violence Network", compile their reports and provide information to the public. Yet, despite this crucial role to raise awareness about and report on the existing problem, research in Serbia also points to sensationalism and stereotypes in media reporting, most often with regard to specific cases, while the number of prevention- or education-oriented media reports remains insufficient. While it is very important that victims see the media as supporters and allies, an approach that will not harm the victims and that will fully comply with the ethical principles of media reporting often poses a range of dilemmas to journalists, sometimes raising questions they are not able to answer.

We believe that these revised *Guidelines* will help our peers in all aspects of journalistic work, from conduct during field work and treatment of violence victims, direct and indirect witnesses, to the choice of interlocutors, identification of adequate institutions to approach, and choice of precise wording to be used in drafting texts and headlines.

All guidelines have been designed carefully in order to be consistent with the *Serbian Journalists' Code of Ethics*, which served as the basis for their development. Furthermore, the new, revised *Guidelines* have, amongst other things, been informed

by societal changes that have taken place since the original publication. The new, revised *Guidelines* are adapted to the societal context where women are increasingly encouraged to speak up publicly about their experiences. The revised Guidelines are a result of efforts to ensure that media ethics and professionalism keep abreast of this trend.

The *Guidelines* are aimed – on the one hand, at improving the quality of reporting on this topic, addressing the dilemmas often faced by journalists who report on this problem, and – on the other – at avoiding or at least reducing the traumatising of women who experienced violence as a consequence of public exposure.



RECOMMENDATIONS TO EDITORS

- Editors are recommended to assign the topic of violence against women only to women journalists who are knowledgeable or experienced in reporting on this phenomenon whenever possible, especially if field work involves interviewing the survivor, because – however sensitised they may be – men may instil fear and discomfort in women who experienced violence.
- Editors are also recommended to encourage journalists to attend training events and to refer them to manuals, recommendations and guidelines for responsible media reporting on sexism, discrimination and violence against women, and to refer them to peers who have pertinent experience and who report on this topic in an ethical manner.
- Further, editors are recommended to approach the topic of violence against women comprehensively, which means:
 - when reporting on specific cases of violence, follow the event from beginning to end (including the legal penalty imposed on the perpetrator) – reporting on legal penalties contributes to violence prevention, as it informs the public that violence is punished and further victimisation stopped; it also indirectly influences public views and awareness of the unacceptability of violence and the need to protect victims;
 - report not only on specific cases, but also on the phenomenon of violence against women as such with a view of prevention and education – the phenomenon of violence against women is much broader and more prevalent than violence happening only within the family and committed by or affecting family members only;
 - violence against women includes not only physical, but also psychological, economic, sexual violence, which is also dangerous and causes severe consequences, both within and outside the family; it is, therefore, essential to report and educate the public on these aspects as well.

- When reporting on cases of violence, have in mind – as an editorial office – that other victims of the same perpetrator or of the same form of violence may contact you to tell their stories and seek support (see the section on interviewing survivors).
 - The section “Further Literature and Resources” contains the contact details of relevant victim protection and support organisations and institutions to which you may refer survivors when they approach you.
- Given that, in most print and online media editorial offices, headlines are decided by the editor, it is especially important to pay attention to headlines, since they are the most visible, and often are the only part that readers actually read. **Even when the text is entirely appropriate, the headline may turn out to be inappropriate.** Good headlines on violence against women must not begin with sensationalist wording such as “brutal”, “horrid”, “shocking”, “horror” and the like. Headlines should be consistent with all of the listed guidelines.

REPORTING ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In a media report, as long as court proceedings are underway, the identity of the survivor/victim and her family members should not be revealed.

- The survivor’s/victim’s identity or details that could indicate her identity, including photographs of the place/building/home where the violence took place, should not be disclosed.
- The survivor’s/victim’s family members’ identity should not be revealed, especially in case of underage children.
- The presumption of innocence should be respected with regard to the perpetrator and his identity should not be revealed (especially where it leads to the disclosure of the survivor’s/victim’s identity), in conformity with the legal provisions and the *Serbian Journalists’ Code of Ethics*.

In a media report, responsibility for the violence should not be shifted from the perpetrator to the survivor/victim.

- Clear wording should be used that does not blame the survivor/victim, but rather emphasises the responsibility of the perpetrator, who is always and solely responsible for violence:
 - after the information on violence, do not use the expressions “because”, “but”, “owing to”, “however” and the like, whereby the act is associated with the survivor’s behaviour, clothing, change of partners or any other personal characteristic.
- Do not justify violence – either indirectly or directly, by questioning the victim’s behaviour that could have “incited the perpetrator” (e.g. she borrowed/spent money, she was unfaithful, she was nagging the perpetrator, she got into his car, she met him in his apartment etc.) – remember, the perpetrator always has a choice other than violence!
- Particular attention should be paid to this when reporting on sexual violence, given that it is most frequently presented as the woman’s responsibility (she “provoked”, “asked for it”, “actually enjoyed it” etc.), thus causing additional victimisation and a sense of self-guilt.

A media report must not contain information that could justify an act of violence by external circumstances or the perpetrator’s personal characteristics.

- Violence must not be justified by external circumstances or the perpetrator’s personal characteristics (e.g. poverty, culture, high temperatures, job loss, mental illness, alcoholism, drug addiction):
 - violence against women is never a tragic event, but rather a calculated act on the part of the perpetrator;
 - violence is not a reflection of the perpetrator’s mental illness – if we depict perpetrators as mentally ill persons, we affect the creation of an erroneous perception of the perpetrator and, at the same time, stigmatise

persons with mental illnesses who are not violent;

- likewise, violence is not a reflection of addiction – persons addicted to alcohol or psychoactive substances may be as violent as persons who do not consume any of these; further, persons addicted to alcohol or psychoactive substances are not necessarily violent at all.
- Do not give justification to the perpetrator, even if it is a well-known and influential person:
 - the perpetrator could be from any social stratum, including public personalities and office holders – this must not be a reason to justify violence.

Especially in the case of sexual violence, expressions such as “maniac”, “satisfaction of uncontrolled urges” and the like should not be used. These are not mentally ill persons and this is not about an inability to control their urges. Violence is not linked to sexual desire, but rather to the need to establish power and control.

A media report must not contain the details of the act of violence/murder, or interlocutors’ statements that are not relevant to the act.

- The narrative presentation of concrete, graphic depictions of the violent scene with details should be avoided, on the one hand – because they offend the survivor’s/ victim’s dignity and put the public in a voyeuristic position, and on the other – because they give other perpetrators ideas for violent behaviour.
- With regard to information sources and interlocutors, it is essential to:
 - by all means, have in mind the *Serbian Journalists’ Code of Ethics*, in particular chapters “Treatment of Information Sources” and “Journalists’ Due Diligence”;
 - only publish information that has been verified from at least two independent sources;
 - rely on official sources as far as possible (e.g. the police, court, prosecutor’s office, attorneys, experts on violence against women);

- avoid interlocutors who are ideologically biased in terms that they frequently take the perpetrator's side, have a history of public statements in which they justify or downplay violence against women, blame victims, and/or belong to misogynous men's rights groups;
- bear in mind that people close to the perpetrator view him through the lens of their own relationship with him, which usually bears no resemblance to the perpetrator's relationship with the survivor/victim – avoid taking statements from people close to the perpetrator;
- if statements are taken from people from the survivor's/victim's and perpetrator's environment, convey them carefully and provide a context (e.g. in case a woman is murdered, if the murderer's neighbours state that he was "quiet and reserved, a reputable person", explain in the text or feature that anyone can be an abuser and that, in the external environment and relationships with other people, they often seem to be ordinary people, while in the privacy of their home and with the victim, they are completely different);
- do not use social networks as sources of information about survivors/ victims and perpetrators – by doing so, we further victimise survivors, while encouraging a culture of violence through comments and messages which are often left on perpetrators' or victims'/survivors' profiles and which are of a violent nature;
- at the same time, through the case reported on, try to convey information that illustrates "warning signs" (ask witnesses or neighbours meaningful questions and link answers to the context – e.g. ask whether they have seen the survivor/victim out of home without him, whether the perpetrator has been coming to her place of work, whether she has seemed scared, upset, whether she has had bruises, whether she has friends);
- especially with regard to abusers who are public personalities, ensure that media reporting does not become a public forum where other public personalities, entirely irrelevant to the case, express their views about the perpetrator, victim/survivor and the act of violence, and do not use public personalities' sensationalist, misogynous or sexist statements to raise viewership/readership rates – in other words, make sure that, in cases of violence that attract especially high public interest, voice is given primarily to survivors and professionals, rather than acquaintances who pass their judgment on what happened;

- when reporting on specific cases of violence against women, it is extremely important to ensure it is not interwoven with details that explain the case from the aspect of astrology, numerology, graphology and the like and “make a judgment” on whether violence, in fact, occurred and, if yes, what its causes were.

A media report must not contain sensationalist or stereotypical expressions referring to violence, the survivor/victim, the perpetrator.

- Stereotypical depiction of the survivor/victim implies that she is crying, shaken up, with visible physical consequences of violence – this often may not be the case, especially when it comes to psychological, economic or sexual violence, which creates a misconception that every woman reacts to and deals with violence in the same way.
- The perpetrator’s ethnic, religious or other background should not be emphasised unless it is closely linked to the act of violence itself (e.g. do not stress that the perpetrator is Roma, Albanian, Muslim, migrant and the like).
- Do not depict or describe victims/survivors as “poor” or “unfortunate” women – this impairs their dignity and they are completely reduced to the role of victim, although the violence they experienced is only one of their life experiences – remember, media reporting can lift survivors’ spirits and motivate them to leave the situation of violence, which will not be the case if they are referred to as “poor wretches”.
- When reporting on violence against women committed as a result of religious or cultural customs, it is necessary to:
 - collect key information and become familiar with forms of violence against women – such as arranging or selling girls into underage marriage, practices of genital mutilation, so-called corrective rape (rape as an act of punishment and correction with respect to something the woman has done, such as falling in love with another woman, seeking divorce from her husband etc.), honour killings and the like;
 - make sure to avoid prejudice and nationalist, racial or other tension;

- avoid headlines and narratives that express surprise and shock when reporting on these forms of violence – whether they happen in Serbia or worldwide, they must be approached in a responsible and professional manner;
- do not justify violence by cultural and religious customs or stereotypes associated with a specific social group (e.g. do not use expressions such as “Gypsy ways” for violent acts committed by Roma men against Roma women).
- Particular attention should be paid to reporting on violence against women with disabilities and ensuring they are not depicted as asexual persons who cannot be subjected to every form of violence.
- It should be borne in mind that multiply marginalised women (e.g. women belonging to ethnic, religious, sexual minorities, women with disabilities, rural women) are more often at risk of violence – use relevant statistics and do not use stereotypical depictions.

A media report must not diminish/ridicule violence and should not express doubts about the survivor’s/ victim’s honesty.

- The terms and language describing violence should be chosen carefully so as not to downplay it, which means:
 - do not romanticise violence:
 - violence must not be presented as an expression of love or a consequence of jealousy, but only as an expression of the need for power and control;
 - pay special attention to this when reporting on femicide followed by the perpetrator’s suicide, since the act of suicide after murder is not an act of love, but rather an act of ultimate control and taking of life, after which the purpose of one’s existence is lost since the object of control is no longer present – do not present this crime as a “tragic/ unfortunate ending to a love story”;

- do not equate violence with an argument:
 - during an argument, the participants are equal and there is no feeling of fear, while violence involves inequality and a feeling of fear of the consequences;
- do not equate violence with domestic/marital problems;
- clearly name and distinguish between rape (any sexual intercourse without consent) and sex (consensual sexual intercourse between two people) – e.g. sexual intercourse with a minor, irrespective of consent, is not an “affair”, “sex scandal” etc., but rape;
- if the survivor is not physically injured during sexual violence, do not depict her as “unharmred” – sexual violence is, in itself, a crime and may or may not involve the use of force; therefore, there are no “unharmred” rape survivors, as they have certainly sustained different – often psychological – consequences of what happened to them;
- use wording that emphasises the responsibility of the perpetrator and avoids passivisation and further victimisation and distrust of the survivor (“he raped her”, not “she was raped”; “he was arrested for reported rape”, not “he was arrested for alleged rape”);
- especially make sure to avoid downplaying “minor” forms of violence, such as sexual harassment, which is a criminal offence (e.g. do not confuse it with flirting and do not justify it by culture, mentality and the like);
- especially in situations of sexual violence, always bear in mind that sexual violence is any act in the sphere of sexuality committed against a person without that person’s consent; therefore, it is essential to avoid seeking and providing evidence of the use of force, since it is not a necessary element of sexual violence, and this also downplays violence where force was not used – in situations of sexual violence, one of the most common reactions is “freezing up”, stillness of the victim, i.e. the body’s inability to defend itself.
- It should be noted that – if violence is not proved and the perpetrator is not convicted – it does not mean that it did not happen:
 - this is especially important in cases of sexual violence, which is more difficult to prove, which is why it is crucial not to call the survivor a “liar”;

- in particular, refer to the “Due Diligence” chapter of the *Serbian Journalists’ Code of Ethics*, since two seemingly contradictory things need to be done: keep in mind that violence may have happened and, at the same time, respect the presumption of innocence – nevertheless, this is all easily achievable in reporting if the above guidelines are followed.

A media report should not be accompanied by photographs/video footage that depicts violence, survivors/victims and perpetrators in an inadequate and stereotypical manner.

- Photographs and video footage that reveal the identity of the survivor/victim and/or her family members should not be used.
- Photographs and video footage showing simulations of violence (e.g. a woman cowering in a corner and a man standing over her with a raised fist/knife) should be avoided:
 - such content, although not real, leads to retraumatisation and consolidation of the negative sense of victimhood, rather than to a sense of one’s own strength and transition from victim to survivor.
- Photographs and video footage showing women with bruises should not be used – both because of retraumatisation and because this creates a profile of survivor/victim who is always physically injured, which lowers the awareness of psychological, sexual and economic violence.
- Photographs or photographic montages in which the perpetrator and the victim/ survivor are positioned next to each other should not be used, since this romanticises their relationship and puts them at the same level, which, in particular, may additionally traumatise the survivor.
- Do not use photographs of the victim/survivor, perpetrator or persons close to them from social network profiles – in addition to further victimising survivors and encouraging a culture of violence through comments and messages, which are often left on perpetrators’ or victims’/survivors’ profiles and which are of a violent nature, we may also put them at risk or expose them to threats outside social networks, reveal their identities and indirectly victimise their family members, especially children.
- Ideally, drawings or other types of illustrations showing survivor’s/victim’s feelings, as well as their strength, should be used:

- for instance, it is acceptable to use drawings or animation, but, preferably, female figures should not be shown only with their lips sealed, without voice;
- female figures may be shown crying/worried, but, preferably, their strength and determination should be noticeable at the same time (e.g. her fist is clenched; her gaze is determined; she stands upright, rather than sitting or cowering; she holds a child tight, whose face is not visible; she looks out of a window, worried but standing tall; a man stands behind her, but she holds a child tight and is seen going away from him, leaving him).
- It should be noted that not every report needs to be accompanied by a photograph or video; it is also possible to use infographics or charts showing statistical data on violence, or photographs/video footage/other materials from women's organisations' protests, photographs of hands in handcuffs, a police vehicle, a judge's gavel, etc.
- Reports may also be accompanied by a photograph/video footage of an expert or other interlocutors.
- When choosing visual materials to accompany a story, photographs or video footage that may retraumatise the interlocutor or women with similar experiences should, preferably, be avoided. Preferably, contents with stylised images of violence, where the victim is crying, on a bed, in a passive position etc. should be avoided. If the survivor is a public personality, e.g. an actress, which has happened in practice, avoid excerpts from films or series where the survivor appears in a scene of violence or sex. If both the perpetrator and the victim are public personalities, it is not advisable to use collages or photographic montages in which they are positioned next to each other or which in any way suggest that she is subordinated to him.

A media report should clearly indicate that violence against women is a social problem stemming from unequal power relations between men and women.

- Violence against women should be considered and reported on in the context of unequal power relations between men and women.
- It should be borne in mind that there are different forms of violence against women and that each has its specific features (e.g. domestic/intimate partner violence,

sexual violence, trafficking in women, forced or early marriage, etc), and that, at the same time, each constitutes a gross violation of human rights and a severe social problem, rather than a private one.

- The statements of persons suspected or convicted of violence should be conveyed carefully:
 - avoid giving public space to perpetrators, who may use it to manipulate survivors, the public and the system, by presenting themselves as victims as well;
 - never air a “confrontation” of the survivor and the perpetrator on the programme or use polygraphs “on air” to provide further proof of violence – the role of the media and media content consumers is not to act as judges.
- When addressing all forms of violence against women, the survivor’s subjective feeling should be acknowledged:
 - this is especially important with regard to sexual harassment, which entirely depends on the survivor’s subjective feeling;
 - this rule does not apply to violence committed against a minor (even where she does want a relationship with an older man, it is his responsibility not to agree to it; otherwise, it is a criminal act.
- When reporting on women who have committed violence:
 - do not hesitate to state the fact that there are women abusers, and report on it in accordance with all other recommendations given herein; however, keep in mind that men prevail among perpetrators of domestic and intimate partner violence, while women are victims in most cases (official statistics of reported domestic violence cases is available on the Ministry of Justice’s website *Isključi nasilje* (Stop Violence));¹
 - keep in mind that a woman’s violent behaviour is often a reaction to the violence she has been subjected to in the relationship, try to obtain data on it and examine the case thoroughly;
 - where a woman has killed her partner, always examine whether she has killed an abuser.

1 Available at: <https://iskljucinasilje.rs/>.

- When reporting on violence against women, especially in situations where the victim/survivor and/or the abuser are officials of a given political organisation, it is extremely important not to reduce violence to a problem that is only prevalent among people of a given political affiliation. At the same time, reporting must not be reduced to political altercations between two political groups, and violence must not be abused to score political points.

A media report should fulfil an educational role as well.

- Reporting on specific cases of violence should be set in a broader context of this problem by using statistical data, highlighting the prevalence of violence against women and possibly describing the phenomenon.
- Reporting on specific situations of violence should be substantiated by statements from experts (from the state or civil sector), who can put each specific case into context.
- At every opportunity, the key risks that increase the likelihood of a fatal outcome (femicide) should be pointed out – jealousy, the moment when the woman decides to leave or report the abuser, and the fact that the abuser possesses a weapon or has access to one.
- At every opportunity, the media report should mention the contact details of organisations and institutions that survivors may approach.

The media should also fulfil their educational role when reporting on violence against women committed through firearms misuse.

- The media should not only report on specific events, but also explore this topic in a preventive, evidence- and knowledge-based manner, without superficiality and banality leading to the normalisation and glorification of firearms culture.

It is recommended that the media include topics such as:

- information about the risks and consequences of firearms misuse, such as their lethal power, risk of injury and permanent disability, potential for multiple and mass killings;
- broader reporting not only on cases where firearms were discharged, but also on all cases where they were present in households in which violence occurred, where firearms were used for intimidation and threats;
- gender-specific details of firearm possession and misuse – who possesses firearms, whether firearms are more likely to contribute to men and women’s safety or to misuse, such as domestic violence and violence against women, including femicide;
- relationship between hatred towards women, violence against women, firearms, participation in wars, history of violent behaviour, presence of post-traumatic syndrome, especially in the context of multiple and mass killings;
- relationship between cases of femicide followed by the perpetrator’s suicide and his mental condition;
- measures taken in respect of members of state authorities who carry service weapons and are perpetrators of violence, and measures to prevent firearms misuse for domestic violence where these persons may be perpetrators;
- system-wide arrangements to provide care and support to survivors and their families or victims’ families (no possibility to claim compensation from the state; protracted, discouraging and inefficient processes to claim compensation from perpetrators; systematic care and psychological support for children whose mothers were killed by their fathers);
- impact of tradition, customs, popular culture etc. on citizens’, especially young men’s views about firearms, with the aim of addressing the problem in a comprehensive and prevention-oriented way.

In addition to experts on specific subjects, questions on each of these topics must also be asked to professionals from institutions, review their work and call them to account in case of failure or omission.

Further specific features of reporting on violence against women and domestic violence:

- When reporting on femicide, it is necessary to:
 - research whether there were prior reports of violence and how the institutions responded;
 - not convey surprise if there were no prior reports of violence – this shifts the responsibility to the victim by implying that she should have sought help, while the perpetrator is absolved;
 - put femicide in the context of the story of prior violence, although it was not reported – femicide is always the final and most brutal form of violence against a woman;
 - keep in mind the data indicating high risk of femicide and make a link with them (jealousy/control, victim's decision to leave, weapon possession);
 - keep in mind the risks of femicide specific to this region, such as armed conflicts in former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), which enabled a number of civilians to access firearms and caused post-traumatic syndrome in a number of war veterans, as well as the impact of these factors on violence against women;
 - if the murder was committed with a firearm, report on this fact, check whether the perpetrator possessed the firearm legally or not, and mention the context surrounding the prevalence of legal and illegal firearms in households;
 - avoid details concerning how the murder was committed, the specific location and the like;
 - follow the story through – report on the progress of the trial and the penalty imposed on the murderer;
 - clearly specify the motive (e.g. hatred towards a specific woman) in cases of multiple murders (e.g. the Žitište case).
- When reporting on violence, with regard to women with children, or where children themselves have survived violence:
 - keep in mind that children are always victims of domestic violence – either directly or indirectly;

- avoid stereotypes about “children needing both parents “– children need parents and an environment that are not violent;
- avoid taking statements from children because of the sensitivity of the situation and vulnerability of this group, even where a parent or guardian has given consent;
- be careful with the amount of information conveyed – never reveal the child’s identity or details that could lead to his/her identity being revealed; it is acceptable to convey the information about the number of children and their ages, but not their initials, place where they live, school they attend or full name of a relative, since those details can easily lead to their identification.

When reporting on revenge porn:*

- The focus of reporting should not be on the woman whose private videos/ photographs have been shared online, which is most often the case, but rather the perpetrator or perpetrators and the phenomenon of violence.
- Media reports should avoid naming the websites and groups for revenge porn distribution, especially in cases where those groups and websites are still active.
- When reporting on celebrities’ revenge porn, the media should avoid implying or expressly stating that the celebrity has benefitted from revenge porn (popularity, income).
- The focus of the media report should not be on the intimate relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, to avoid perpetuating the idea that revenge porn is motivated solely by revenge and jealousy and that revenge porn is something that happens between only two people – the survivor and the perpetrator.

* Non-consensual pornography (whose most common form is known as “revenge porn”) includes the distribution of sexual photographs or videos without the consent of the individual in the images. The perpetrator is often a former partner who receives the photographs or videos during the past relationship and aims to publicly shame and humiliate the victim, as reprisal for ending the relationship. However, perpetrators are not necessarily partners or former partners and the motive is not always revenge. Images may also be obtained by hacking into the victim’s computer, social media accounts or telephone, and may be aimed at causing harm in the “real world” (e.g. to get the person fired from a job, or in some cases, to cause suicide).

Source: European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1488?lang=en>

- The media should stress that revenge porn is a form of gender-based sexual violence, although it is not recognised as violence by the Republic of Serbia's criminal law framework – accordingly, the media report should include the information that revenge porn is criminalised in some countries (Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, Malta etc.) and point to the need to criminalise this form of violence in the Republic of Serbia as well.
- Media reports on revenge porn should include information on the negative impact of this form of violence on the survivor's psychological condition and her further safety.

HOW TO APPROACH A WOMAN SURVIVOR OF VIOLENCE

- Taking statements should be avoided, unless the journalist has been specifically trained (familiarity with the phenomenon of violence, basic knowledge of trauma, understanding of laws and interviewing skills are required).
- If the survivor approaches the journalist herself, wishing to talk publicly about her experience, it is essential to consult women experts (e.g. psychologists, lawyers, activists etc.) working with survivors (contact details available below).
- If talking to the survivor cannot be avoided, make sure that the interlocutor has overcome trauma, has an experience of life without violence after having lived through this experience and is capable of encouraging and empowering other women.
- Take care of the survivor's safety (take account of the circumstances, her location and the perpetrator's location), even when the statements are anonymous.
- Believe survivors!
- Bear in mind that a survivor in a state of trauma is not a reliable interlocutor, that her train of thought is unclear and she may give contradictory statements – these are all normal characteristics of a person who has survived a traumatic experience.
- The survivor should be warned of the possible consequences of her statement:

the impact of a public statement on the survivor's (and her children's) safety, the possibility of her community questioning her statement and doubting her, not believing her statement, laying blame, retraumatisation etc.

- No questions should be asked about children, as the fact that she exposed her children to public attention can be used against the survivor in a possible custody trial, of which survivors are often not aware or lack knowledge.
- “Why didn’t you” questions should not be asked and – in general – particular attention should be paid to anything that can cause secondary traumatisation of the survivor (the violence a woman has experienced, especially sexual violence, is accompanied by feelings of guilt, shame and embarrassment – the interview should, therefore, be conducted by using carefully chosen words that in no way imply that the survivor has done anything wrong or that she is responsible; do not touch the survivor or make sudden moves, especially if she is still in a state of trauma).
- It is especially important not to ask questions such as: “Why didn’t you leave him?” or “Why did you go back to him?” – having in mind that it has been established that a woman leaves the abuser and goes back to him, on average, between seven and eleven times before finally leaving him, and that there are many reasons why this happens (e.g. loss of self-confidence and faith in herself, loss of resources and support, inadequate institutional response, impunity if the abuser is reported, economic situation).
- Never cross-examine the abuser and the survivor (either indirectly – through the print media, or directly – through the electronic media) or bring them to the same place at the same time.
- Never tell the survivor what you would do in her situation or what you think she should do – regardless of the fact that she may ask you to.
- Keep the promises you give to the survivor – if you say that you will send her the text before publishing it, do so. She also has the right to change her mind. It would be good to send her the parts of the text that contain her statements– it will mean a lot to her to read her own words, you will also build a relationship of trust, and she may want to put a stronger emphasis on something when she reads the text.
- Thank the survivor for her statement and remind her how brave she is to talk about it.
- Try to remain available for a follow-up interview with the survivor (especially if the text/feature becomes highly visible and influential).

- Bear in mind that interviewing the survivor may affect you – prepare for it psychologically in order to be aware that you may be overwhelmed by emotions; work on yourself before and after the interview.
- Do not get emotionally attached to the survivor – you are a journalist and should not intervene in the case in any way except by professional and ethical reporting; you must have empathy, but any closer bonding may prove to be bad for both you and her.

STORIES OF WOMEN SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE

- Never call the woman first. If she calls you herself or contacts you through an intermediary, respond as soon as possible. Women who decide to go to the media with their experience of sexual and other forms of gender-based violence usually take a long time to prepare for it, and when they are finally encouraged, if they wait too long, they may feel let down again.
- Arrange a meeting with the survivor where she feels safest – a public place, editorial office, her private space, online video-meeting etc. Do not bring anyone else to the meeting, such as a photo reporter or camera operator. The relationship of trust with the survivor is crucial and you must build it on your own. The presence of a third person may make the survivor feel threatened.
- When making arrangements to meet, offer the survivor, if she feels more comfortable, to describe her experience in writing and send it to you, but only if she is happy with that approach.
- At the beginning of the interview, the most important part is to clarify the survivor's expectations of going public with the story. Only after this will you decide whether to publish her story or not. Your decision solely depends on your assessment whether a media outlet can fulfil the survivor's expectations. Always keep in mind that survivors sometimes want to go public since they believe that this is the only way to get institutions' attention and that institutions will do a better job as a result of such pressure. It should be made clear to them that this may not be the case, and cases currently handled by institutions should be approached carefully (if at all). Explain to the survivor that going public guarantees neither arrest nor conviction of the perpetrator. The only thing that a media outlet can offer to a survivor is to make sure her voice is heard.

- Try to assess whether going public will bring relief to the survivor or additionally traumatise her. This requires making sure that she has professional psychological support and that her trauma has been processed. If this is not the case, the most meaningful decision is to decline to publish the story, refer the survivor to a direct support system (such as a helpline or organisations providing that type of assistance) and leave the possibility of publishing the story for a future time when the survivor's psychological condition improves.
- As the next step, it is essential to give the survivor the possibility of changing her mind at any time and choosing not to go public, without giving any additional explanations or reasons. By all means, make it clear that this is only possible until a specific point, e.g. until the newspaper is sent to print, after which you are no longer able to withdraw the story.
- Start talking about the experience of sexual violence itself by telling the survivor that not knowing where to begin is quite normal. Let her begin where she wants, and ask follow-up questions discreetly and tactfully to clarify any ambiguities.
- Make sure the questions are not threatening. Politely ask for additional clarification or admit that you did not understand a part of the survivor's story.
- Owing to the draining nature of the topic and the survivor's trauma, try to wrap up the interview in no more than one hour. After 45 minutes, ask the interlocutor if she feels tired and let her know that you are aware how hard all this can be for her. Also, after 45 minutes, the interlocutor will often start to repeat herself or go around in circles. If you see that this is happening, suggest stopping the interview there and then and immediately make another appointment to continue.
- Do not expect to be able to collect everything you need for the story in one interview with the survivor. Do not be surprised that the survivor cannot recall all the details that seem important to you. Traumatic memory is not chronological, and the brain represses certain details. Never show the survivor that you are frustrated by this; rather, let her know that not being able to remember everything is quite normal
- While working on the story, consult psychologists working with sexual violence victims. Ask everything you want to know about the nature of sexual trauma, but do not expect to be able to learn everything about this phenomenon, owing to its complex and sensitive nature. Rely on experts' opinion for assistance, but always keep in mind that you are a journalist, and not a person trained in providing direct assistance to survivors.

- In contrast with standard journalistic work, where you have full control of every aspect of the story as its author, when it comes to stories about sexual violence, you yield control of the story to the survivor by making sure that nothing she tells you is published without her consent. Let her read her every word multiple times and change, remove or add what she thinks is important.
- Do not forget about your duty to take care of the victim's dignity: if her story contains elements that are brutal or humiliating to her personally, do not publish them, but explain to the survivor in detail why this is in her best interest.
- Where possible, together with the survivor, prepare a plan of conduct after publication – what to do if the story is picked up by tabloids, where attacks on you or the survivor may come from – and devise coping strategies for the period after the article is published. Suggest that she “withdraw” from social networks and that she request a few people around her to filter and forward reactions to her story, if she wants.
- In the relationship with the survivor, because a relationship of trust is built, an emotional bond is forged that continues after the story is published. It is, therefore, important to discuss the nature of your relationship with the survivor again, immediately before the story is published, stressing that you are a journalist and that your role is to make her voice heard. This means that, once her story is out, she can contact you at any time and share the news of any progress in her case, but that, for your own protection, you cannot take over the burden of her trauma, or make her sexual trauma disappear by publishing her story.

REPORTING ON JUDICIAL PROCESSES CONCERNING VIOLENCE/DIVORCE/ CHILD CUSTODY

- Reporting on proceedings in progress, should be avoided.
- No statements should be taken from either party.
- No statements should be taken from either party.
- Any questions about children should be avoided, including those such as “Why did you leave your children with your husband?”, – because we do not know under what circumstances the survivor escaped and how she is now fighting to regain custody of her children.

- Questions such as: “Why did you drop charges/refuse to testify?” should be avoided – because this shifts responsibility back to the survivor, and domestic violence is a criminal offence prosecutable ex officio irrespective of the survivor’s willingness to take an active part in the process, which she is often incapable of doing owing to the psychological and/or other exhaustion resulting from being subjected to violence.
- When reporting on criminal proceedings, the terms defined by the Criminal Proceedings Code should be kept in mind and consistently used (“suspect”, “defendant”, “accused”, “convicted” etc.); do not use terms such as “alleged”, “wrongly accused” and the like – judgment should be left to the judicial authorities.
- Where fathers claim that children have been taken away from them unfairly, it should be checked whether they are being or have been prosecuted for domestic violence.

COMMENTS ON PORTALS AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

- It would be preferable to lock articles on violence for comments, owing to a high probability that commenters will cause secondary victimisation and retraumatisation – either of the survivor concerned or of women who have had or are having the same experience – which may discourage them from reporting the abuser.
- On media outlets’ social network accounts, increased attention should be paid to the administration of comments (e.g. on Facebook and YouTube, while these news items should preferably not be posted on Twitter, where moderation is not possible, unless the media outlet has a dedicated staff member dealing only with social networks, who can respond to a problematic commenter and/or block him/her).
- You should be prepared for the possibility of survivors contacting you in comments or by direct messages, and provide clear instructions to moderators on how to act in such cases, i.e. where to refer the survivors.

FURTHER LITERATURE AND RESOURCES

- ***Mediji u Srbiji o rodno zasnovanom nasilju u 2015. i 2016. godini: Kako protiv nasilja – uloga medija (Serbian Media on Gender-Based Violence in 2015 and 2016: How to Counter Violence – the Role of the Media)***

Published by: UNDP

Year: 2017

<https://www.rs.undp.org/content/serbia/sr/home/library/poverty/kako-protiv-nasilja---uloga-medija.html>

- ***Portret nasuprot pejzaža: Analiza medijskog izveštavanja o zloupotrebi vatrenog oružja za muško nasilje prema ženama (A Portrait against a Landscape: Analysis of media coverage of firearm misuse in violence against women committed by men)***

Izdavač: UNDP

Year: 2020

<https://www.rs.undp.org/content/serbia/en/home/library/search.html?q=portrait&tagid=>

- ***Vodič za novinar(k)e: Nasilje u porodici, II izdanje (A Guide for Journalists: Domestic Violence, Second Edition)***

Published by: Autonomous Women's Centre

Year: 2018

<https://womenggo.org.rs/publikacije/razvoj-dobrih-praksi/857-vodic-za-novinarke-nasilje-u-porodici-ii-izdanje-2018>

- ***Kako vas žene čitaju? – Medijsko izveštavanje štampanih medija o muškom nasilju prema ženama u porodici i partnerskim odnosima iz perspektive žena koje su preživele nasilje (How Women Read You? – Print Media Reporting on Men's Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence against Women from the Perspective of Survivors)***

Published by: Autonomous Women's Centre

Year: 2017

https://zeneprotivnasilja.net/images/pdf/literatura/Kako_vas_zene_citaju.pdf

- ***Kodeks novinara Srbije (Serbian Journalists' Code of Ethics)***

Published by: Press Council

Year: 2015

<https://savetzastampu.rs/dokumenta/kodeks-novinara-srbije>

- ***Medijski kodeks – Vodič za profesionalno i senzibilizirano izvještavanje o nasilju prema ženama i femicidu (Media Code of Ethics – A Guide for Professional and Sensitive Reporting on Violence against Women)***

Published by: Gender Equality Ombudsperson of the Republic of Croatia

Year: 2019

http://vawa.prs.hr/storage/uploads/publikacije/MEDIJSKI-KODEKS-vodic-za-profesionalno-i-senzibilizirano-izvjestavanje-o-nasilju-prema-zenama-i-femicidu_PRS_VAWA-800a.pdf

- ***Isključi nasilje (Stop Violence) – Website of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Serbia on the implementation of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence***

<https://iskljucinasilje.rs/>

- ***List of women's NGOs providing individual support to women survivors of men's violence in Serbia within the "Women against Violence" Network***

<https://zeneprotivnasilja.net/o-nama/spisak-organizacija>

- ***Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma***

<https://dartcenter.org>



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