

EMBARGOED UNTIL 24TH November, 9 AM GMT

Reporting on Violence Against Women: A Fact Sheet

What is Violence against Women?

- The **1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women**, defines violence against women as *any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life*. It includes: domestic violence, sexual violence, emotional and psychological abuse, forced prostitution, trafficking for forced labour or prostitution, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, harmful traditional practices (including honour killings and infanticide) and other discriminatory practices based on gender.
- The **World Health Organisation** lists the following as additional categories examples of **sexual violence against women**:
 - Rape within marriage, in dating relationships and by strangers
 - Systemic rape during armed conflict (including kidnapping of young girls for impregnation)
 - Unwanted sexual advances or harassment, including demanding sex in return for favours
 - Forced marriage or cohabitation, including the marriage of children
 - Denial of the right to use contraception or to adopt other measures to protect against sexually transmitted disease
 - Violent acts against the sexual (or bodily integrity) of women, including female genital mutilation, obligatory inspections for virginity and forced abortion
 - Forced prostitution and trafficking of people for the purpose of sexual exploitation
- **Human Rights Watch** says: **Nearly one in four women** around the world experiences sexual violence during her lifetime, according to the World Health Organization. **Up to a third of all women** have been physically assaulted by an intimate male partner. Survivors of violence often under report their experiences because of social stigma (within their own communities), fears about their safety, and lack of appropriate response from institutions meant to protect them.

Where is it happening?

- **Amnesty International** reports:
 - In **Europe**, domestic violence is the major cause of death and disability for women aged 16-44.
 - In the **United States**, a woman is raped every 6 minutes; a woman is battered every 15 seconds.
 - Rape of women is widespread in armed conflicts such as **Colombia** and **Darfur**.
 - Trafficking of women has become a global phenomenon where victims are sexually exploited, forced into labour and subjected to abuse. Murders of women in **Guatemala**, **Russia**, **India**, and other countries often go un-investigated and unpunished.

- In many countries, domestic violence is not even against the law, and labour laws against bullying and harassment are weak or non-existent.

What can the media do?

As well as reporting this issue in depth and with greater sensitivity media must adopt an internal culture of respect that eliminates all forms of harassment, bullying or any form of discrimination based upon gender. Media must ensure that they report fairly and accurately, and appropriately, wherever there is violence against women.

Violence against women and girls remains under reported, or badly reported, in the news. Very often media fail to take account of or give prominence to the systemic sexual violence occurring as a result of armed conflict, often from both sides. Additionally, the 2005 Global Media Monitoring Project reveals that domestic and sexual violence are the least reported subjects among those where women are portrayed as a victim.

Media must do more to ensure that the public has a realistic, inclusive and accurate account of the horrifying prevalence of violence against women on an international scale.

However, reporting on such a sensitive issue cannot be improvised. It requires professionalism, humanity and respect. A failure to apply the highest standards in dealing with those affected such as poor conduct of interviews can compound the trauma and may even add to the suffering and worsen the long-term impact of the ordeal on survivors.



IFJ Guidelines for Reporting on Violence Against Women

1. **Identify violence against women** accurately through the internationally accepted definition in the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.
2. **Use accurate, non-judgmental language.** For instance, rape or sexual assault is not in any way to be associated with normal sexual activity; and trafficking in women is not to be confused with prostitution. Good journalists will strike a balance when deciding how much graphic detail to include. Too much may be sensationalist and can be gratuitous; too little can weaken the victim's case. At all times, the language of reporting should avoid suggestions that the survivors may be to blame, or were otherwise responsible for the attack or acts of violence against them.

3. **People who suffer in such an ordeal will not wish to be described as a 'victim' unless they use the word themselves.** The use of labels can be harmful. A term that more accurately describes the reality of a person who has suffered in this way is 'survivor.'
4. **Sensitive reporting means ensuring that contact for media interview meets the needs of the survivor.** A female interviewer should be on hand and the setting must always be secure and private, recognising that there may be a social stigma attached. Media must do everything they can to avoid exposing the interviewee to further abuse. This includes avoiding actions that may undermine their quality of life or their standing in the community.
5. **Treat the survivor with respect.** For journalists this means respecting privacy, providing detailed and complete information about the topics to be covered in any interview, as well as how it will be reported. Survivors have the right to refuse to answer any questions or not to divulge more than they are comfortable with. Journalists should make themselves available for later contact; providing contact details to interviewee will ensure they are able to keep in contact if they wish or need to do so.
6. **Use statistics and social background information** to place the incident within the context of violence in the community, or conflict. Readers and the media audience need to be informed of the bigger picture. The opinion of experts on violence against women such as the DART centre will always increase the depth of understanding by providing relevant and useful information. This will also ensure that media never give the impression that violence against women has an inexplicable tragedy that cannot be solved.
7. **Tell the whole story:** sometimes media identify specific incidents and focus on the tragic aspects of it, but reporters do well to understand that abuse might be part of a long-standing social problem, armed conflict, or part of a community history.
8. **Maintain confidentiality:** as part of their duty of care media and journalists have an ethical responsibility not to publish or broadcast names or identify places that in any way might further compromise the safety and security of survivors or witnesses. This is particularly important when those responsible for violence are the police, or troops in a conflict, or agents of the state or government, or people connected with other large and powerful organisations.
9. **Use local resources:** Media who take contact with experts, women groups and organisations on the ground about proper interviewing techniques, questions and places will always do good work and avoid situations – such as where it is unacceptable for male camera workers or reporters to enter a secluded place – which can cause embarrassment or hostility. There is always virtue in reporters educating themselves on the specific cultural contexts and respect them.
10. **Provide Useful Information:** reports that include details of sources and the contact details of local support organizations and services will provide vital and helpful information for survivors/witnesses and their families and others who may be affected.

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