“When I speak to journalists about what I experience, many times it feels as though they don’t understand what we go through as women in this camp. We pour our hearts out, but we rarely see our issues being discussed.”

— AMAL, refugee from Damascus, Syria
Journalism is among the most powerful tools for social justice, particularly in the global fight against gender-based violence. Journalists have the power to amplify the voices of women and girls, to shed light on the forms of violence that target them, and to help communities worldwide address the harmful social norms that underpin gender-inequality and gender-based violence.

— NATALIA KANEM, UNFPA Executive Director
Before you report, I want you to place yourself in the shoes of the individual or group on whom you are reporting. How would you feel if you were portrayed in the same way?

— NADINE NIMRI, Jordanian journalist and media trainer

UNFPA is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. Our mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled.
INTRODUCTION

By not adhering to rigid standards of professionalism, journalists can unwittingly become part of the problem, causing further trauma to survivors and allowing perpetrators to evade prosecution.

“When I speak to journalists, many times it feels as though they don’t understand what we go through as women in this camp,” says Amal, a Syrian refugee from Qamishli who had gone out of her way to communicate with journalists on the issues impacting Syrian women and girls. “It is a daily struggle and we are powerless amidst the traditions, rules and laws that make it much easier for men to take advantage of us. We pour our hearts out, but we rarely see our issues being discussed.”

For women and girls like Amal, many of whom grapple with various forms of gender-based violence on a daily basis, journalism constitutes one of the few available avenues for their stories to be heard. This function becomes even more critical during humanitarian crises, such as those currently taking place in numerous countries in the Arab region, including Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and others.

For a journalist, covering the topic of gender-based violence (GBV) is a challenging undertaking. Not only is the topic itself widely misunderstood, but it is also increasingly complex and has many contributing factors, making coverage all the more difficult. More importantly, journalists need to be aware that their coverage — if not conducted under strict professional standards — can be harmful to survivors in a multitude of ways. Between insensitive interviewing techniques, inaccurate reporting, personal biases and perceptions about gender and sexuality, and a lack of understanding of the legalities of criminal cases, journalists can unwittingly become part of the problem, re-traumatising survivors and allowing perpetrators to escape prosecution.

These challenges can often drive journalists to avoid reporting on GBV altogether, further compounding the problem by perpetuating a culture of impunity in which perpetrators are seldom held accountable.

While effective journalism is often the result of years of experience and diligent practice, building upon internationally-accepted ethical principles and approaches minimises the potential for harm.

This handbook was developed to help journalists report on GBV with greater ease and awareness. It provides essential information on the definition and root causes of GBV, in addition to a simple set of guidelines and best practices that facilitate the process and help journalists deliver stronger, more impactful stories on this essential topic.
Sexual violence is an epidemic that thrives in times of conflict and during emergencies, once the rule of law and criminal justice systems collapse and, far too often, rape is wielded as a weapon of war.

More than 200 million girls and women have experienced some form of female genital mutilation (FGM) in the 29 countries in Africa. 4

More than 700 million women alive today were married as children (below 18 years of age), and of those, more than one in three were married before 15 years of age. 3

A total of 87,000 women were intentionally killed in 2017. More than half of them (56 per cent) were killed by intimate partners or family members, meaning that 137 women across the world are killed by a member of their own family every day. 2

Worldwide, more than 700 million women alive today were married as children (below 18 years of age), and of those, more than one in three were married before 15 years of age. 1

What is gender-based violence?

In many cultures, gender-based violence is seldom openly discussed, which drives the subject underground and further propagates many of the misconceptions surrounding it. As such, understanding GBV and its causal and contributing factors is of paramount importance when reporting on it.

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 differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty.

Gender-based violence can be broadly defined into five categories: sexual violence (rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment), physical violence (hitting, slapping, beating), emotional violence (psychological and verbal abuse), economic violence (restriction of movement, denial of resources), and harmful traditional practices (child marriage, female genital mutilation, so-called “honour” killings).

Who is at risk?
The term “gender-based violence” is most commonly used to refer to violence perpetrated against women and girls.

While women, men, boys and girls can be at risk of gender-based violence, women and girls continue to be the overwhelming majority of survivors and victims due to the deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs, attitudes and social norms that prevail in numerous communities throughout the globe. This gives women and girls a perceived subordinate status, cultivating an environment that is conducive to deprivations of liberty and abuse. This is often reinforced through various socio-cultural institutions, such as educational, religious and legal institutions.

In the words of Awa, a 17-year-old Yazidi girl who is a survivor of sexual violence, “being a girl is like being born into a prison. No place is safe, not even your own home, and you are always at risk of being harassed, abducted, raped or forced into marriage even when you don’t want to.”

GBV is also used by some people to describe the “gendered dimensions of certain forms of violence against men and boys, particularly sexual violence committed with the purpose of reinforcing socially constructed ideas of what it means to be a man and male power.”

What are the consequences?

Gender-based violence has serious, immediate and long-term consequences on the sexual, physical and psychological health of survivors. In addition to causing a variety of psychological disorders among survivors, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), GBV can have a wide range of health consequences that include severe physical injuries, unwanted pregnancies, complications from unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted infections, and death from complications arising from these conditions.

Survivors of GBV may suffer even further because of the stigma associated with this type of violence. When ostracised by their family or community, survivors are affected both economically and socially. This stigmatisation not only places them at greater risk for exploitation and violence but can endanger their lives, particularly when male members of the family/community retaliate with physical violence or so-called “honour” killings.

Not only is GBV a violation of individual human rights, but the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators and the fear generated by their actions poses a serious and far-reaching risk to all women and girls and on the fabric of society as a whole. Gender inequality and GBV can also contribute to the disintegration of inherent protection mechanisms that safeguard civil liberties, freedom of expression, social justice, and social progress. Moreover, societies in which GBV is accepted tend to limit the contributions women and girls can make to development and peacebuilding, which can considerably compromise the countries’ resilience to geopolitical, economic and humanitarian emergencies.

The root causes of gender-based violence are simple. Deeply-rooted beliefs of male supremacy place women and girls at particular risk of discrimination and marginalisation, making them more at risk of gender-based violence. This risk is further exacerbated during humanitarian crises, when even the most basic protection mechanisms and social networks are disrupted or absent.

Gender discrimination often results in the unequal distribution of power between men and women, combined with socially prescribed gender roles and stereotypes that also play a part in causing, perpetuating and accepting gender-based violence.

DEFINING GBV

Gender-based violence is a sensitive subject with numerous underlying factors and consequences. As such, understanding the subject is essential, particularly when reporting on it.
COMMON MYTHS

About Gender-Based Violence

In most cultures, GBV is not openly discussed. As a result, several myths about GBV remain in circulation. Inaccurate perpetrator profiles, and a focus on the behaviour of GBV survivors can also influence access to justice. The media has a role to play in counteracting these inaccuracies.

Myth: GBV only affects certain kinds of people

GBV can affect anyone. It cuts across class, race/ethnicity, religion, educational level, or personal history. Negative assumptions about GBV survivors make it difficult for them to reach out for help.

Myth: Sexual assault is usually committed by strangers

According to World Health Organisation estimates, almost a third of all women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner, and up to 70 percent of sexual assaults are committed by an intimate partner.

Myth: Perpetrators of violence are ‘monsters’ or ‘sick outsiders’

Perpetrators come from all walks of life. As a result, when survivors report violence perpetrated by their partner, an influential figure in the community, or someone who does not conform to the stereotype of a perpetrator, they are often not believed.

Myth: A woman’s choice of clothing and her behaviour puts her at risk

Abusers often blame their victims in order to make excuses for their behaviour. This is in itself abusive and shifts the focus away from the perpetrator. It is important that abusers take full responsibility for their actions, and that reporters challenge any attempt to blame those who are abused.

Myth: Poverty and conflict are the cause of attacks on women

There are many men living in conditions of poverty or conflict who are not violent towards women, just as there are many individuals in wealthy countries and in times of peace who are violent towards women. While some studies have found poverty and violent conflict to increase the likelihood of certain kinds of GBV, it is seen as a global problem.

Myth: A person who has been raped or abused will be visibly upset when discussing her ordeal

Each person reacts differently to GBV. It is important to be aware of the wide range of reactions to such traumatic events: some survivors choose to never speak about what happened to them or they may do so after several months, or even years, while others will choose to disclose immediately. Expecting or compelling survivors to follow a shared behavioural pattern is not only potentially harmful to their recovery but can also shift the focus away from perpetrators, further compounding the problem.

Myth: False reporting is widespread or used by women in order to access services and resettlement

Overall, false reporting is rather rare, with under-reporting being a more widespread and serious problem. Research published in the American Journal of Epidemiology indicates that only around 7 percent of survivors in developing countries officially report incidents of GBV, and research suggests that the fear of losing out on housing and other services, or losing custody of children, prevents many GBV survivors from coming forward to report incidents. ²

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2. Tia Palermo, Jennifer Bleck, and Amber Peterman, Tip of the Iceberg: Reporting and Gender-Based Violence in Developing Countries, American Journal of Epidemiology, 2013.
GBV IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS — ARAB STATES

A humanitarian crisis, geopolitical conflict, or natural disaster inevitably increases the risk of gender-based violence. Covering GBV in these settings requires additional care to prevent harm.

SYRIA

In Syria, nearly a decade after the crisis erupted in 2011, women and girls report that GBV continues to be a daily reality. Additionally, online harassment, revenge pornography, sexual assault, and sexual violence are all trends that were more frequently reported in 2019, while forced marriage, forced pregnancy and denial of economic opportunities emerged as new trends.

YEMEN

In Yemen, which is arguably facing one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time, numerous forms of GBV have been reported since the onset of the crisis. Sexual assault, child marriage, sexual violence, and domestic abuse. Nearly 27 percent of women displaced from Yemen are below age 18, putting them at greater risk of exploitation or of negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage, or survival sex.

IRAQ

In Iraq, GBV continues to be a scourge on the lives of women and girls. With restriction of movement, sexual harassment, and forced marriage identified as common trends. UNFPA estimates that 10 percent of girls aged under 14 could have undergone female genital mutilation in 2018, with the average age of cutting being five years old.

LIBYA

Libya continues to reel from the consequences of a protracted humanitarian crisis. Sexual violence, including sexual torture, is widespread in Libya. Sites of sexual violence include official detention centers, clandestine prisons, and in parts of the country, forced labour and enslavement during random stop and checks by armed groups. In urban settings by gangs, and in private homes.

SOMALIA

In Somalia, severe climatic conditions, clan and communal conflicts, and widespread poverty continue to expose women and girls to a multitude of risks. Women and girls are harassed as they journey back and forth to do petty trading of food and other domestic items. In particular, women are persistently harassed in IDP camps and host communities as they attempt to cover their basic needs, such as fetching water from nearby sources. Child marriage, female genital mutilation, violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and emotional violence were all identified as trends over the past years.

“What makes humanitarian settings different?”

As women and girls become separated from their families and protective communities, norms that govern social behaviour are disrupted. This presents an array of protection concerns that uniquely impact such settings.

Mass displacement leads to increased violence by causing further disruptions in community networks and creating environments where lawlessness can thrive. However, the underlying causes of GBV are associated with attitudes, beliefs, and structures in which there is gender discrimination and an inherent imbalance of power between genders.

In recent decades, efforts have been made to address sexual violence in emergencies. At the same time, there is growing recognition that populations affected by conflict and natural disaster experience different forms of GBV. Domestic violence, early marriage, and sexual exploitation are increasingly recognized as major concerns in such environments, particularly given the expected disruptions in basic services, livelihoods, and various protection mechanisms.

It is estimated that more than 37 percent of Arab women and girls have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime, with indicators showing that the percentage is likely higher due to underreporting as a result of fear, shame or social stigma. Moreover, given the cultural and contextual similarities between different countries in the region, gender-based violence appears to follow similar patterns, with restriction of movement and harmful practices.

In humanitarian settings, reporting in general, and on gender-based violence in particular, becomes even more challenging. Not only do journalists assume risks to their personal safety, but the potential for harmful reporting increases. As a general best practice, journalists working in humanitarian settings are always encouraged to seek the assistance of reputable organisations responding to GBV in humanitarian settings.

There are common areas of concern facing women and girls in humanitarian settings:

Access to support

In some places, services for GBV survivors either do not exist at all or are very limited, and survivors are reluctant to report GBV due to fear of stigma, social exclusion, so-called “honour killings,” and other reprisals. This prevents many survivors from seeking life-saving support.

Harassment and Restriction of Movement

Humanitarian conflicts often see the movement of women and girls curbed significantly. Many women and girls have limited movement outside the home due to fear of sexual violence and harassment. In some cases, extremists may place additional restrictions on women and girls, including strict dress codes, restrictions on access to education and employment, and limitations on engagement in public life. While the freedom of mobility was somewhat limited for many women and girls prior to displacement, increased fear of sexual assault and harassment has placed even further restrictions on displaced women and girls.

Domestic Violence

Women and girls in the Arab States region report that violence in the home has increased as a result of displacement and conflict. According to UNFPA’s programme data, domestic violence continues to be one of the most frequently reported trends across several countries. It is also important to note that child and forced marriage have been observed to increase the risk of domestic violence.

Child Marriage

Child marriage of girls is a relatively common practice in the Arab states region, but humanitarian conflicts have contributed to girls getting married younger and under different conditions. For example, girls are increasingly being married to older men not known to the family of the bride, or are entered into serial marriages in order to generate income for the family. Economic insecurity, the perception that marriage will provide protection for girls in an unstable environment, and lack of alternative opportunities are all factors contributing to this issue.

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Accessing humanitarian aid can carry increased risks of sexual exploitation and abuse by individuals charged with delivering humanitarian aid, or by those in positions of relative economic or political power in their own communities. It is not uncommon to hear of women or girls being engaged in “special friendships” with leaders in camps, religious leaders, community leaders, employers, landlords, and others. These often include being asked for sex or an agreement to marry, and sometimes involve men working in community organisations and distributing goods.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence can be used as a weapon of war. For instance, certain rebel groups might commit sexual violence when performing house searches, as well as at checkpoints and in detention centres. For example, women may be detained, tortured and physically abused, with the actions perpetrated against having a clear gender component. Upon release from detention and after house raids, women who are believed to have been sexually assaulted can often be alienated from their families, putting them at further risk of abuse or neglect. Viewed as “unit for marriage”, some may have been divorced or killed. The fear of sexual violence and its consequences is also a trigger in the displacement of many families.
THE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Even for the most experienced journalist, filing a story about GBV is likely to be one of the most challenging assignments.

There are a number of ethical principles of which journalists need to be aware when attempting to adopt a survivor-centered approach and adhering to a ‘do no harm’ strategy. These principles are based on the general ethics of journalism; however, in order to avoid harming survivors and successfully using journalism to effect positive change, additional care is required on behalf of any journalist reporting on this far-reaching form of violence.

**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.

**Accuracy**
Getting the facts right should be at the core of all journalism, and this is especially true when covering gender-based violence. While journalists’ interviews should be sensitive; they should also ensure that their reporting is factually correct. Journalists should be specific when mentioning gender-based violence and not attempt to report on criminal proceedings unless they 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 approach often leads to misleading reports.

**Fairness**
Journalists should always be fair and honest with interviewees. When speaking to people who have experienced gender-based violence, journalists have the additional responsibility of protecting 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**
When reporting on gender-based violence, it is of paramount importance that journalists remain aware of their own biases on the subject and the stereotypes we harbour about women, girls, sexuality and violence. It is crucial that the subject is approached from a completely objective and fact-based perspective.

It is not the job of a responsible journalist to judge or discriminate. It is particularly important to ensure that reporters do not mention details that can be interpreted as blame on the gender-based violence survivor. For example, if a journalist mentions the clothes worn at the time of an attack or other aspects of a survivor victim’s appearance, it can be perceived by some audiences as an implication of judgement. This can be particularly true when writing features: some journalists may attempt to add unnecessary detail to colour their narratives, which can unintentionally shift the focus of blame away from the perpetrator.

**Respecting Privacy**
Principled and ethical journalism means respecting the privacy of both gender-based violence survivors and their bereaved families. Journalists should be wary of what is referred to as “jigsaw identification” when granting anonymity. This happens where audiences can piece together details, such as location, age, clothing or family members, even when journalists don’t name the survivor or show their face.

**Protecting Sources**
Journalists should always protect their sources and ensure that they extend this protection to their fixers, translators, drivers, interviewees and others helping them with their story. Some communities have been known to shun those who have spoken openly about gender-based violence, and in some cases, so-called “honour crimes” have been carried out in retribution for speaking out.

Speaking to a journalist carries many risks for survivors and their families and could have serious negative repercussions for them and their families. For example, if a survivor mentions the name of a third party in the course of narrating their story, it is the responsibility of the journalist to safeguard the privacy and safety of that individual.

Some journalists may be tempted to pay money or offer gifts in exchange for interviews. However, payment for this kind of interview is considered ethically inappropriate, as not only is it 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 put undue pressure on survivors to speak to the media.

**Never Paying for Interviews**
It is recommended that journalists contact organisations 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 interviewees directly, reporters may feel that a discreet donation to an organisation working with GBV survivors is appropriate.

**A Survivor-Centred Approach**
A survivor-centred approach seeks to empower survivors by putting them at the centre of the reporting process. It recognizes that each survivor is unique, reacts differently to gender-based violence, and has different strengths, resources and coping mechanisms. It also recognizes that each survivor has the right to decide who should know their story and what should happen next.

Gender-based violence is a manifestation of inherent imbalances in power and gender equality. If people around survivors who are 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 and shame. Dealing with gender-based violence survivors in a survivor-centred manner involves prioritizing their best interests and applying the guiding principles of safety, confidentiality, respect and non-discrimination. Not only does this help prevent re-traumatisation, but it is also the safest way to effectively leverage the power of journalism to GBV while doing no harm in the process.

Unfortunately, while we are certainly seeing an increase in the quantity of reports on gender-based violence, we still need to place greater emphasis on quality.

— JOUMANA HADDAD, Lebanese journalist, activist and writer.
In 2014 ISIS launched genocidal attacks against the Yazidi people, a small religious minority community in the Nineveh Plains of northern Iraq. ISIS killed thousands of men and boys and elderly women, abducted younger women and girls, and trafficked them to be sold and brutally raped, forced children into military camps, and forced thousands of men, women and children to convert from the Yazidi faith to become Muslim. These attacks displaced close to half a million people, most of whom are still unable to return home while thousands more fled Iraq, believing it will never be safe for their people.

“Despite the many crimes ISIS committed against the Yazidis, the one story that peaked journalists’ interest was the rape of women and children.”

Despite the many crimes ISIS committed against the Yazidis, the one story that peaked journalists’ interest was the rape of women and children. In 2014 and 2015 many Yazidis escaped and were rescued from ISIS and journalists from Iraq and around the world flocked to the camps in the Kurdistan Region to interview them. Journalists interviewed many survivors multiple times, and the narrative that emerged from this genocide was almost singularly focused on horrific reports of sexual violence, often perpetrated against young girls.

In our research, we explored how Yazidi women themselves felt about the ways in which journalists gathered and published reports on their stories. Overall, a majority of our respondents described incidents that could be defined as evidence of unethical reporting practices, including promises of money or aid, pressure to reveal details of their traumatic experiences, or the disclosure of identities without informed consent.

“For example, 80 percent of all respondents, and 90 percent of the survivors, felt that journalists’ disclosure of photos and other identifying information put them and their relatives still in ISIS at risk for further violence and retaliation. One survivor stated, “With photos, even with my face covered, I did not feel safe. They [ISIS] know everything about me. They can know me from my eyes. Even I know them when they are covered and just by their eyes.”

Equally concerning is the fact that 54 percent of respondents overall, and almost 70 percent of survivors, felt that women who had escaped ISIS experienced strong negative emotional and physical responses during the interviews and published reports might negatively impact their traumatic experiences, or the disclosure of identities without informed consent.”

Yet, despite the emotional difficulty and challenges reported by the majority of the survivors, 75 percent of respondents overall, and 90 percent of survivors specifically reported positive feelings or emotions after interviews, such as this survivor who said, “When we talk to the media we feel comfortable and we feel relaxed. When we speak to the media they make us comfortable because we said our story and when people talk, they feel more relaxed.”

“Eighty-five percent of the Yazidi women we interviewed described incidents that could be defined as evidence of unethical reporting practices, including promises of money or aid, pressure to reveal details of their traumatic experiences, or the disclosure of identities without informed consent.”

Eighty-five percent of the Yazidi women we interviewed described incidents that could be defined as evidence of unethical reporting practices, including promises of money or aid, pressure to reveal details of their traumatic experiences, or the disclosure of identities without informed consent.

Our findings reinforce the need for a survivor-centered approach to reporting on conflict-related sexual violence. Consulting experts on gender-based violence and those with expertise in conflict settings is an important part of safely reporting on conflict-related sexual violence.

— SHERIZAAN MINWALLA, ESQ.

Minwalla is a human rights lawyer and activist currently based in Iraq.


**GENERATING IDEAS**

Interviewing survivors is not the only way route to a good story on GBV. There are a multitude of ways in which journalists can effectively tackle the subject without putting survivors at risk.

In practice, this means that journalists covering GBV are likely to have to work harder when generating story ideas and finding creative angles to tackle these issues. There is no one-size-fits-all approach that can be supplemented by thinking creatively about sources, details and the overall message of their reporting in order to produce the kind of stories that audiences might truly be interested in, as well as in order to ensure that those who are at a disadvantage or power disparity are given their voices.

Giving Stories Depth

Upon examining the vast majority of stories published on GBV, most have one thing in common: they often approach the subject in the form of isolated incidents and seldom tackle the issue as a human rights phenomenon. As a result, audiences are rarely given the opportunity to connect the issue to social norms, gender stereotypes, and human rights, but are instead given isolated reports of rape, domestic assault, child marriage, and other types of GBV. Issues such as gender, gender norms and the rights of women and girls are also seldom discussed.

Even when writing news stories, journalists should endeavour to present their findings as part of a well-researched, thoroughly documented narratives, preferably one that explores gender-based violence as a prevailing social phenomenon. Such stories should try delving beyond the individual acts of violence being inflicted upon women and to explore the causal factors underlying the violence. These can take numerous forms: for example, it can be a feature exploring GBV in refugee communities, or a piece that questions the social inequalities that underly it; an investigative report on child marriage from the lens of culture, religion or other relevant institutions; or a story that sheds light on survivors of gender-based violence and the personal achievements they have made on their road to recovery.

**Where to Begin**

Personal experience and observation is an obvious starting point and journalists are likely to hear stories from friends, neighbours, even shopkeepers and taxi drivers. Whether journalists are based in countries where a humanitarian crisis is taking place or one where displaced individuals are actively seeking refuge, they are often confronted with stories that inevitably crop up during such events. Rather than ignoring or simply repeating these, journalists should seek to explore whether these are actually true or if there are greater depths to these stories that audiences may want to be informed about.

Contact Official Sources

When it comes to official sources, the resources section (pages 32-33) of this handbook is a good place to begin, although journalists are of course encouraged to cultivate their own contacts. There are a number of local and international NGOs and UN agencies working to respond to humanitarian crises, many of whom are listed in the resources section. Places like the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) can be a useful resource for updated, factual information. The humanitarian response network in the region is a fairly broad alliance that includes NGOs, UN agencies, governments, civil servants, community organisations, and others. It is, therefore, a good idea to cultivate a range of sources.

Generally, a constructive first step is to speak with official contacts on a regular basis. Such official contacts may be able to arrange field visits to conflict locations or camps, where stories and other stories might be easier. It is also important to remember that the majority of refugees and displaced individuals do not live in camps or other humanitarian settings but tend to reside in host communities. This, in itself, is an angle that may be worth exploring as audiences are used to seeing images of refugees in camps.

Engage with People

Journalists should also speak to refugees and displaced people themselves: it is only by giving them a voice that we can ensure that their stories are told with compassion and humanity. This will involve building a certain level of trust, as some journalists report that many survivors or refugees are reluctant to tell their stories for fear of being targeted, or because of mistrust of the media. According to Maurice Adero, a Syrian refugee in Lebanon who has extensively covered the Syrian crisis, “Syrian refugees are often reluctant to speak to journalists. They were more open when the conflict began as they were trying to raise their voices. But now, many are disappointed and think that the media is using them. They’ve become more defensive.”

This further highlights the importance of being extra careful when interviewing refugees, survivors or other individuals who are at a disadvantage or power disparity. More often than not, the actions of a single journalist can affect how refugees and survivors view the media industry as a whole, further understanding the importance of adhering to professional guidelines at all times.

Desk Research has its Place

Whilst journalists should not rely on it, desk research is an integral component of the writing process. Knowing what other media organisations are producing on this topic and keeping up-to-date with the wires and social media can be useful, as can keeping track of blogs and Facebook pages created by refugees and displaced people themselves. Many organisations produce reports, surveys, and campaigns that can be a useful source of data and story ideas; many also have mailing lists. There are also a number of participating organisations, such as pre-prepared “behind-the-scenes” material on their running orders and pages, and in some cases, these can be used later in a bigger news story on the intended day of publication or broadcast.

However, there are other GBV topics which have somewhat been overlooked by the vast majority of journalists. These include issues like domestic violence, privacy issues faced by refugees living in crowded conditions, access to health services, the role of men in combating violence, unemployment, and poverty and its impact on GBV. In addition to approaching alternative subjects within the confines of the story, journalists are encouraged to think about news pegs, i.e., items that are already on the news agenda to which journalists can be linked, or if the power dynamic between the interviewer and interviewee means that the right to decline or refuse any part of the interview is in any way limited.

Find a Hook

When thinking about ideas for GBV features, journalists are encouraged to think about “news pegs,” i.e., items already on the news agenda to which they can “peg” their stories. This will help when journalists are pitching their stories or convincing their editors to include the item.

Journalists are also encouraged to think about new themes as opposed to those that have already been covered extensively. For example, have frequently appeared in many media outlets. In some countries, there has been a greater focus on sex work and trafficking, which has led to an assumption amongst some men that certain segments of the population (e.g. refugees) are sexually available, further placing these communities at greater risks of sexual harassment and assault.

Follow-up features and “diary stories” allow for in-depth analysis of GBV issues. For example, journalists could write a feature on the anniversary of the start of a given conflict, or make a package in advance of a planned event such as the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence campaign in November, or International Women’s Day in March. They will also have mailing lists. There are also a number of participating organisations, such as pre-prepared “behind-the-scenes” material on their running orders and pages, and in some cases, these can be used later in a bigger news story on the intended day of publication or broadcast.

And finally, unusual or quirky stories can put a human face to a humanitarian crisis. These may not be directly about GBV but more about the representation of girls and women within humanitarian crises. For example, these can be highlights that show how refugee communities are making real-life contributions in development, peacebuilding, art or other fields. Stories could also focus on a particular segment (e.g. adolescent girls) and highlight their resilience in the face of displacement or violence.

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**One of the core functions of journalism is to find new and informative angles from which a subject can be explored to reveal new, insightful conclusions. This is especially true in the case of gender-based violence, where conventional approaches might not always be feasible.**

— Etaf Roudan, Jordanian journalist
CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Interviews with survivors are generally discouraged. In rare instances where they are necessary, there are a number of considerations for journalists to keep in mind in order to avoid causing harm.

In the course of developing stories on gender-based violence, it may be a journalist’s first instinct to interview survivors. To many journalists, forming a clear understanding of a given subject requires interviewing people who are fairly knowledgeable in it or, even better, have first-hand experience with it.

Unfortunately, when dealing with human rights issues, this clearly raises a number of ethical dilemmas. When is it appropriate to interview a GBV survivor? How detailed should the questions be? If the interviewee becomes upset, should the interview be stopped?

Below are some helpful guidelines to help journalists get started. It is important to remember that each survivor is unique and reacts to trauma in different ways, so the journalists are encouraged to be mindful and take cues from the interviewee at all times.

Research First

The interview process should begin with extensive research, such as by speaking to GBV service providers in the area to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the context. If possible, journalists should seek out counsellors or case managers who have handled survivor cases. Interviewing such individuals often spares survivors the need to be interviewed themselves and can offer plenty in terms of usable materials, such as direct or anonymous quotes, descriptions of events, and others. Once the background information is fully available, the decision to proceed with the interview becomes much easier.

Be aware of the risks

Journalists should be fully aware of the potential risks to the person that is being interviewed: will they become upset, should the interview be stopped? Will the interviewee in decisions about the interview. Journalists should be aware that, in an interaction with a journalist or a UN/NGO communications officer, there may be a power differential between a reporter and a GBV survivor. They may feel compelled or otherwise pressured into speaking, even if this is not something with which they feel entirely comfortable. Journalists and communication personal must ensure that survivors are given full autonomy over their stories and experiences.

There are a number of preparatory steps that journalists can take to ensure that the process is conducted professionally and with the least possible harm. You should discuss with the survivor where the interview should be conducted and who will be present; for example, they may wish to have a friend, family member, or a social worker present. A female reporter and interpreter should carry out interviews with female GBV survivors. Given that ensuring safety and confidentiality are key priorities, it is important that everyone involved understands and agrees on the sensitive nature of the process. This includes explicit warnings provided to interpreters, drivers, security teams, and any production crew.

Moreover, journalists are advised to beware of the effects of questioning that can reactivate the pain and grief associated with a survivor’s exposure to GBV. Survivors have been through traumatizing experiences, so interviewers need to be mindful not to intentionally cause additional trauma with their questions. The interviewee has the right to decline answering any question being asked, and may choose to end the interview early.

“Survivors have been through traumatizing experiences, so interviewers need to be mindful not to intentionally cause additional trauma with their questions.”

There can be a high level of mistrust amongst GBV survivors. You will need to explain why you are carrying out the interview, and to treat your interviewing with respect. Explaining when and where an interview will appear is part of this process.

Be specific and accurate in your language or expressions whilst remaining respectful in your manner. Ask open rather than closed questions and remember to allow plenty of time for this type of interview. It would clearly be disrespectful to “rush” GBV interviewees. As such, you will need to plan your time effectively, taking into account travel time, which in some areas can be unpredictable owing to security reasons.

Payment for this type of interview, whether in cash or gifts of any kind, is considered poor ethics; not only is it likely to make it harder for other journalists to cover the story, but it will also cloud the content of the interview. It could also put potentially vulnerable GBV survivors in a position of relying traumatic in exchange for money.

Everybody reacts differently to violence and trauma. It is important to remember this when interviewing survivors, because no two reactions will be the same. If you are looking for the “classic victim” response, you will find that it does not exist, and you might miss out on the importance of a story because your interviewee does not conform to your idea of which emotions are “appropriate” to the situation.

Some Helpful Tips

- Emphasize the confidential nature of the interview and the fact that the survivor has the full right to decide what happens to the story, even after the interview is conducted.
- Listen/intently and refrain from making unnecessary follow-up remarks until the survivor has finished speaking. Ask open rather than closed questions and remember to allow plenty of time for this type of interview. It would clearly be disrespectful to “rush” GBV interviewees. As such, you will need to plan your time effectively, taking into account travel time, which in some areas can be unpredictable owing to security reasons.
- If a survivor struggles or shows any signs of discomfort, consider ending the interview immediately, or defer to any specialists present on the best course of action.

CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Interviews with survivors are generally discouraged. In rare instances where they are necessary, there are a number of considerations for journalists to keep in mind in order to avoid causing harm.

In the course of developing stories on gender-based violence, it may be a journalist’s first instinct to interview survivors. To many journalists, forming a clear understanding of a given subject requires interviewing people who are fairly knowledgeable in it or, even better, have first-hand experience with it.

Unfortunately, when dealing with human rights issues, this clearly raises a number of ethical dilemmas. When is it appropriate to interview a GBV survivor? How detailed should the questions be? If the interviewee becomes upset, should the interview be stopped?

Below are some helpful guidelines to help journalists get started. It is important to remember that each survivor is unique and reacts to trauma in different ways, so the journalists are encouraged to be mindful and take cues from the interviewee at all times.

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This does not suggest that journalists should never interview GBV survivors: many have given powerful testimonies that have brought the issue to public attention.

However, journalists may be able to produce an equally effective story by speaking to local organisations working with GBV survivors, or UN agencies. It is good practice to find out about the local medical, legal, and psychosocial support services available for GBV survivors, and to share this information with your audience as well as with the people you contact for an interview.

During the Interview

There are a number of preparatory steps that journalists can take to ensure that the process is conducted professionally and with the least possible harm. You should discuss with the survivor where the interview should be conducted and who will be present; for example, they may wish to have a friend, family member, or a social worker present. A female reporter and interpreter should carry out interviews with female GBV survivors. Given that ensuring safety and confidentiality are key priorities, it is important that everyone involved understands and agrees on the sensitive nature of the process. This includes explicit warnings provided to interpreters, drivers, security teams, and any production crew.

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- If a survivor struggles or shows any signs of discomfort, consider ending the interview immediately, or defer to any specialists present on the best course of action.
Rana Husseini, Joumana Haddad, Milia Eidmouni and Lina Ejeliat have been covering women’s rights and gender-based violence for many years. When asked about the role of journalism in transforming harmful social norms, they all agreed: continuous and survivor-centred reporting on GBV is essential.

“Being bold in tackling certain topics is admirable, but being consistent in professionalism and quality is another challenge entirely, particularly when facing more challenging stories and deadlines,” explains Eidmouni. “More often than not, a good story requires significantly more time for the subject to be explored from multiple angles, and to be supported by facts, quotes, and background information that goes beyond the obvious.”

When it comes to gender-based violence, this entails touching upon the many facets surrounding the violence itself, such as inherent socio-economic inequalities, legal biases, and others, all of which intertwine to disenfranchise women and girls, and justify the violence being perpetrated against them.

“I wanted to highlight how women, both on the frontlines and behind the scenes, are shaping the future of Syria and helping entire generations recover from the worst of the crisis,” explains Eidmouni, Syrian journalist and co-founder of the Syrian Female Journalist Network.
When reporting on gender-based violence, these are the most common pitfalls in which journalists find themselves.

**COMMON MISTAKES**

**Bringing individual biases into the narrative**

The job of the journalist is to inform. As such, allowing personal beliefs and attitudes, including cultural, religious or other biases to colour the narrative, is considered blatantly unethical. This includes judging others directly or indirectly — the appearance, demeanour or actions of a GBV survivor, and including any additional details that may be interpreted as such.

**Identifying details of GBV survivors**

There will be many occasions when you will need to identify GBV survivors. It will be inappropriate to publish or broadcast their name or any other information that can reveal their identity. Putting interviewees at further risk can have damaging consequences; you should avoid details that could enable “puzzles” identification.

**Focusing on details of GBV victims / survivors**

When reports focus on details such as the dress, personal habits, or physical appearance of GBV survivors, the focus tends to shift away from the perpetrator; at worst, this can result in blaming the survivor, which contributes to an atmosphere where it becomes more difficult for women to report GBV crimes or access services, and easier for perpetrators to go unpunished.

**Lack of research**

From your initial story idea, through to reporting during criminal proceedings and following up on stories, journalists need to research GBV thoroughly. This means spending time with experts, carrying out desk research, and understanding the medical, legal and social angles to GBV.

**Insufficient understanding of criminal proceedings**

Reporting on criminal proceedings in cases that require a thorough and solid understanding of the law. Journalists are encouraged to thoroughly research the legal nuances of any case they are covering and to consult attorneys and official organisations when necessary to verify their understanding.

**Inappropriate language**

Using vague or euphemistic language (see page 8) leads to inaccurate journalism, which is misleading for your audience. Have a look at the glossary (see page 38) in order to understand the terminology used when describing GBV. Choice of vocabulary is particularly important when covering this topic.

**Language**

Language is both incredibly adaptable and highly relative. When reporting on sensitive issues, more often than not, meanings can be either unintentionally either diluted or lost in the narrative due to the use of inappropriate terminology.

When it comes to reporting on gender-based violence, the use of clear, objective and accurate language is of paramount importance, as the proper use of various GBV-related terminologies. This not only results in a more reader-friendly and impactful story but can also help ensure that information is not distorted during delivery.

In many cases, the use of inaccurate terms or phrases when reporting on GBV can inadvertently alleviate the weight of a crime, further contributing to the environment of impunity enjoyed by perpetrators.

Journalists may also inadvertently use problematic languages that may compromise the impartiality of the narrative. These examples enforce harmful associations or preconceptions.

For example, it is preferable to use the term “survivor” rather than “victim in most contexts because this implies resilience and empowerment. The term ‘honour killing’ assigns a positive connotation to murder, and is neither accurate nor impartial. Whilst a range of alternatives has been suggested including ‘family femicide’, ‘shame killings’, and ‘patriarchal killings’, none has become dominant. A common solution is to add a prefix, quotation marks, or both (as in so-called ‘honour killings’).

The use of euphemistic terminology to describe GBV acts is often confusing and inaccurate. For example, “He forced himself on her” is vague, and could be used to describe a wide range of assaults. The term “rape” has far more specific meaning, i.e., non-consensual penetration. This handbook includes a full glossary of terms on pages 34-35.

Ultimately, journalists will need to tailor their narrative to ensure that language used is simple, clear and understood by the target audience. This includes avoiding the use of potentially confusing or misleading language and the use of euphemism in reporting.

Communication is key to the success of any GBV-related reporting. The study explicitly criminalizes marital rape.

**GBV AND THE LAW**

Writing about GBV requires a clear understanding of certain aspects of criminal, civil, and traditional law. These vary greatly from country to country and journalists are encouraged to carry out their own research in their area of operation and where possible, to seek further advice from their organisations legal team.

“Writing about GBV requires a clear understanding of certain aspects of criminal, civil, and traditional law.”

It is also helpful for journalists to have lawyers amongst their contacts, as this can benefit all aspects of journalism, even beyond reporting on GBV. Laws relating to GBV are changing and journalists need to keep up with these changes, as this in and of itself can be approached as a story. For example, when Lebanon ratified the Law on Protection of Women and Family Members from Domestic Violence in 2014, the first convictions relating to the new law provided a solid follow-up story and allowed for a greater exploration of changes in the legal framework can bring about positive changes on the societal level.

“It is also helpful for journalists to have lawyers amongst their contacts, as this can benefit all aspects of journalism.”

Legal aspects and practices of police and judicial staff towards GBV survivors prevent many from seeking legal redress. There is often a lack of resources to pursue legal action, further compounded by challenges in providing corroborating evidence from witnesses for crimes relating to GBV.

Controversial legislation exists throughout the Arab States region, which can impact the proceedings of various GBV cases and contribute to further impunity by perpetrators. While many Arab countries have introduced positive legislative reforms to promote gender equality, a lack of clear and effective laws guaranteeing equality before the law remains a persistent challenge across the region based on the results of an extensive study of gender justice and the law that explored the legal framework in 18 countries in the region.

Legal gaps in many countries continue to deny women equality before the law. For example, the constitutions of several countries do not guarantee gender equality, and penalties in at least five countries still exonerate a rapist from punishment if he marries his victim in at least 5 countries. Penal codes in 11 countries also allow for mitigating circumstances, such as adultery, to decrease penalties or exonerate perpetrators of so-called “honour killings”, while none of the countries included in the study explicitly criminalises marital rape.

“Legal gaps in many countries continue to deny women equality before the law.”

Moreover, in most countries in the region, the legal age for marriage is 18 for both boys and girls, but courts can allow boys and girls to be married earlier ages, for example, 13 years for girls in some countries. In Lebanon, for example, there is no standard minimum age of marriage as this depends on the individual’s religion, which demonstrates the need for journalists to accurately reference the law.

“Moreover, in most countries in the region, the legal age for marriage is 18 for both boys and girls, but courts can allow boys and girls to be married earlier ages.”

—NADINE NIMRI, Jordanian journalist and activist
USE OF IMAGES

Whether a journalist works online, in the print media, or for a TV station, it is likely that a striking image will significantly boost coverage of their GBV story, particularly if an original image (as opposed to stock photography) is used. This presents an ethical dilemma. Without informed consent, you should not identify the GBV survivor; therefore, you should beware of filming details that might identify.

Be careful about using conventional privacy tactics, such as pixilation, scrambling voices, or filming into light, as these techniques are not always failproof. Anything distinctive, such as a headscarf, wedding ring, furniture in a home, or a family member, can easily reveal the identity of an anonymous source and cause a problem. When images are used, clear labelling is vital to prevent misinterpretation.

You will need to be creative in your solutions: for example, photographs or video of a busy marketplace or public area are less likely to be associated with a GBV survivor than shots of their home or street.
CASE STUDY: CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage is among the most common negative coping mechanisms in humanitarian crises and can have lasting ramifications for the protection of adolescent girls.

“Some people may say that marrying off a young girl can solve her family’s problems,” explains May, an adolescent girl from Idlib, Syria. “Even some naïve girls themselves may think so, and get married without considering having their own house and family. But the truth is that girls my age know nothing about life, responsibilities, and what it takes to run a home or raise a family. They’ll wind up escaping one set of problems and falling into new ones. There is no way that child marriage resolves anything, and more girls need to be told this.”

“The truth is that girls my age know nothing about life, responsibilities, and what it takes to run a home or raise a family.”

Child marriage is a practice that affects girls, boys, and families. Child marriage is also a problem that affects girls and boys, as well as families and communities. This practice is a violation of human rights and a violation of the rights of children and adolescents. It is also a violation of the rights of women and girls. Child marriage is a form of violence against children and adolescents.

“Child marriage in refugee communities in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, and Egypt is one of the main GBV concerns in the region.”

In some countries, parents encourage child marriage, and girls in particular, to get married at a young age. They believe that marriage will benefit them both socially and economically. However, this has serious repercussions on the lives of children who experience it. For example, children who marry at a young age are often denied a proper education, which can lead to a cycle of violence. They are often powerless, and it can be much easier to ignore, for example, child sexual abuse in children.

“Child marriage in refugee communities in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, and Egypt is one of the main GBV concerns in the area.”

The coverage has helped focus attention on the problem, and has contributed to efforts of the humanitarian community to mobilise resources and to establish services to work on the issue.

However, this media attention has also perpetuated the idea that any Syrian girl is ready to get married very young. Syrian girls and their families reported feeling that the media contributed to a negative perception of Syrian women and girls, and sometimes reacted by increasing isolation and control over young women in particular.

“This media attention has also perpetuated the idea that any Syrian girl is ready to get married very young.”

Furthermore, because of the perception that child marriage is not a “real” form of GBV, some journalists have been unresponsive in sharing details, including pictures of young brides, potentially placing them at risk of possible retaliation by other members of the community.

In the next decade, 14.2 million girls aged below 18 years will be married very young. This translates into 29,000 girls married each day.

I’ve seen girls as young as fourteen years become mothers. I’ve seen them forced to marry, sometimes beaten into it, and I have also seen some of them die giving birth.

— UM RAAD, a midwife Damascus, Syria

SOME FACTS ABOUT CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage (sometimes called “early marriage”) is defined as marriage before an individual reaches the age of 18 years.

Despite near universal commitments to end child marriage, one in three girls in developing countries — excluding China — will probably be married before they are 18 years of age.

One out of nine girls will be married before their 15th birthday. Most of these girls are financially underprivileged, less-educated, and living in rural areas.

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Writing about GBV requires a clear understanding of certain aspects of criminal, civil, and traditional law. These vary widely from country to country and journalists are encouraged to carry out their own research in this area of operation and, where possible, to seek further advice from their organisation’s legal team.

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It is also helpful for journalists to have lawyers amongst their contacts, as this can benefit all aspects of journalism, even beyond reporting on GBV. Laws relating to GBV are changing, and journalists need to keep up with these changes, as this in and of itself can be approached as a story. For example, when Lebanon rectified its Law on Protection of Children, some Members from Domestic Violence in 2014, the law provided a new follow-up and allowed for a broader exploration of how changes in the legal framework can bring about positive changes on the societal level.

“It is also helpful for journalists to have lawyers amongst their contacts, as this can benefit all aspects of journalism.”

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Moreover, in most countries in the region, the legal age for marriage is 18 for both boys and girls, but courts can allow boys and girls to be married earlier: as early as 13 years for girls in some countries. In Lebanon, for example, there is no standard minimum age of marriage. In Daraa, this depends on the individual’s religion, which demonstrates the need for journalists to accurately reference the law in their coverage.

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— UM RAAD, a midwife Damascus, Syria

PREVENTION & RESPONSE

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PROGRAMMING

UNFPA’s GBV Interventions – Arab States

UNFPA works to ensure quality life-saving services are available to GBV survivors throughout the Arab States region. UNFPA works with partners, civil society, and governments to establish strategies to prevent and mitigate the risks of GBV.

UNFPA supports Safe Spaces in the region, where women and girls can access psychosocial activities as well as other GBV response services. It works closely with ministries of health and, for example, the Ministry of Health in Jordan to increase the availability of survivor-centered post-rape treatment.

UNFPA, in collaboration with other agencies, is also the lead of the GBV coordination groups in the region, providing strategic direction and technical expertise.

For more details about UNFPA’s strategy on GBV, please see the UNFPA Regional Strategy on Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in the Arab States (https://bit.ly/38EnPwN).
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE DATA

How common is gender-based violence? When reporting on this sensitive topic, statistics and data have their place, but can sometimes detract from the core focus of the message.

“Gender-based violence data is useful. However, there’s a risk that the focus of the story will be taken over by the data rather than the reality that goes behind the numbers.”

— LINA EJEILAT, Jordanian journalist / editor

Obtaining prevalence data on GBV is a challenge. This is particularly true during humanitarian emergencies, where service limitations, security and access constraints can make it difficult to get accurate data. More generally, the stigma associated with GBV often prevents people from coming forward.

“The stigma associated with GBV often prevents people from coming forward.”

Data on GBV usually reflects only reported incidents, which are considered to be a small proportion of the total. A recent study indicated that only 7 percent of survivors in developing countries actually report to a service, and less than half (46 percent) of all GBV survivors even tell anyone, including family members or friends. Most evidence about the scope and nature of GBV in emergencies derives from qualitative assessments, studies, and service delivery statistics. These mostly suggest that many forms of GBV increase during emergencies.

The need to “provide some figures” around GBV can lead to flawed estimates being widely circulated, or statistics being shared without context.

Given the challenges around GBV data collection and interpretation, consulting a GBV specialist on how to interpret the data and figures is likely to be useful. For example, increasing reported GBV cases may be the result of a new women’s centre opening in a particular region, or a campaign encouraging women to come forward rather than an actual increase in incidents of gender-based violence.

“Consulting specialist on how to interpret the data and figures is likely to be useful.”

There are many reasons why there is an under-reporting of GBV worldwide. Many survivors think that they will not be believed, that they will be blamed, that they will be ostracised by their family, or that they will be rejected by their husbands. Social stigma, fear of repercussions by perpetrators, and of losing child custody, homes or financial support are amongst the reasons given.

“Being bold in tackling certain topics is admirable, but being consistent in professionalism and quality is another challenge entirely, particularly when facing more challenging stories and deadlines.”

— LINA EJEILAT, Jordanian journalist / editor

REPORTING SELF-TEST

Before handing in your story, consider reviewing the following points to ensure that your reporting will do no harm.

1. Have you made every effort possible to avoid conducting an interview with the survivor?

   In the course of developing your story, have you conducted all the necessary research and consulted the proper official sources/authorities?

   Have you checked with any of the organisations providing GBV support services for additional information and possible quotes?

2. In carrying out your interviews, have you been sympathetic to the trauma suffered by a GBV survivor?

   Have you made sure that a GBV specialist / professional care provider is present during the interview?

   Have you made every effort to interview without causing re-trauma? Have you made sure that your interviewee has been made aware of appropriate counselling and support services?

   Have you pointed them in the direction of appropriate support services in this region? Do you know what help is available?

3. Have you protected your sources/interviewees?

   Have you made sure that you have quoted all your “expert sources,” and included a direct link to the relevant page of any organisation you have mentioned?

   Where appropriate, have you made sure that you have quoted a government official talking about GBV, or a survivor?

   For example, if a caller claims that a woman “did not report an incident of GBV to the police immediately and must therefore be making it up,” have you explained the reasons that might be behind this? This is because there are many enduring myths about rape that often go unchallenged.

4. Have you been specific in your terminology, and avoided vague or ambiguous euphemisms?

   For example, “he was found guilty of rape which carries a death sentence under Jordanian law.”

   Have you avoided prejudicial descriptions of the victim? For example, “He was wearing make-up at the time of the attack.” (This description is not relevant, and could imply judgment of the person who has suffered from an attack).

5. Have you used plain language that the audience can understand and explained unfamiliar language?

   The glossary (see pages 32-33) explains some of the terminology used by people who work on GBV issues. You are likely to have to explain or rephrase some of these terms in plain language for a general audience. Print and web journalists may need to explain to sub-editors, the reasons for specific terminology used in a particular article; more generally, you may need to explain to colleagues why you have covered GBV stories in a particular way.

6. If you are hosting a discussion or call-in programme on GBV, have you included any guests with advanced knowledge on the subject, and challenged inaccurate comments made by contributors?

   For example, if a caller claims that a woman “did not report an incident of GBV to the police immediately and must therefore be making it up,” have you explained the reasons that might be behind this? This is because there are many enduring myths about rape that often go unchallenged.

   A woman may not report a GBV incident for fear of reprisals from her attacker, or because she was disoriented following her trauma, or because of inadequate legal systems. Lack of immediate reporting does not imply she has made up the incident.

7. Have you avoided “single source” journalism?

   For example, if you have quoted a government official talking about GBV, have you also spoken to a local NGO about the issue?

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   Have you avoided “single source” journalism? For example, if you have quoted a government official talking about GBV, have you also spoken to a local NGO about the issue?
A journalist is much more likely to be successful in producing an effective GBV story if they can show an understanding of the ethics of working with GBV survivors. A common complaint of people working with GBV survivors is that journalists simply ‘phone up in order to speak to a child bride’ or make similar inappropriate requests. In fact, those field workers may choose not to deal with such requests as they can be harmful for those involved.

“A common complaint of people working with GBV survivors is that journalists simply ‘phone up in order to speak to a child bride.”

“Approaching the story through the proper channels might take more time, but it is by far the most efficient and professional route to take as a journalist,” explains Luay Shabaneh, UNFPA Regional Director, Arab States. “For UNFPA, safeguarding the lives and safety of survivors is our priority, and while we are committed to provide timely responses to journalists, responses to stories involving GBV can take longer as we decide the best course of action.”

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Journalists covering GBV will also need to think closely about who they interview. The UN regional humanitarian coordinator may be an authoritative and trustworthy source; however, they are likely to be too busy to deal with frequent press calls. A press officer for an international NGO might want to talk about the particular initiative they are promoting, rather than the particular issue that you want to cover.

“Journalists can often shorten their wait times and expedite the process of securing interviews with professionals by investing time and effort in the initial research phase.”

Officials at local and international NGOs may be able to talk more freely about gender-based violence: they are likely to have a useful overview of the topic. Bear in mind that they may use language and terminology which is unfamiliar to your audience. You should not be afraid of asking your interviewees to explain their language if it will confuse your audience.

We must consistently remember that even though we are journalists, we are people first, and need to approach survivors as gently and respectfully as we approach other people in need.

— AMIN DABWAN, Yemeni journalist

Without a concerted effort by journalists to ensure that issues such as gender discrimination and violence are impacting women and girls everywhere, real change will be much harder. We need to encourage stronger standards of reporting today.

— Nibras Al-Ma’amuri, Iraqi journalist and Head of the Iraqi Women Journalists’ Forum

UNFPA’S MANDATE

UNFPA aims to deliver a survivor-centred approach in all aspects of our work, including supporting the media in covering gender-based violence. Before we respond to a request to meet survivors, we think about their best interest: can we guarantee the safety, confidentiality, and dignity of survivors, their families, and communities? At times, these requests cannot be accommodated. Usually, UNFPA will provide information and expertise and, where possible, facilitate visits to project sites to ensure that important stories about GBV can be told from different angles.

APPROACHING ORGANISATIONS

A journalist is much more likely to be successful in producing an effective GBV story if they can show an understanding of the ethics of working with GBV survivors.

The below table lists some of the main organisations working on GBV response in various humanitarian contexts in the Arab States region. Journalists are encouraged to contact these organisations when attempting to report on GBV in these settings.

**Local Organisations**

ABAAAD Lebanon
www.abaaad.org

Arab Women Organization (AWO)
www.awo.org

Institute for Family Health / Noor Al Hussein Foundation (IFH/NHF)
www.nooralhusseinfoundation.org

Jordanian Women Union (JWU)
www.jwu.org

KAPA Lebanon
www.kapa.org

Syria Relief and Development
www.srd.ngo

**International Organisations**

Care International
www.care-international.org

International Rescue Committee (IRC)
www.rescue.org

Institute for Family Health / Noor Al Hussein Foundation (IFH/NHF)
www.nooralhusseinfoundation.org

International Medical Corps
https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/

**United Nations Agencies**

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
www.unfpa.org

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
www.unhcr.org

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)
www.unicef.org

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian in the Near East (UNRWA)
www.unrwa.org

UN Women
www.unwomen.org

**Organisations Working on GBV**

The below table lists some of the main organisations working on GBV response in various humanitarian contexts in the Arab States region. Journalists are encouraged to contact these organisations when attempting to report on GBV in these settings.

**Local Organisations**

ABAAAD Lebanon
www.abaaad.org

Arab Women Organization (AWO)
www.awo.org

Institute for Family Health / Noor Al Hussein Foundation (IFH/NHF)
www.nooralhusseinfoundation.org

Jordanian Women Union (JWU)
www.jwu.org

KAPA Lebanon
www.kapa.org

Syria Relief and Development
www.srd.ngo

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UN Women
www.unwomen.org

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**We must consistently remember that even though we are journalists, we are people first, and need to approach survivors as gently and respectfully as we approach other people in need.**

— AMIN DABWAN, Yemeni journalist
Glossary of References

Child Sexual Abuse

The term ‘child sexual abuse’ generally is used to refer to any sexual activity between a child, or a young person, and another person who is not closely related family member (incest) or between a child and an adult or older child from outside the family. It involves either physical force or coercion or, in cases where consent cannot be given by the victim because of his or her young age, implied force.

Coercion

Forcing, or attempting to force, another person to engage in behaviours against her will by using threats, verbal insistence, manipulation, deception, cultural expectations, or economic power.

Confidentiality

The right of every survivor to have their identity kept private and unidentifiable. There is an implicit understanding and obligation on those providing services that any information disclosed is not to be shared with others, unless the person concerned gives explicit and informed consent to a particular confidentiality involves not only how information is collected, but also how it is stored and shared.

Conflict-related sexual violence

“Conflict-related sexual violence” refers to incidents or (for SCR 1960 listing purposes) patterns of sexual violence, that is rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity, against women, men, girls or boys. Such incidents or patterns occur in conflict or post-conflict settings or other situations of concern (e.g. political strife). They also have a direct or indirect nexus with the conflict or political strife itself. i.e., a temporal, geographical and/or causal link.

Coordinating Agencies

The organisations (usually two working in a co-arranging arrangement) that take the lead in chairing GBV working groups and ensuring that the minimum prevention and response interventions are put in place. Coordinating agencies are selected by the GEWG working group and endorsed by the leading United Nations entity.

Domestic Violence

Intimate Partner or Other Family Members: Domestic violence takes place between intimate partners (spouses, boyfriend/girlfriend) as well as between family members (for example, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law). Domestic violence may include physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. In any reference to domestic violence, it is important to clear whether the violence is perpetrated by an intimate partner, or another family member. Other terms used to refer to domestic violence include an intimate partner include ‘spousal abuse’ and ‘battered woman.’

Domestic violence is defined as violence in the home, or in any other place where family or domestic relationships exist. It can involve a single incident of violence, or a series of incidents of violence.

Denial of Resources

Denial of rightful access to economic resources/assets or livelihood opportunities, education, health or other social services. Examples include a widow prevented from receiving an inheritance, earnings forcibly taken by an intimate partner or family member, a woman prevented from using contraceptives, a girl prevented from attending school, etc. “Economic abuse” is included in this category. Some acts of confinement may also fall under this category.

Child Marriage

Child marriage is defined as the marriage of a boy or a girl before the age of 18 years. It is sometimes referred to as early marriage. The preferred UNICEF style is to refer to “child” instead of “early” marriage, since the word “early” does not immediately convey the fact that this practice affects children below a specified age. UNICEF. http://enki. ct/1tVnVdC

Emergency

Generally used to refer to situations of armed conflict or natural disaster, often involving the displacement of populations, sometimes as refugees, other times as internally displaced people (IDPs). For the purposes of these guidelines, humanitarian emergencies include the period of instability, which often leads up to an acute crisis and ends at some point after the ‘return’ or ‘resettlement.’ Emergencies are often cyclical, with periods of stability followed by recurrent violence and/or instability. In some emergencies, populations flee, find refuge that later becomes unsafe, and are thus forced to flee again to another location. This cycle can repeat itself multiple times throughout an emergency.

Female Genital Mutilation

All procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

Forced Marriage

The marriage of an individual against her will.

Gender

Refers to the social differences between males and females that are learned, and though deeply rooted in every culture, are changeable over time, and have wide variations both within and between cultures. ‘Gender’ defines the roles, responsibilities, opportunities, privileges, expectations, and limitations for males and females in any culture.

Gender-Based Violence

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. The term ‘gender-based violence’ is primarily used to underscore the fact that structural, gender-based power differentials between males and females are inherent to the international world of places at risk for multiple forms of violence.

As agreed in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), this includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The term is also used by some actors to describe some forms of sexual violence against males and /or targeted violence against LGBTI populations, in these cases when referencing violence related to gender, inequitable norms of masculinity and/or norms of gender identity.

Host Community

Host community is an area in which many refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) reside due to conflicts, which, whether in nearby camps, private accommodation, or integrated into households.

Internally Displaced Person (IDP)

IDPs are people who have been forced to flee their homes as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights or natural or manmade disasters, and who seek protection elsewhere within their country of origin or residence and have not crossed internationally recognised state borders.

Informed Consent

Refers to approval or assent, particularly and specifically after thoughtful consideration. Informed consent occurs when someone fully understands the consequences of a decision, and consents freely and without any force.

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence takes place between intimate partners (spouses, boyfriend/girlfriend) as well as between former intimate partners (for example, ex-husband or boyfriend). Intimate partner violence may include sexual, physical, and psychological violence. It is sometimes referred to as IPV.

Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)

An organised entity that is functionally independent of and does not represent a government or State. It is normally applied to organisations devoted to humanitarian and human rights causes, a number of which have official consultative status at the United Nations.

Perpetrator

Person, group, or institution that directly inflict or otherwise supports violence or other abuse inflicted on another against her/his will. Perpetrators are in a position of real or perceived power, decision making and/or authority, and can thus exert control over their victims.

Psychological / Emotional Abuse

Infliction of mental or emotional pain or injury. Examples include threats of physical or sexual violence, intimidation, humiliation, forced isolation, stalking, harassment, unwanted attention, remarks, gestures, or written words of a sexual and/or menacing nature, destruction of cherished things, etc.

Rape

Physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration—even if slight—of the vagina, anus or mouth of a penis or other body part. It also includes penetration of the vagina or anus with an object. Rape includes marital rape and anal rape/ sodomy. The attempt to do so is known as attempted rape. Rape of a person by two or more perpetrators is known as gang rape.

Refugee

A refugee is a person who is outside his or her country of origin or habitual residence, and has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution.

Survivor/Victim

A person who has experienced gender-based violence. Whilst the terms ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ are sometimes used interchangeably, ‘victim’ is a term often used in the legal and medical sectors while ‘survivor’ is a term generally used by the psychological and social support sectors because it implies resilience.

Survivors

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat of or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation includes that of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs.

Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action

Adapted from the Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action, Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), 2012.
When I speak to journalists, many times it feels as though they don’t understand what we go through as women in this camp. We pour our hearts out, but we rarely see our issues being discussed.

— AMAL, a Syrian refugee from Qamishli