
Reporting on violence against children

A GUIDE FOR JOURNALISTS



World Health
Organization

Reporting on violence against children: a guide for journalists

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Violence against children: key issues

Every year, half of the world's children experience violence.

— Violence against children can be perpetrated by parents or caregivers, peers, romantic partners, or strangers.

— Most violence against children is carried out by individuals closely connected to the child.

— Children exposed to violence are at greater risk of mental and physical ill health that can last a lifetime.

— The impact of violence against children is severely underreported by the media.

— Stories featuring children are often sensationalist and tend to trivialize or stigmatize their suffering.

— Journalism on violence against children incorporates a wide range of subjects including public health, law, politics, and economics.

— Children's rights and welfare should always be prioritized, including while their story appears online or in print media.

— The “voice of the child” is a term used to describe children's wishes, feelings, and views about an event: journalists should always try to amplify the voice of the child.

— Solutions-based journalism (evidence-based reporting on the response to social issues) allows reporters to share existing evidence-based solutions to problems and can include a “call to action” to invite states and other bodies to act.



Introduction

There is a pressing need for journalists to understand the global health crisis that is violence against children, and the many forms of violence against children that exist. This will help this crisis to end.

This guide aims to support journalists in exposing violence against children through stories that inspire and bring about meaningful change. As an emerging discipline in journalism, finding people with an in-depth understanding of violence against children, and in its many contexts, is not always easy. This guide has been designed to help journalists find those people and amplify the voices of the many children who have been, and continue to be, abused.

The harm caused by violence against children does not disappear with time or the onset of adulthood. It is a deeply traumatic experience that can leave children with a legacy of pain and suffering into adulthood, affecting entire communities and countries, often for decades. Millions of children around the world continue paying the price for political instability and adult decision-making that rarely includes long-term thinking or the importance of integrating child-focused policies into all state sectors.

In a world where children are still largely seen as unimportant, reporting on these forms of violence can change that narrative. It can give children the visibility and legitimacy they deserve and can help to make violence against children a thing of the past.

The following pages set out how this can be done.

Chapter 1: Reporting on violence against children

Half of the world's children experience violence every year (1) yet it is an issue largely overlooked by the media. While governments continue to ignore child maltreatment, media outlets focus their reporting on violence against children in the contexts of war, conflict and slavery, allowing child maltreatment to remain underexposed and unchecked. While reporting violence against children as part of war, conflict and slavery is essential, child welfare journalism must also investigate less-visible forms of violence found in low-, middle- and high-income countries worldwide.

The good news is that there is a growing demand for empathetic, solutions-based journalism, rooted in evidence and able to build constructive responses to some of society's most urgent problems: violence against children is one of them. There is also increasing public sensitivity to the way children are treated and portrayed by the media.

The purpose of this guide

This guide aims to help editors and journalists understand the forms and complexities of violence against children, and their scale. It is designed to help journalists craft more in-depth stories on the subject and to identify opportunities to expand and sustain coverage of what is a critical public health issue.

It aims to guide journalists in exposing the harms caused by violence against children, and in exploring what can be done to prevent it. It also hopes to help enrich reporting on the subject through meaningful context and thought-provoking insight.

How the guide was developed

This guide is based on a review of existing guidance for journalists on how to report on violence against children, as well as interviews with journalists that have done so in the past. It served as the basis for a series of World Health Organization (WHO) trainings with over 50

In the following sections you will find:

- key statistics that show the scale of global violence against children;
- frameworks that can help tell the full story of violence against children;
- definitions of violence against children, and testimonies from survivors of such violence;
- helpful further resources for solutions-based journalism on the subject.

journalists from more than 20 countries in 2021. Training participants reviewed the first draft, and their inputs were subsequently included in the final guide.

The power of the media to expose violence against children

High-quality media coverage of stories on violence against children (and which gives audiences the wider context) can help protect children from experiencing such violence. By presenting credible information on children's exposure to violence, including by amplifying the voices of children and adolescents, and those that represent them, the media can help society adopt appropriate standards for treating and protecting them. This in turn can push governments to improve legal protection (through laws and their enforcement) and can help everyone – from parents, teachers, neighbours and children – to adopt norms and systems of protection that permeate daily life (2).

Why violence against children must be headline news

Wide-ranging, nuanced, and with consequences that can last a lifetime, violence against children includes all forms of violence against people under 18 years of age. It can be perpetrated by anyone from parents and other caregivers, to peers, romantic partners, or strangers. Most forms of violence against children are perpetrated by individuals who have a close connection to the child.



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