

Interviewing Traumatized Sources

Jenifer B. McKim

Deputy Investigative Editor

GBH New Center for Investigative Reporting

@jbmckim

jenifer_mckim@wgbh.org

TRAUMA- INFORMED JOURNALISM

Jan Canty & Vesna Cikovic

“Trauma-informed journalism means understanding trauma, understanding what a trauma survivor is experiencing before you show up at their door, and understanding how your actions [as a journalist] will impact them after you pack up and leave.”

Tamara Cherry

What is Psychological Trauma?

The American Psychiatric Association ([APA], 2013) defines a trauma as “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways: (1) directly experiencing the traumatic event(s), (2) witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others, (3) learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend. In cases of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental; (4) experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s).”

Note: “extreme or repeated exposure to negative details” **includes exposure to graphic content** when this content is **work-related**.

Trafficking, Inc.

GBH News Center for Investigative Reporting
takes a deep look into forced labor in
Massachusetts.



LOCAL

For labor trafficked immigrants, T-visas are a life-saving but flawed relief



Anabelle Masalon at the Boston Common on Oct. 21, 2022.

Jenifer McKim / GBH News

By **Sarah Betancourt** and **Jenifer B. McKim**

October 24, 2022 **Morning Edition**

SHARE   

Support for GBH is provided by:



[Become a GBH Sponsor](#)

LATEST STORIES

For labor trafficked immigrants, T-visas are a life-saving but flawed relief

TRAFFICKING, INC., IMMIGRATION,
LAW ENFORCEMENT, MORNING EDITION

Why you should 'think before you pink' this October

HEALTHCARE MORNING EDITION

How to motivate
sources to tell
their stories
*in empowering
ways.*



We aren't giving voice to the
voiceless

We are amplifying voices that are
too often ignored

How to motivate sources to tell their stories *in empowering ways.*

Determine what motivates them to tell their story

They want to make sure what happened to them doesn't happen to someone else.

They want to make the loss/trauma means something.

They want to hold those responsible to account.

How to build trust with victims *and other vulnerable sources*

- Be clear what your story is about and why you want to talk to them.
- Be transparent about how the story may play out: Where it will be published, when, etc.
- Be clear about your role as journalist.

Reminder: SPJ Code of Ethics

MINIMIZE HARM

Ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect.

Journalists should:

- ▶ Balance the public's need for information against potential harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance or undue intrusiveness.
- ▶ Show compassion for those who may be affected by news coverage. Use heightened sensitivity when dealing with juveniles, victims of sex crimes, and sources or subjects who are inexperienced or unable to give consent. Consider cultural differences in approach and treatment.
- ▶ Recognize that legal access to information differs from an ethical justification to publish or broadcast.
- ▶ Realize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than public figures and others who seek power, influence or attention. Weigh the consequences of publishing or broadcasting personal information.
- ▶ Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity, even if others do.
- ▶ Balance a suspect's right to a fair trial with the public's right to know. Consider the implications of identifying criminal suspects before they face legal charges.
- ▶ Consider the long-term implications of the extended reach and permanence of publication. Provide updated and more complete information as appropriate.

How to find vulnerable sources

Build a brand that can be trusted.

Work with advocates, lawyers, government officials.

Get out there.

The set up

Let them decide where and when.

Anonymity versus identified?

Photos?

Do your homework



Educate yourself about
the issues.

Language matters

Died by suicide rather than committed suicide.

A person suffering addiction rather than a drug addict.

Child victim of sex trafficking vs. child prostitute.

Victim or survivor? How do they describe themselves?

Unhoused vs. homeless

The Interview

Start with easy open-ended questions.

Don't judge

Embrace the silence

Listen respectfully

Ask the hard questions

Don't flinch.

Helpful to frame them as someone would ask, people would want to know.

Final questions:

Why are you willing to tell this story?

What else do you want people to know?

Leave people in a good place

Their story is so important.

They are not alone.

How they will be contacted, learn about when the story runs.

Follow up

From Melba's attorney:

AS you and I both suspected, Melba says no to Greater Boston. She's still just not comfortable with video. But she feels very good about the story – said she was “happy and excited” about it.

She did say how hard and emotional it was for her, but also said that it is helpful for her to talk about it and emphasized how good she feels about getting the word out and hopefully preventing the same thing happening to others.

Self care

Between 80 and 100% of journalists have been exposed to a work-related traumatic event

92% of journalists reported experiencing at least four traumatic situations

The average number of work related traumatic events ranges from 4 to 81

Self Care

Have a life

Take breaks

Be healthy, eat well, drink water

Talk about what's happening with friends, family, therapist

Find joy

Find meaning

This work IS so important!

Discussion points

Does your trauma matter?
(or how to keep yourself out of the story)

The case of Felicia Sonmez

🕒 This article is more than 4 months old

Washington Post fires reporter Felicia Sonmez amid social media controversy

Termination letter accuses Sonmez of insubordination and maligning co-workers after colleague retweeted offensive joke



Dartcenter.org

HOME

RESOURCES ▾

TOPICS ▾

GLOBAL ▾

PROGRAMS ▾

ABOUT ▾



Almudena Toral / Univision

From the 2021 Dart Award Honorable Mention [Trapped in Mexico](#).

Deadline Approaching: 2022 Dart Awards

December 15, 2021

The Dart Awards for Excellence in Coverage of Trauma honor innovative, ethical and effective reporting of violence and tragedy across all media platforms. Last year's Awards went to the Anchorage Daily News / ProPublica for "[Unheard](#)"; to Gimlet / Spotify for "[Shake the Room](#)"; and to the Associated Press for "[Lives Lost](#)." The deadline for submissions is January 26, 2022 at 5:00 pm EST.

RELATED

[Telling the Hardest Stories](#)



[MORE FEATURES ►](#)

TOPICS

[Aftermath & Anniversaries](#)

[Children & Youth](#)

[Classroom Resources](#)

[Disaster](#)

[Homicide & Mass Shooting](#)

[Immigrants & Refugees](#)

[Interviewing](#)

[Intimate Partner Violence](#)

[Press Freedom](#)

[PTSD & Mental Health](#)

[Self-Care & Peer Support](#)

[Sexual Violence](#)

[Suicide](#)

[Terrorism](#)

[Veterans](#)

[War & Civil Conflict](#)

Reportingonsuicide.org

Checklist for Responsible Reporting

✓ Report suicide as a public health issue

Including stories on hope, healing, and recovery may reduce the risk of contagion.

✓ Include Resources

Provide information on warning signs of suicide risk as well as hotline and treatment resources. At a minimum, include the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and Crisis Text Line (listed below) or local crisis phone numbers.

✓ Use Appropriate Language

Certain phrases and words can further stigmatize suicide, spread myths, and undermine suicide prevention objectives such as “committed suicide” or referring to suicide as “successful,” “unsuccessful” or a “failed attempt.” Instead use, “died by suicide” or “killed him/herself.”

✓ Emphasize Help and Hope

Stories of recovery through help-seeking and positive coping skills are powerful, especially when they come from people who have experienced suicide risk.

✓ Ask an Expert

Interview suicide prevention or mental health experts to ensure that you're sharing factual information about suicide and mental illness.

<https://www.nsvrc.org/sexual-violence-reporting-tools>

[National Sexual Violence Resource Center \(NSVRC\)](#) > [Find Resources](#) > [Media & Press](#) > Reporting on Sexual Violence

Reporting on Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is a complex societal issue that affects one in five women and one in 71 men in their lifetime¹. This makes it an extremely important yet complicated topic to report on in the media.

We understand that reporting on these topics is a difficult task, and we appreciate the media's commitment to doing so with integrity. The following resources provide guidance and tips for journalists reporting on sexual violence.

Reporting on Sexual Violence

- This tip sheet, created in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control, includes background information, statistics, definitions, language considerations, and additional resources for journalists reporting on sexual violence.

NSVRC Media Packet

- The eight resources included in this packet answer common questions related to sexual violence.

NSVRC Tip Sheet for Journalists

- This resource includes best practices and story ideas for writing about sexual violence.

Issue 22: What's missing from the news on sexual violence? An analysis of coverage, 2011-2013

- This publication by the Berkeley Media Studies Group presents findings on news coverage of sexual violence to determine how the topic is covered and identify any gaps.

transjournalists.org/style-guide/



1.2 Guidance on respectful coverage

when other sources deadname or misgender a trans person

A friend, family member, or the police may misgender or deadname your source. Do not use that quote in your story without a correction. Use brackets to replace the incorrect information with the correct information for text stories. For video or audio stories, reporters should find another clip or write around the deadnaming or misgendering. If this is not possible, consider not using this person as a source. You may also let the listener/viewer know the person is being misgendered/deadnamed and bleep those words out, as you would with a curse word or protected personal information.

writing about someone in the past

Use someone's current name and pronouns when writing about that person in the past, unless they tell you differently.

don't identify someone as trans unless it's relevant

If you're working on a story unrelated to transgender issues and a person you're quoting is trans, you don't usually need to mention that they're trans. Only report this information if it's necessary to contextualize a quote or explain the inclusion of the source.

don't make a big deal about someone's pronouns

Reporters never write a sentence to explain a cis source's pronouns. For example: "Jill, who uses she/her pronouns, attended the event." If we don't emphasize cis people's pronouns, we shouldn't need to explain trans people's pronouns — especially when they are common pronouns like he, she, and they. They/them pronouns are not new and should not require an explanation for audiences. The pronoun they has been in use as a singular pronoun [since the 1300s](#). The media has been reporting regularly on singular they/them pronouns in relation to trans people for at least a decade, and these pronouns are in the dictionary. They/them pronouns are only confusing when stories are written poorly. When a source uses less common pronouns, it's acceptable to have a quick, appositive phrase mentioning their pronouns. For example: Taylor, who uses ze/hir pronouns, attended the event.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Below are some of the resources that we consulted in researching this document, which might be useful for further reading:

- [Media Takes: On Aging](#) (International Longevity Center)
- [NABJ Style Guide](#) (The National Association of Black Journalists)
- [Reporting and Indigenous Terminology](#) (Native American Journalists Association)
- [Reporting the Rwanda Genocide: Reflections from journalist Catherine Bond](#) (Open Canada)
- [How Do You Define Genocide?](#) (BBC)
- [Disability Language Style Guide](#) (National Center on Disability and Journalism)
- [Cultural Competence Handbook](#) (National Association of Hispanic Journalists)
- [BBC News Style Guide](#) (BBC)
- [Conscious Style Guide](#)
- [Paying Attention to Work Choice When Writing About Addiction](#) (Nieman Reports)
- [A High Stakes Beat: Tips for Balanced and Informed Crime Coverage](#) (Center for Journalism Ethics)
- [Journalist's Guide to Reporting on Child Abuse](#) (Utah Department of Human Services)
- [Media Contagion and Suicide Among the Young](#) (Madelyn Gould, Patrick Jamieson and Daniel Romer)
- [Racial Trauma: Theory, Research and Healing](#) (Lillian Comaz-Díaz, [Gordon Nagayama Hall](#), [Helen A. Neville](#))