



Reporting Violence against Women & Girls Media Toolkit

Content

SECTION 1 Introduction	5
1.1 Purpose of the Toolkit.....	5
1.2 Importance of Ethical Reporting on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)	5
1.3 How to Use This Toolkit.....	6
SECTION 2: Understanding Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).....	7
2.1 Definitions and Forms of VAWG.....	7
2.2 Global and National Statistics on VAWG.....	8
2.3 The Role of Media in Addressing VAWG.....	10
SECTION 3: Ethical Guidelines for Reporting on VAWG	17
3.1 Core Principles of Ethical Reporting	17
3.2 Avoiding Sensationalism.....	22
3.3 Ensuring the Privacy and Dignity of Survivors.....	27
3.4 Language and Terminology: What to Use and What to Avoid...	31
3.5 The Importance of Contextualising VAWG Stories.....	36
SECTION 4: Legal Frameworks and Media Reporting.....	43
4.1 Overview of Relevant International and National Laws	43
4.2 Media’s Legal Responsibilities When Reporting on VAWG.....	49
4.3 Case Studies of Legal Implications in VAWG Reporting	52
SECTION 5: Practical Tools for Journalists	55
5.1 Interviewing Survivors: Do’s and Don’ts	55
5.2 Fact-Checking and Verifying Information in VAWG Cases.....	58
5.3 Writing and Editing Sensitive Content	59

5.4 Guidelines for Visual Reporting and Imagery	61
5.5 Sample Scripts and Templates for News Reports	62
SECTION 6: Data-Driven Reporting on VAWG	65
6.1 How to Access and Use VAWG Data	65
6.2 Interpreting Statistics and Trends in VAWG	70
6.3 Incorporating Data into News Stories	73
6.4 Tools and Resources for Data Journalism.....	77
SECTION 7: Case Studies and Best Practices	82
7.1 Successful Media Campaigns on VAWG	82
7.2 Lessons Learned from VAWG Reporting Around the World	86
7.3 Profiles of Journalists Leading Change in VAWG Reporting.....	87
SECTION 8: Collaborating with Stakeholders	90
8.1 Building Partnerships with Civil Society Organisations.....	90
8.2 Working with Law Enforcement and Legal Experts	93
8.3 Engaging with Survivor Networks and Advocacy Groups.....	96
8.4 Leveraging International Support and Resources	99
SECTION 9: Addressing Challenges in VAWG Reporting	103
9.1 Managing Editorial Pressures and Commercial Interests.....	103
9.2 Protecting Journalists from Retaliation and Threats	105
9.3 Navigating Censorship and Freedom of Press Issues.....	108
9.4 Overcoming Barriers in Data Access and Reporting	111
SECTION 10: Media Literacy and Public Engagement	115
10.1 Educating the Public on VAWG through Media	115
10.2 Media Literacy Programs for Communities.....	118

10.3 Using Social Media for VAWG Awareness and Advocacy	121
References	126

SECTION 1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Toolkit

The **Media Toolkit on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)** is designed to empower journalists, editors and media professionals to report on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) with integrity, sensitivity and respect. VAWG is a pervasive issue globally, affecting millions and manifesting in numerous forms, from intimate partner violence to sexual harassment, trafficking and harmful practices. Reporting on VAWG is a responsibility that extends beyond simply documenting incidents; it requires a commitment to educate the public, advocate for systemic change and uphold the dignity of survivors.

This toolkit provides journalists with the essential guidelines, best practices and case studies necessary to produce impactful stories that foster empathy, challenge harmful norms and push for policy reform. It is tailored to the realities of reporting in diverse social, cultural and political contexts, emphasising practical approaches to responsible journalism.

1.2 Importance of Ethical Reporting on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Ethical reporting on VAWG is not only a matter of journalistic integrity, but also a crucial step towards dismantling the societal structures that enable violence and discrimination against women and girls. Media plays a decisive role in shaping public opinion, cultural norms and policy discussions. Sensationalised, biased or graphic coverage of VAWG can re-traumatise survivors, perpetuate myths and reinforce stigma. Conversely, sensitive, informed and ethical reporting can educate audiences, promote survivor dignity and advocate for meaningful change.

Why Ethical Reporting Matters:

- **Survivor Dignity:** Ethical reporting prioritises survivors' voices, respects their privacy and avoids sensationalising trauma, reinforcing survivors' autonomy and dignity.

- **Public Awareness:** Responsible coverage educates audiences about the systemic root causes of VAWG, promoting a deeper understanding of its social, economic and cultural dimensions.
- **Advocacy for Change:** The media can be a powerful force for policy reform and social change, highlighting gaps in legislation, systemic failures and areas where institutions need to improve support for survivors.
- **Community Engagement:** Thoughtful reporting fosters a culture of empathy, encouraging communities to support survivors and challenge harmful attitudes towards gender-based violence.

1.3 How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is organised to provide step-by-step guidance, best practices and resources for reporting on VAWG effectively and ethically. Each section is structured to offer practical insights into different stages of the reporting process:

1. **Overview of VAWG Reporting:** Sections 2-4 offer a foundational understanding of VAWG, ethical principles and the types of violence journalists may encounter.
2. **Guidelines and Best Practices:** Sections 5-7 provide comprehensive guidelines on ethical reporting, case studies and lessons learned from successful VAWG media campaigns worldwide.
3. **Collaborative Strategies:** Sections 8-9 highlight collaboration approaches with stakeholders, such as civil society organisations, law enforcement, survivor networks and international organisations to enhance reporting quality and safety.
4. **Challenges and Solutions:** Sections 10-11 focus on overcoming barriers, including editorial pressures, safety risks, censorship and data access challenges with actionable strategies for each.
5. **Media Literacy and Advocacy:** The final sections explore how journalists can leverage media literacy programmes and social media platforms to foster public engagement, counter misinformation and drive advocacy.

SECTION 2: Understanding Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

2.1 Definitions and Forms of VAWG

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations globally. Rooted in gender inequality and discrimination, it affects women and girls across every society, leading to long-term physical, psychological and socio-economic consequences. Understanding the definitions, forms and broader context of VAWG is essential for developing effective strategies to prevent and address it.

The United Nations defines violence against women as:

"Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

This broad definition encompasses various forms of violence, which can occur within intimate relationships, in the community or in conflict settings. The CEDAW Committee further links violence against women to discrimination, noting that gender-based violence impairs women's ability to enjoy fundamental human rights.

Key forms of VAWG include:

- Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): This involves physical, sexual, or psychological harm caused by a current or former partner. IPV often includes controlling behaviours, coercion, economic abuse and threats of harm. It is one of the most prevalent forms of violence against women worldwide.
- Sexual Violence: This includes any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion. It includes rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment. Rape is defined as the non-consensual penetration of the vulva or anus with or without force.
- Psychological and Emotional Abuse: This form of violence involves behaviours that cause psychological harm, such as verbal abuse,

threats, humiliation and isolation. Often accompanying physical or sexual violence, it undermines a woman's sense of self-worth and independence.

- **Economic Abuse:** Economic violence occurs when an individual is denied access to financial resources or is prevented from working or gaining financial independence. This form of abuse can exacerbate women's vulnerability by making them financially dependent on their abusers.
- **Femicide:** Femicide refers to the killing of a woman because of her gender. It often follows a history of IPV or other forms of gender-based violence. This includes "honour killings," where women are killed for bringing perceived shame to their families.
- **Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation:** Trafficking in women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation remains a severe global issue. Victims are often subjected to physical, sexual and psychological violence.
- **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):** FGM refers to procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It has no health benefits and results in lifelong physical and psychological harm.
- **Child Marriage:** Marrying girls before they reach adulthood deprives them of their fundamental rights to education, health and safety. Early marriages often lead to early pregnancies and increased risks of violence within the marriage.

2.2 Global and National Statistics on VAWG

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a pervasive and critical issue globally and in Nigeria. **Worldwide, 1 in 3 women** experiences physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, with most cases involving intimate partner violence (IPV) (World Health Organisation, 2021). The 2024 UN Gender Snapshot also reveals that **1 in 8 women and girls aged 15-49** reported intimate partner violence in the past year alone. Additionally, **64% of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation** are women, and **27% are girls**, emphasising the gendered nature of trafficking (UN Women, 2024).

In Nigeria, gender-based violence (GBV) statistics reflect a significant and complex challenge. **31% of Nigerian women aged 15-49** have reported experiencing physical violence, and underreporting is prevalent due to stigma and lack of adequate support systems (UNICEF, 2024). Regional variations in Nigeria highlight that **12% of women in the Northwest** experience physical violence, whereas the prevalence rises to **38% in the Northeast** and **46% in the South-South** (UNFPA, 2024). This geographic disparity is also evident in practices like **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**, which affects **24% of urban women and 16% of rural women**, with the highest prevalence in the Southeast and Southwest regions. The UN identifies Nigeria as the country with the third highest number of child brides, as **43% of Nigerian girls are married before the age of 18**, with child marriage being particularly common in the northern regions (UNICEF, 2024).

The impacts of VAWG extend beyond immediate physical and psychological harm. Health consequences for survivors include trauma, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and severe maternal complications, particularly for young brides who face heightened risks due to early marriage and limited healthcare access. Economic implications are also substantial. Globally, the cost of VAWG is estimated at **2% of GDP** due to factors like reduced productivity, healthcare and legal costs. For instance, Uganda incurs significant economic losses, and similar costs are anticipated in other regions with high VAWG prevalence (UNODC, 2023).

Addressing VAWG in Nigeria requires a multi-sectorial approach, with recent emphasis on policy reform, gender equality initiatives and technology-facilitated prevention efforts. The **UN Women Global Database** (2023) records over 1,500 legislative measures across 193 countries to combat VAWG, with Nigeria implementing specialised training for law enforcement and survivor support programmes. Additionally, the **World Bank** (2024) underscores that factors such as polygamy, substance abuse and social norms that tolerate violence continue to increase women's vulnerability, particularly for those aged 15-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) stands at 33% among women in this age group.

Prevention efforts must consider both global and national contexts, ensuring that policies are both culturally relevant and locally effective.

Global initiatives such as the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action have improved protections and awareness, yet effective enforcement remains a critical challenge. Comprehensive support systems and survivor-centred services are essential for addressing VAWG, along with educational programmes that engage both men and women in advocating for gender equality and safe communities.

2.3 The Role of Media in Addressing VAWG

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a pressing global issue that affects individuals across all communities, economic groups and cultures. Media's role is essential in shaping societal perceptions, raising awareness and influencing policy reforms concerning VAWG. However, media coverage in Nigeria often suffers from issues such as underreporting, insensitive language and lack of cohesive policy guidelines, which can reinforce harmful stereotypes and victim-blaming. Ethical reporting is therefore critical for creating a media landscape that informs, empowers and advocates for a society that condemns gender-based violence. This section provides actionable insights, ethical guidelines and practical case studies for journalists to better address VAWG through responsible and impactful reporting.

Key Roles of Media in Addressing VAWG

1. Promoting Ethical and Non-Biased Reporting

Ethical journalism on VAWG focuses on portraying incidents with accuracy and empathy, prioritising survivors' dignity and ensuring that narratives do not reinforce stereotypes or stigmatise victims. Media must also emphasise the crime's severity over the survivor's personal behaviour, which often gets scrutinised, leading to victim-blaming.

Case Study:

The 2022 case where *The Nigerian Tribune* newspaper revised its initial report on a high-profile domestic violence incident involving a prominent

local figure is an excellent example. The first report unfairly questioned the survivor's "extravagant lifestyle" rather than focusing on the abuse itself. Following public criticism and advocacy, the newspaper retracted the initial article and re-published it with a balanced approach that centred on the legal process, support mechanisms and the societal impact of domestic violence (*The Nigerian Tribune*, 2022).

Guidelines:

- **Avoid Victim-Blaming Language:** Use terms that describe the crime and its impact rather than implying that the survivor's actions contributed to the violence.
- **Maintain Privacy and Anonymity:** Always use pseudonyms or initials unless the survivor consents to their identity being revealed. This can protect them from further trauma, social stigmatisation, or retaliation.
- **Ensure Accuracy Without Sensationalism:** Avoid using graphic or sensational language when describing incidents of violence. Instead, focus on the facts, legal aspects and support mechanisms available to survivors.

2. Raising Awareness and Educating the Public

The media is profoundly responsible for educating the public on VAWG's prevalence and impact. In-depth reporting and consistent coverage highlight VAWG as a systemic issue rather than an isolated incident. By showcasing stories of survivors, media can foster empathy and prompt collective action against violence.

Case Study: In 2020, Secret Deodorant launched the "All Strength, No Sweat" campaign to empower women by showcasing their stories of resilience against adversity. The campaign focused on personal strength and overcoming challenges, including gender-based violence in a supportive and inclusive way. By casting a diverse group of women, it educated the public about the varying forms of strength and resilience. The initiative aimed to redefine what it means to be strong in the face of hardship. Through this campaign, Secret helped raise awareness and fostered empowerment through storytelling.

LINK: [Secret Deodorant Casts a Power Line-Up for New “All Strength, No Sweat” Campaign to Share Diverse Stories of Personal Strength, in All Its Forms | Procter & Gamble News](#)

Guidelines:

- **Showcase Diverse Narratives:** Address different forms of VAWG, such as economic and emotional abuse, cyber harassment and trafficking. This creates a well-rounded view of VAWG’s many forms.
- **Collaborate with Experts:** Feature insights from social workers, mental health professionals and legal experts to provide a broader understanding of VAWG and how communities can address it.
- **Utilise Public Service Announcements (PSAs):** Employ PSAs and expert interviews to raise awareness about the causes, impacts and prevention of VAWG.

3. Challenging Gender Norms and Stereotypes

Media can be a powerful tool in dismantling stereotypes that contribute to VAWG. Harmful narratives that portray women as weak or passive victims perpetuate societal norms that justify violence. By showcasing women in roles of strength and resilience the media can reshape public perception and challenge gender norms.

Case Study Reference: Nollywood, Nigeria's film industry, has made significant strides in addressing gender-based violence by portraying women in empowering roles. Films like *Oloture* and *The Wildflower* challenge traditional stereotypes by depicting women as resilient and capable. These films highlight the struggles of women facing abuse, showcasing their strength and agency. By focusing on women’s empowerment, Nollywood contributes to broader societal discussions on violence against women and girls (VAWG). This shift in narrative helps challenge harmful norms and encourages change in public perception.

Guidelines:

- **Avoid Gender Stereotypes:** Focus on survivors’ resilience and their contributions beyond the incident. Avoid words that reinforce harmful stereotypes of women as “passive” or “helpless.”

- **Use Respectful Language:** Ensure that the language respects survivors' dignity, portraying them as multi-dimensional individuals rather than reducing them solely to their victim status.
- **Frame VAWG as a Societal Issue:** Emphasise that VAWG stems from systemic issues, such as unequal power dynamics and cultural norms, rather than focusing solely on isolated incidents.

4. Advocating for Policy Change and Legal Reforms

Through consistent coverage of VAWG, the media can influence policymakers and push for comprehensive legal protections for survivors. Exposing legal gaps and shortcomings in enforcement encourages institutions to take accountability and fosters a climate where reforms are prioritised.

Case Study Reference:

A 2020 investigative series by *Premium Times* uncovered systemic sexual harassment in Nigerian universities, leading to national discussions and subsequent reforms. In response, the Ministry of Education formed a task force to address harassment across universities, highlighting the media's influence on policy reforms when it sheds light on institutional failures (*Premium Times*, 2021).

LINK: [SPECIAL REPORT: How unclear policies contribute to sexual harassment in Nigerian universities \(Part 1\)](#)

Guidelines:

- **Report on Legal Frameworks and Rights:** Educate the public on the legal rights of survivors and the available protections to encourage a culture of accountability.
- **Identify Policy Gaps:** Provide consistent coverage of policy weaknesses and emphasise the need for legal reforms, such as increased penalties for perpetrators and support systems for survivors.
- **Follow Up on Cases:** Regularly revisit cases to keep the issue in the public eye and press policymakers to address outstanding needs or reforms.

5. Supporting Survivors and Ensuring Safety

Journalists play a vital role in empowering survivors by providing respectful and supportive coverage. Ethical reporting includes refraining from re-traumatising survivors and offering them a platform to voice their stories if they choose. Media coverage should focus on the survivor's perspective, recognising them as individuals with agency and not solely as victims of violence.

Case Study: In a 2021 report on intimate partner violence, *The Punch* newspaper covered the work of an NGO Mirabel Centre to list resources available to survivors, such as shelters, counselling and legal aid. The collaboration ensured that the report provided information on the issue and directed those affected towards essential services, promoting a support culture (*The Punch*, 2021).

LINK <https://punchng.com/tags/mirabel-sexual-assault-referral-centre/>

Guidelines:

- **Empower Through Supportive Information:** Include resources such as hotline numbers and shelters within articles to inform readers about where they can seek help.
- **Obtain Consent:** Always get explicit consent from survivors before sharing personal details. Respect their autonomy by allowing them to guide what parts of their story are shared.
- **Use Sensitive Language:** Avoid graphic language that might retraumatise survivors or audiences. Focus instead on the survivor's resilience, available support and the broader societal impact of VAWG.

6. Strengthening Media Accountability and Institutional Policies

Media organisations should establish clear internal policies that prioritise responsible reporting on VAWG. By implementing zero-tolerance harassment policies, offering sensitivity training and creating ethical guidelines for VAWG coverage, organisations can ensure that their reporting remains consistent and respectful.

Guidelines:

- **Adopt Anti-Harassment Policies:** Implement zero-tolerance policies to protect female journalists and other employees from workplace harassment, ensuring a safe environment for reporting on VAWG.
- **Conduct Regular Sensitivity Training:** Organise workshops and training for journalists to keep them informed on best practices for reporting on VAWG ethically.
- **Create a Media Monitoring Framework:** Establish a media oversight body that sets and monitors reporting standards, offering accountability and guidance for journalists covering VAWG.

7. Collaborating with Social Media Platforms and Advocacy Groups

Many VAWG incidents, especially online harassment, occur in digital spaces. Media organisations should collaborate with social media platforms and advocacy groups to enhance online reporting mechanisms and improve safety for journalists, particularly women, who often face harassment in digital spaces.

Case Study Reference: In July 2021, *Facebook, Google, TikTok* and *Twitter* announced commitments to tackle online abuse and improve women's safety on their platforms. These commitments were made during the UN Generation Equality Forum in Paris, aiming to provide women with greater control over who can comment or reply to their posts and enhance reporting systems for violent or abusive content.

LINK: [Facebook, Google, TikTok and Twitter make unprecedented commitments to tackle the abuse of women on their platforms - World Wide Web Foundation](#)

Guidelines:

- **Strengthen Online Safety Tools:** Advocate for better reporting tools on social media to protect journalists and reduce online harassment.
- **Promote Public Awareness Campaigns:** Collaborate on initiatives that encourage respectful online behaviour and educate audiences about the impact of online harassment.

- **Engage Social Media Accountability:** Partner with social media platforms to ensure they take complaints seriously and maintain safer digital environments.

SECTION 3: Ethical Guidelines for Reporting on VAWG

Effective and ethical reporting on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is more than just conveying information—it's about shaping societal attitudes, educating the public on systemic issues and giving survivors the respect and dignity they deserve. This section provides comprehensive guidelines for media professionals to report on VAWG accurately, sensitively and strategically. Ethical reporting on VAWG can challenge harmful stereotypes, influence public perception and promote social change to end gender-based violence.

3.1 Core Principles of Ethical Reporting

Ethical reporting on VAWG is grounded in a set of principles that focus on the survivor's dignity, privacy and agency. These principles guide journalists on how to approach, interact and frame stories, ensuring that their reporting supports survivors rather than retraumatizing or stigmatising them.

Key Principles

1. **Respect for Survivors:** Respecting survivors means honouring their choices and voices in how their stories are told. Journalists should recognise the strength it takes for survivors to share their experiences, often revisiting painful memories in the process. Empowering survivors to control their narratives, decide which aspects they are comfortable sharing and how they want to be represented is fundamental.

“Survivors should have a voice in how their stories are shared. Respecting their autonomy involves giving them choices about what, how and when they share details about their experiences.”

To respect survivors, it is key to remember that

1. Survivors should have the right to say no to sharing specific parts of their story, to withdraw from the interview, or to request anonymity. Ensuring they feel safe in making these choices is vital.

2. Discuss with survivors what they want readers to take away from their stories. This can help survivors feel empowered and ensure that their experiences are portrayed as part of broader societal issues, not isolated events.
3. Survivors may not wish to revisit certain details, especially if they feel retraumatised. Avoid pushing for details, and respect their decision to withhold aspects of their story.

2. Accuracy and Sensitivity: Accuracy and sensitivity in reporting are essential to avoid spreading misconceptions or reinforcing harmful stereotypes about VAWG. Reporting must be grounded in verified facts, free from assumptions and sensitive to the survivor's experience and the broader cultural context. This involves debunking myths around VAWG, such as those that might imply shared responsibility or dismiss violence against women as "private matters."

Important to

- Verify all information with multiple sources where possible and avoid assuming details based on common stereotypes or preconceived notions.
- Refrain from language that implies blame or diminishes the severity of violence. For instance, terms like "domestic dispute" imply mutual fault, while terms like "domestic violence" clarify the issue's seriousness.
- Tailor language to reflect the survivor's identity and experiences respectfully, avoiding words or terms that might suggest judgement or reflect biases.

3. Minimising Harm: Minimising harm means taking every possible precaution to prevent further trauma or distress to survivors as they recount their stories. This involves conducting interviews to prioritise the survivor's well-being, avoid graphic language and safeguard their privacy. It also requires journalists to consider the potential social, emotional, or physical risks that reporting could impose on survivors and their families.

"This involves respectful interviewing techniques, safeguarding privacy and avoiding language that may cause further distress."

Strategies to Minimise Harm:

- Allow survivors to pause, skip, or stop the interview if it becomes distressing. This respects their emotional boundaries and maintains a sense of control.
 - Keep identifying details confidential unless explicit and informed consent is given. Details like names, locations, or other personal information should be withheld unless the survivor agrees to share them.
 - Focus on systemic issues rather than sensationalising the violence endured. Graphic details can re-traumatise survivors and shift focus away from the story's educational or advocacy purposes.
4. **Responsibility and Accountability:** Reporting extends beyond recounting an incident; it involves educating the public on the systemic nature of VAWG. This principle urges journalists to highlight the societal, cultural and legal factors that perpetuate violence and to hold perpetrators accountable by focusing on the root causes rather than sensationalising the survivor's experience. Reporting should emphasise prevention, societal responsibility and possible solutions, encouraging policy changes and fostering public awareness.

“Reporting should go beyond isolated incidents and aim to educate the public on the systemic issues underlying VAWG.”

Strategies for Responsible and Accountable Reporting:

- Link individual stories to larger societal problems, such as economic dependency, gender inequality or inadequate legal protections. This positions VAWG within a broader context and informs readers of the changes needed.
- When relevant, reference resources, hotlines and organisations working to address VAWG, provide readers with actionable steps to support survivors or advocate for systemic change.
- Use language that places responsibility on the perpetrator rather than implying that violence “happened” to the survivor. Statements like “he assaulted her” clarify agency and accountability, rather than passive phrases that may obscure the perpetrator's role.

Learning Box: A Story Told with Dignity

In 2019, a Ghanaian newspaper published a story on a young woman who survived domestic violence. The story didn't focus on graphic details but highlighted the legal and economic barriers she faced. By working closely with the survivor, the newspaper was able to frame her experience as part of a broader issue, showing readers how systemic factors enable violence to persist. This respectful approach empowered the survivor and educated the public on much-needed reforms.

In addition to adhering to the key principles, the following best practices provide a practical approach to applying these principles in the field. These practices guide journalists on how to engage survivors sensitively, handle their stories responsibly and educate the public on the systemic causes of VAWG.

1. Obtain Informed Consent

Before a survivor's story is shared, they must fully understand its implications, usage and reach. Journalists should clearly explain where and how the story will be published and allow the survivor full control over what details they wish to share.

- **Explain the Process:** Describe how the interview will be conducted, where it will be published and its potential reach. The impact of a public statement on the survivor's safety and potential re-traumatisation. Survivors should know they can opt out at any time.
- **Ask for Consent for Specific Details:** Even after agreeing to the interview, survivors may choose not to disclose certain parts of their story. Obtain explicit consent for each detail shared.

Example: A journalist could explain, "Your story may be published online and in print, reaching a large audience. If there are parts you're uncomfortable sharing, please let us know. You're free to stop at any time."

2. Frame Stories Objectively

Objectivity involves presenting facts without biases, avoiding victim-blaming and emphasising systemic issues instead of personal drama. An objective frame encourages readers to view VAWG as a public issue that requires societal action.

- **Avoid Judgemental Language:** Use terms that avoid implying any fault or judgement on the survivor.
- **Focus on Facts:** Accurately represent the survivor's experience and the broader issues without implying that their choices or actions contributed to the violence.

Example: Instead of saying, "She was attacked while out late," frame the story as "the perpetrator attacked her," focusing on the perpetrator's actions rather than the survivor's circumstances.

3. Empower Survivors

Language that empowers survivors reinforces their resilience and humanity. Referring to women affected by violence as "survivors" rather than "victims" can provide a sense of agency and strength, helping shift the narrative from one of helplessness to one of resilience and courage.

- **Use "Survivor" not "Victim":** This terminology respects the survivor's resilience and ability to overcome adversity.
- **Encourage Survivor Agency:** Give survivors control over how their stories are framed, allowing them to share positive outcomes or personal reflections if they choose.

4. Practice Protective Interviewing

Protective interviewing techniques ensure survivors feel safe, respected and in control during the interview process. Journalists should be prepared to adjust their approach based on the survivor's comfort level, ensuring they never feel pressured or obligated to share more than they wish.

- **Allow Pauses:** Survivors should feel free to take breaks, stop or skip questions. The interview process should prioritise their emotional comfort.
- **Create a Safe Environment:** Interviews should be conducted in a private, secure location where survivors feel comfortable.

Example: “If at any point you feel uncomfortable, please let us know, and we can pause. This interview is about sharing your story in a way that feels safe and comfortable for you.”

3.2 Avoiding Sensationalism

Sensationalism can distort the public’s understanding of VAWG, trivialising the experiences of survivors and promoting harmful stereotypes. Overemphasising graphic details or turning VAWG stories into “drama” does a disservice to both survivors and society, diverting attention from the critical systemic issues and reinforcing violence as a mere spectacle.

Risks of Sensationalism

Sensationalism can skew the public’s understanding of VAWG and shift attention away from meaningful solutions and survivor-centred storytelling. Overly graphic or dramatic narratives turn violence into “entertainment,” overshadowing survivors’ realities and often ignoring the systemic issues enabling such violence. Below are the main risks associated with sensationalist reporting on VAWG.

1. Desensitisation

When media reports on violence with sensationalised or overly graphic details, it risks normalising violence and treating it as a common or acceptable part of society. Over time, readers and viewers can become emotionally desensitised, meaning they are less likely to empathise with survivors or advocate for necessary interventions and protections.

- **Impact of Desensitisation:** If audiences repeatedly see VAWG stories framed in a graphic, dramatic light, they may begin to view violence as inevitable or “normal.” This perception reduces the urgency for change, discouraging public demand for policy reforms, support services or justice for survivors.
- **Long-Term Effects:** Continuous exposure to sensationalised stories can lead to apathy. The public may see VAWG as just another part of the news cycle, lessening the collective drive for meaningful action to address and prevent violence.

Example: Media coverage of a high-profile case that emphasises graphic details may attract initial public attention. However, if every VAWG report takes a similar approach, audiences may become “numb” to violence, feeling less compelled to act or support survivors in their own communities.

2. Stigma and Re-traumatisation

Sensationalism often disregards the mental and emotional toll on survivors. By dramatising their experiences, media coverage can re-traumatise them, forcing them to relive painful memories in a public, often judgemental, sphere. This can lead to unwanted scrutiny and social stigma, especially if identifying details are inadvertently revealed.

- **Re-traumatisation:** When survivors’ stories are told without sensitivity, they may experience renewed feelings of trauma, guilt or shame. Sensationalist language can make survivors feel exploited or reduced to mere subjects in a dramatic story rather than respected individuals with complex experiences.
- **Social Stigma:** Dramatic narratives often encourage public curiosity and gossip, subjecting survivors to social judgement or even blame.

This stigma can have long-term social and psychological impacts, making survivors feel isolated or hesitant to seek support in the future.

Example: When a popular media outlet shared a story about an assaulted survivor with shocking language and images, the survivor was recognised by her community. This led to unwanted public scrutiny that affected her mental health and led her to withdraw from local support groups due to feelings of shame and exposure.

3. Lost Educational Opportunity

Sensationalist reporting tends to overlook the broader issues surrounding VAWG. By focusing on isolated incidents or dramatic details, journalists miss the chance to inform the public about the root causes of violence, such as gender inequality, cultural norms and legal barriers. Consequently, the public remains uninformed about the structural changes needed to prevent VAWG.

- **Failure to Inform on Root Causes:** Sensationalism reduces the opportunity to educate the public on systemic factors contributing to VAWG. Audiences may see each case as an individual tragedy rather than a symptom of larger social problems.
- **Neglecting Solutions:** When reporting lacks depth, it fails to provide readers with insights into prevention efforts, support services or policies that could help mitigate VAWG.

Example: A news story focusing on graphic details of an assault may attract viewers initially but lacks impact in terms of social awareness and reform. If the report instead covered the social and economic conditions that contribute to such violence, it would provide readers with a better understanding of necessary reforms.

Learning Box: The Harmful Impact of Sensationalism

- *In 2020, a high-profile domestic violence case in South Asia involving a public figure became the focus of national media. Coverage focused on gruesome details, and social media amplified rumours, ultimately re-traumatising the survivor. Following public backlash, the media outlet issued a statement acknowledging their approach's harmful impact. This case demonstrates the importance of responsible storytelling in VAWG reporting.*

Guidelines to Avoid Sensationalism

Journalists should focus on factual, respectful and educational approaches to report ethically on VAWG. The guidelines below emphasise dignity, accuracy and responsibility, helping to prevent sensationalism and promote informed public discourse.

1. Use Fact-Based, Neutral Language

Reporters should ground their stories in verified facts and use neutral language that avoids exaggeration or dramatisation. Neutral language supports a balanced understanding of VAWG without resorting to shock value.

- **Focus on Verification:** Before publishing, ensure all details are confirmed and reliable, particularly when dealing with sensitive information.
- **Avoid Emotional Tone:** Refrain from language that could heighten the drama, such as “horrific,” “grisly” or “brutal.” Instead, let facts speak for themselves, guiding readers to appreciate the gravity of the issue without sensational language.

Example: Instead of “the horrific abuse left her scarred for life,” a fact-based approach might read, “She sustained injuries that have had lasting physical and emotional impacts.” This approach conveys the severity of the incident without exaggeration.

2. Frame Stories for Education

Educational framing shifts the focus from isolated incidents to broader issues, including societal, cultural and legal factors contributing to VAWG. By providing readers with context, journalists help audiences understand the prevalence and root causes of violence, encouraging them to view it as a public issue that requires collective action.

- **Incorporate Contextual Information:** Include statistics on VAWG prevalence, local laws or social factors contributing to violence. This educates readers on why VAWG is a systemic issue and not merely a personal tragedy.
- **Highlight Systemic Gaps:** Use the story to underscore areas where the justice system, healthcare or social services may fall short. This approach educates the public on potential solutions, fostering a more informed society.

Example: A story covering domestic violence could include insights on the lack of protective measures for women in specific areas, barriers to accessing support services, or cultural stigmas that prevent survivors from reporting incidents. This approach invites readers to consider how these factors contribute to the persistence of VAWG.

3. Emphasise Survivor Dignity

Ethical reporting should always prioritise survivor dignity, presenting them as individuals with complex lives and respecting their right to privacy. Avoiding a “character” approach reduces the chance of sensationalising their experience.

- **Avoid Dehumanising Narratives:** Sensationalism often reduces survivors to “characters” in a dramatic story. Instead, acknowledge the full range of their experiences, including their resilience and efforts to rebuild.
- **Use Empowering Language:** Choose words that empower survivors rather than focusing solely on their trauma. The word “survivor” reflects resilience and agency, whereas “victim” may reinforce passivity.

Example: Rather than framing a survivor’s experience as an isolated tragedy, focus on her resilience and efforts to advocate for change. For instance, “After surviving assault, she has become an advocate for

stronger legal protections” acknowledges her agency and her role in societal improvement.

3.3 Ensuring the Privacy and Dignity of Survivors

The privacy of survivors is essential in VAWG reporting. Survivors of gender-based violence face social stigma, potential retaliation and ongoing trauma. Public identification or even inadvertent clues about their identity may expose them to further harm. Journalists are responsible for safeguarding their personal information and ensuring that survivors feel safe and in control of their own narratives.

Privacy Protection Techniques

1. Anonymisation

Anonymisation is one of the most effective techniques for protecting survivors’ identities. This involves avoiding using real names, exact locations and other specific details that could lead to identification unless the survivor explicitly consents to their disclosure. Anonymising details allows journalists to tell impactful stories while safeguarding survivors from potential harm.

- **Replacing Real Names with Pseudonyms:** Using pseudonyms protect survivors' identities. Additionally, journalists should avoid using specific details that could indirectly identify the survivor, such as particular landmarks or family details.
- **Obscuring Personal Identifiers:** Details like age, occupation or family connections should also be generalised if they could potentially reveal the survivor’s identity within their community.

Example: Instead of saying, “28-year-old Sarah, a local school teacher from Gosa,” a journalist might report, “A young educator from a rural area,” which provides context without revealing identifying details.

2. Consent for Every Detail

Consent is not a one-time event. Just because a survivor shares details or a detail does not mean they want every part of that story publicly disclosed. For journalists, obtaining consent for each specific piece of personal information before publication is essential.

- **Confirming Consent for Sensitive Details:** A journalist may interview a survivor who shares personal details during the conversation. Before publishing, it is critical to check with the survivor which specific aspects they are comfortable sharing publicly.
- **Empowering Survivors with Control:** Consent should be empowering, allowing survivors to set boundaries on what they are willing to disclose. This approach fosters a sense of security and respects the survivor's autonomy over their own story.

Example: If a survivor shares that they felt uncomfortable during certain parts of their experience, journalists should seek permission before including those aspects in the story, as sharing such details without consent could lead to re-traumatisation or unwanted public scrutiny.

3. Contextual Sensitivity

As survivors may face unique pressures or stigmatisation in certain environments, cultural context matters. In such cases, ensuring that consent is truly voluntary and informed requires journalists to be mindful of these cultural factors. Survivors in communities with strict social norms may experience additional risks or consequences if they disclose their identities.

- **Understanding Social and Cultural Norms:** Journalists should research and be aware of any specific social taboos or stigmas related to VAWG in the survivor's community.
- **Assessing Consent in Context:** In culturally sensitive areas, a survivor's decision to share may be influenced by societal pressures, family expectations or potential community backlash. Journalists should ensure that survivors do not feel coerced or pressured into sharing sensitive information.

Example: In certain cultural settings, survivors of VAWG may face additional barriers if identified, such as losing family support or facing community exclusion. In these cases, journalists should ensure that survivors understand the implications of sharing their stories and that their consent is given freely, and without pressure.

Learning Box: Protecting Privacy in Reporting

- *A Kenyan newspaper covered a case involving young women affected by domestic violence. Journalists used pseudonyms and general locations, and they included cultural context explaining why survivors chose not to reveal their identities. The story respected privacy while bringing awareness to the challenges faced by many survivors in a culturally sensitive and impactful way.*

Practical Tips for Ensuring Privacy:

To maintain survivor privacy, journalists can take a few practical steps that not only respect survivors' dignity but also provide security and support long after the story is published. These practices help ensure survivors remain protected and in control over the long term.

1. Use Pseudonyms

Simple changes in names or places can make a substantial difference in protecting a survivor's identity. Using pseudonyms is a common but effective practice that offers survivors anonymity while enabling the story to be told in a way that conveys impact and context.

- **Create Unique but Non-Specific Pseudonyms:** Use names that reflect the local language or cultural setting but avoid real names from the survivor's community or demographic to prevent accidental identification.
- **Avoid Repeated Identifiers:** Even with pseudonyms, using too many consistent personal identifiers (like age, occupation or specific family roles) can lead to re-identification; so keep pseudonyms as simple and generalised as possible.

Example: Instead of calling a survivor “Anna, a 35-year-old mother of three,” a journalist might write “a mother of young children” to keep the context intact without risking identification.

2. Clarify Usage of Details

Before any story goes public, verifying with survivors how each piece of information will be used is important, ensuring they are fully aware of the implications. This involves double-checking each detail, especially if they were shared informally, to ensure survivors feel comfortable with how their narrative will be presented.

- **Conduct a Review with the Survivor:** If possible, review the main parts of the story with the survivor to confirm they agree with how each detail is presented.
- **Explain Media Formats and Reach:** Survivors should understand where their story will appear—online, in print or on social media—and the potential reach of each format.

Example: A journalist might explain to the survivor, “This story will be posted online, which means it could be shared widely. Is there any part of your story you would prefer to keep private?”

3. Consider Long-Term Impact

The effects of a story can last well beyond its publication date. A story published today might be read years later, and survivors' lives may change in ways that could make public identification problematic in the future. Ensuring survivors are comfortable with the long-term implications of sharing their stories is essential.

- **Discuss Long-Term Consequences:** Before publishing, ask survivors to consider how they might feel about their story being accessible in the future. Offer them the option to limit certain details that could become sensitive over time.
- **Plan for Retrospective Consent:** Provide survivors with a way to request changes to the story after publication. Some media outlets offer retrospective editing or, at minimum, contact information for survivors to reach out if they wish to discuss changes to their public story.

Example: A survivor might be comfortable sharing certain details today, but if they relocate or their family situation changes in the future, those details might become problematic. Journalists can offer survivors the option to withhold those details or discuss removing identifying information after a set time.

Applying Privacy Protection Techniques

Scenario 1: Covering a Local Case of Intimate Partner Violence

A journalist interviews a survivor from a small town who wants to share her story to advocate for stronger legal protections. The journalist uses a pseudonym to protect her identity, avoids specifying the exact town and refrains from including details about her workplace or family structure. The journalist also explains how the story will be distributed across print and online platforms, verifying that the survivor is comfortable with this before publication.

3.4 Language and Terminology: What to Use and What to Avoid

Language is a powerful tool that shapes public perception, influences societal norms and determines how readers empathise with, or judge individuals affected by violence. The words and terms journalists choose in covering Violence Against Women and Girls' (VAWG) stories can either

support a deeper understanding and compassion or perpetuate harmful stereotypes, stigma and victim-blaming. This section outlines the preferred language and terminology for VAWG reporting and practices for avoiding harmful terminology that could inadvertently reinforce negative perceptions or excuse violence.

Preferred Language and Terminology

Selecting language carefully can help highlight survivors' resilience, hold perpetrators accountable and educate readers on the severity of VAWG issues. By choosing the right terminology, journalists contribute to a respectful narrative that avoids reinforcing stereotypes and misconceptions about gender-based violence.

1. Use “Survivor” Over “Victim”

Referring to individuals affected by violence as “survivors” rather than “victims” acknowledges their resilience, agency and capacity to overcome adversity. The term “survivor” reflects strength and active recovery, while “victim” can imply helplessness, vulnerability and a lack of agency.

- **Survivor:** This term highlights an individual's strength and determination to move forward after violence. It frames them as someone who has overcome trauma, which can empower them and provide hope to others in similar situations.
- **Victim:** While “victim” is a legally recognised term that may be appropriate in certain legal contexts, for example, when referring to the crime or criminal justice system or when an attack has resulted in death. In other situations, it may reinforce a passive narrative. Overuse of this term can perpetuate the notion that individuals affected by violence lack agency or are defined by their trauma.

Example: Instead of saying, “The victim of the assault struggled to rebuild her life,” use “The assault survivor showed resilience in rebuilding her life.” This subtle shift acknowledges the individual’s agency and courage.

2. Directly Identify Perpetrators’ Actions

Passive language such as “she was assaulted” can obscure the perpetrator’s role in the act, subtly implying that violence “just happened” to the survivor. Using active voice to specify the perpetrator and their actions places accountability on the person responsible for the violence and avoids implying any responsibility on the survivor.

- **Active Voice:** “He assaulted her” directly names the person responsible, clarifying that the violence was an act inflicted by someone else.
- **Passive Voice:** “She was assaulted” focuses solely on the survivor and omits the perpetrator. This phrasing may unintentionally imply that the survivor is more central to the story than the responsible party.

Example: When covering intimate partner violence, use phrases like “The perpetrator physically assaulted her,” instead of “She was physically assaulted” to ensure readers understand that violence is inflicted by individuals, not by circumstances.

3. Avoid Minimising Phrases

Certain phrases like “domestic dispute” or “relationship trouble” can imply mutual fault, trivialise the violence and fail to convey the seriousness of the situation. Terms that downplay the gravity of VAWG incidents can make readers perceive violence as a common occurrence or as part of typical relationship challenges, thus reducing its perceived importance.

- **Use Specific Terms:** Terms like “domestic violence,” “intimate partner violence” or “gender-based violence” precisely describe the issue and convey that it is a serious violation of human rights rather than a simple disagreement.
- **Avoid Terms Suggesting Disagreement:** Words like “dispute” or “trouble” suggest that both parties contributed to the problem, which can detract from recognising the act as abusive and dangerous.

Example: Instead of referring to a violent act as a “domestic dispute,” frame it accurately as “domestic violence” or “intimate partner violence,” which makes it clear that the issue is not merely a disagreement but an act of aggression with serious implications.

Learning Box: The Power of Language in Reporting

- *A 2022 survey by Women's Aid titled "Come Together to End Domestic Abuse: a survey of UK attitudes to domestic abuse 2022" examined public attitudes towards domestic abuse in the UK. The survey found that certain terms and perceptions can influence how domestic abuse is understood and tolerated in society.*

Avoiding Harmful Terminology:

To protect survivors’ dignity and promote accurate, respectful reporting, journalists should avoid language that may inadvertently blame the survivor, reinforce stereotypes or downplay the impact of VAWG. Using considerate, trauma-informed language is crucial for ethical and empathetic storytelling.

1. Steer Clear of Victim-Blaming Phrases

Victim-blaming language suggests that the survivor’s actions or appearance contributed to the violence, which can shift responsibility

away from the perpetrator and imply that the survivor could have prevented the incident. Phrases like “she was out late” or “she was wearing” reinforce harmful narratives that make survivors responsible for the violence they experienced.

- **Avoid Descriptions of Survivor’s Appearance or Behaviour:** These details can create the perception that a survivor’s appearance or choices somehow provoked violence, reinforcing stereotypes and deflecting blame from the perpetrator.
- **Emphasise Perpetrator Responsibility:** Keep the focus on the individual who committed the violent act, rather than the survivor’s circumstances or behaviour.

Example: Instead of saying “She was wearing revealing clothing,” use language that holds the perpetrator accountable such as “He assaulted her in a public space.” This framing keeps the perpetrator’s actions central and avoids any implication of survivor culpability.

2. Use Trauma-Informed Language

Trauma-informed language is considerate, respectful and sensitive to the psychological impact of violence on survivors. This approach prioritises words that avoid re-traumatising or stigmatising survivors, creating a compassionate and supportive narrative. Trauma-informed language respects the complexities of a survivor’s experience and refrains from judgement or assumptions.

- **Choose Words Carefully:** Avoid graphic or sensational terms that could shock readers or trigger survivors. Instead, use specific, respectful language that describes the experience without sensationalism.
- **Be Mindful of Mental Health Impacts:** Avoid phrases that could undermine survivors’ mental well-being, and refrain from labelling survivors by their trauma.

Example: Instead of “brutally attacked,” say “physically assaulted” to convey the violence without using shocking or triggering language. Using neutral terms respect survivors and allow readers to grasp the situation without sensationalism.

3. Challenge Stereotypes

Stereotypes surrounding VAWG can be deeply ingrained in certain cultural narratives, often portraying violence as “normal” or inevitable within specific demographics or communities. Journalists should avoid language that reinforces stereotypes about gender roles, power dynamics or the inevitability of violence in particular cultures or settings. Challenging stereotypes promotes a more inclusive and accurate understanding of VAWG as a global issue with deep social and structural roots.

- **Avoid Cultural or Ethnic Generalisations:** Refrain from implying that violence is inherent to certain cultural groups or communities. All societies have norms that may enable or discourage violence, and attributing VAWG to a specific group risks reinforcing harmful biases.
- **Focus on Universal Issues:** Emphasise that VAWG is a systemic issue affecting individuals across all backgrounds and highlight societal factors like power imbalances and gender norms without isolating specific groups.

Example: Avoid framing stories as “cultural issues,” such as “Violence is common in XYZ communities,” and instead explore underlying factors like “In communities with limited resources, lack of legal protections often allows VAWG to persist.” This approach encourages understanding of systemic issues without perpetuating stereotypes.

3.5 Importance of Contextualising VAWG Stories

Contextualising stories about Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) allows journalists to present incidents not as isolated events but as part of larger, systemic issues. Without context, media stories may inadvertently paint VAWG as rare or random occurrences rather than consequences of broader societal structures. Providing context educates the public on the root causes of violence, builds empathy and highlights the need for systemic change to prevent future incidents. Contextualisation fosters a deeper understanding of the cultural, social, economic and legal factors contributing to VAWG, making it clear that the issue is pervasive and requires collective, informed responses.

Contextualisation Strategies

To provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of VAWG, journalists can use the following strategies to enrich their storytelling and shed light on the broader factors influencing these issues.

1. Highlight Systemic Issues

Systemic issues such as cultural norms, economic pressures and legal gaps are foundational in shaping the environment in which VAWG occurs. By referencing these factors, journalists can illustrate that violence against women and girls is not merely an individual act but is often perpetuated by structural conditions that make women and girls more vulnerable.

- **Cultural Norms:** Many societies still uphold gender norms that may implicitly support control over women, including harmful beliefs that justify male authority or female submissiveness. Highlighting these norms helps audiences understand the deep-seated social attitudes that normalise or excuse violence.
- **Economic Conditions:** Economic dependency can trap survivors in abusive situations. For example, lack of financial independence may prevent women from leaving harmful environments, and economic instability can exacerbate VAWG. By referencing economic factors, journalists underscore the importance of financial empowerment and accessible support systems.
- **Legal Gaps:** In many regions, weak legal protections or insufficient enforcement of laws leaves survivors with limited options for justice or protection. Highlighting legal barriers demonstrates the need for stronger laws and enforcement to deter perpetrators and support survivors.

Example: Rather than simply reporting on a specific case of intimate partner violence, a story might include information about the local legal system's handling of domestic violence cases, showing readers that the survivor's challenges are part of a larger pattern influenced by inadequate legal protections.

2. Incorporate Data

Data provides measurable evidence that reinforces the widespread nature of VAWG. Including statistics on the prevalence of VAWG, demographic variations or economic costs adds authority to a story, helping readers grasp the scale of the issue and understand that it affects a significant portion of the population.

- **VAWG Prevalence:** Citing statistics on how common VAWG is in each area helps dispel myths that it is an isolated issue. For example, sharing that “one in three women worldwide experiences physical or sexual violence” shows that the problem is systemic.
- **Demographic Variations:** Data on demographics can highlight which groups are most affected, such as young women, rural communities or economically marginalised groups, showing that certain vulnerabilities intersect with VAWG prevalence.
- **Economic Costs:** Including the economic impact of VAWG, such as the costs to healthcare systems or lost productivity, can help audiences understand that the effects of VAWG extend beyond individual lives and have tangible social implications.

Example: A report on domestic violence might incorporate data on its economic costs, showing that violence leads to billions of dollars in lost productivity and healthcare expenses, thus making it clear that the consequences of VAWG are not only personal but societal.

3. Mention Support Services

Highlighting organisations and services working to support survivors emphasises that survivors have options and help is available. This strategy not only informs readers about resources but also underscores the importance of these services in addressing VAWG's impact and encourages broader public support.

- **Local and National Organisations:** Mentioning specific organisations working to combat VAWG or support survivors can empower individuals to seek help and educate readers about available support systems.
- **Service Accessibility:** Discussing the accessibility or availability of support services, such as whether rural areas have equal access to shelters or counselling, highlights disparities and can increase public support for expanded resources.
- **International Aid and Policies:** Mentioning global organisations or international funding can provide context for how VAWG is addressed in different countries, showing the role of both local and international efforts.

Example: A story on sexual violence might include contact information for a local hotline or advocacy group, reminding readers that help is accessible and encouraging awareness of these services.

Learning Box: Contextualising for Broader Impact

- *In 2023, a story by a Brazilian news outlet on rural VAWG covered not only survivors' stories but also discussed the economic dependency of women in rural areas and the limited access to support services. The report encouraged a national conversation on*

improving resources and protections for rural women, demonstrating how contextual reporting can influence social policy.

Best Practices for Contextualising Stories:

Incorporating context into VAWG reporting requires thoughtful framing, reliance on expert perspectives and attention to policy implications. These practices ensure that stories are informative, impactful and supportive of efforts to address and prevent VAWG.

1. Link Individual Stories to Broader Issues

Individual stories are powerful but linking them to broader issues like gender inequality or legal reforms help readers understand that VAWG is not isolated to one person or place. Instead, VAWG is influenced by structural inequalities that are embedded in society.

- **Gender Inequality:** Relate incidents to gender disparities that affect access to resources, education and decision-making power. This framing shows readers that addressing gender inequality is central to reducing VAWG.
- **Power Dynamics:** Highlight power imbalances, such as in workplace harassment cases, where individuals in positions of power may exploit their authority. This focus on power dynamics illustrates that VAWG is often about control and coercion.
- **Legal Reform:** Frame stories within the context of legal reforms that could address the issue. This may involve discussing existing legal protections, their limitations or pending reforms aimed at closing gaps in the law.

Example: A report on sexual harassment in the workplace could link individual cases to broader discussions about workplace safety policies and equal employment rights, showing that these incidents are part of systemic issues requiring policy attention.

2. Interview Experts and Advocates

Gender experts, sociologists or community leaders provide insights into the underlying causes of VAWG and ways to address them. Their perspectives offer context that goes beyond personal accounts, educating

readers on the complexities of VAWG and reinforcing the need for collective action.

- **Expert Analysis:** Experts can explain complex issues, such as the impact of cultural beliefs on VAWG or the effectiveness of legal protections, providing readers with a clearer understanding of root causes and solutions.
- **Advocate Perspectives:** Advocates from organisations working to prevent VAWG or support survivors can share frontline experiences, such as challenges in securing funding for shelters or trends they see in support service demands.
- **Multidisciplinary Input:** Combining perspectives from different fields like psychology, law and sociology help readers see the multifaceted nature of VAWG and understand how various sectors must collaborate to address it.

Example: A story on domestic violence could include insights from a psychologist on trauma, an advocate on shelter needs, and a legal expert on protective orders, offering a holistic view of the issue and potential solutions.

3. Highlight Policy Implications

Reporting on the legal and policy landscape surrounding VAWG educates readers on the protections available to survivors and the limitations they may face. This strategy highlights the importance of legal reform and encourages public discourse on policy improvements.

- **Current Legislation:** Mention laws in place to address VAWG and discuss their effectiveness. For example, are protective orders easy to obtain? Are perpetrators consistently prosecuted?
- **Policy Gaps:** Identify areas where the law falls short, such as lack of funding for survivor services, insufficient penalties or the absence of workplace harassment protections. This educates readers on the work still needed to protect survivors.
- **International Standards:** Referencing international standards or treaties, such as CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), provides a benchmark for evaluating a country's progress and highlights global commitments to combatting VAWG.

Example: A report on sexual harassment in the workplace might reference proposed legislative changes or compare local policies with international standards, showing readers the potential for policy improvements.

SECTION 4: Legal Frameworks and Media Reporting

This section provides an overview of the legal frameworks that prohibit or criminalise Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and that shape media reporting on VAWG. Understanding these frameworks equips journalists with the knowledge they need to report responsibly, protect survivor privacy and avoid legal repercussions. The section further examines the legal responsibilities of media outlets and journalists when covering VAWG and concludes with case studies that illustrate the impact of legal considerations on media reporting.

4.1 Overview of Relevant International and National Laws

Understanding both National and international laws on VAWG provides a foundation for journalists to report on these issues from a survivor-led perspective, ethically and with the appropriate legal language. This section highlights key Nigerian legislation and International conventions that protect the rights of women and girls and influence media responsibilities in covering cases of violence.

Nigerian Laws on VAWG

1. Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) Act 2015

The VAPP Act is Nigeria's most comprehensive legislation addressing VAWG, criminalising a wide range of abuses, including physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence. Importantly, the Act mandates support mechanisms for survivors, such as restraining orders and access to shelters, making it a key legal tool for addressing VAWG across Nigeria. Initially enacted at the federal level, the VAPP Act requires state-by-state adoption for effective implementation.

As at 1 November 2024, 35 states in Nigeria have adopted the VAPP Act into law or similar legislation, progressively expanding legal protection across the country. Only Kano State is yet to pass a law prohibiting VAWG. For journalists, understanding VAPP Act's provisions allows for accurate and empathetic reporting, especially in highlighting areas of the country where survivors may lack certain

protections if the Act has not been fully adopted or where it is poorly implemented.

Key Provisions:

- Criminalisation of physical, psychological and sexual violence
- Provisions for survivor support and rehabilitation
- Mandatory reporting for certain professionals

2. **Child Rights Act (CRA), 2003:** This federal Act protects the rights of all children under 18, including explicit protections against child marriage, sexual exploitation and abuse. The CRA outlines numerous rights relevant to VAWG and mandates that any actions affecting children prioritise their best interests. This law also frames media responsibilities when reporting on cases involving minors, particularly the need to ensure survivor anonymity and respect for child welfare.

Currently, all states except Gombe state have a Child Rights Law, though some states particularly in northern Nigeria have provisions that are weaker than the federal statute. This variation highlights the importance of journalists understanding specific state adoption, which affects the applicability of protections when reporting on child-related VAWG.

3. **Criminal Laws, Penal Code and Criminal Code**

The Penal Code and Criminal Code are two criminal laws applicable in northern and southern states respectively. This distinction happened under Colonial rule in Nigeria where the authorities adopted a dual legal system to criminal law to accommodate Northern Nigeria's Islamic traditions. Both codes contain provisions related to VAWG, addressing offenses like rape, assault and kidnapping. These codes, however, differ in language and scope, reflecting the distinct legal traditions in Nigeria. For instance, the Penal Code, influenced by Sharia law, includes specific definitions and provisions around personal status laws.

Journalists should be aware of these regional differences, as the legal context may shape the way VAWG cases are investigated, prosecuted and adjudicated in various regions. A nuanced understanding of both codes ensures journalists approach VAWG incidents with legal accuracy based on geographic location.

In addition, some states have modernised and updated their criminal justice systems and enacted new laws. A state like Lagos State has newer laws like the Criminal Law of Lagos State 2015 that have replaced the Criminal Code in their jurisdiction. It is imperative that journalists check that they are using and referencing the correct up-to-date applicable law and ensure that they are making references to it.

4. Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act, 2015

As technology evolves, VAWG increasingly extends into online spaces, making the Cybercrimes Act an important law for journalists covering cases of digital abuse. This Act criminalises online harassment, stalking and bullying, offering a framework for legal action against offenders and protection for women and girls affected by cyber violence. Given the rising prevalence of online harassment in Nigeria, journalists should be well-versed in this Act to responsibly report on digital VAWG cases.

5. Trafficking In Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act 2015

6. The law prohibits and penalises human trafficking, particularly targeting women and children. It also creates a dedicated body, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) tasked with investigating and prosecuting traffickers, as well as offering support and rehabilitation to victims and survivors. NAPTIP is the agency charged with maintaining sex offender registers and reporting on the implementation of the VAPP Act.

International Laws and Conventions on VAWG

- 1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**

CEDAW is an international treaty ratified by Nigeria in 1985, which mandates the elimination of gender discrimination and violence against women. It requires Nigeria to implement protective laws, policies and education programmes. The influence of CEDAW on Nigerian legislation, including the VAPP Act, underscores the commitment to uphold women's rights, and it encourages journalists to adopt a language that promotes women's dignity and challenges harmful stereotypes.

2. United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993)

Though not legally binding, this declaration provides guiding principles on state responsibility in preventing violence and protecting survivors. Its adoption sets ethical standards for both governments and journalists. For the media, it advocates for respectful reporting that acknowledges the human rights of survivors and discourages sensationalism.

3. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989)

The foremost international treaty that protects the rights of the child (anyone below the age 18 years old) in all aspects of their lives and development. Nigeria ratified the treaty in 1991.

4. African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child 1990:

Nigeria ratified the African Union Child Charter in 2001. Like the CRC, it defines every person under the age of 18 as a child and calls on states to protect children from abuse and violations.

5. Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) (2003)

The Maputo Protocol, ratified by Nigeria in 2004, is an African Union treaty focusing on the rights of women in Africa, including protection from violence and harmful practices. It mandates signatory states to create laws, adopt policies and take steps to address VAWG, with special emphasis on culturally-specific forms of violence, such as

female genital mutilation (FGM). Nigerian media professionals should incorporate insights from the Maputo Protocol when reporting on culturally-sensitive VAWG cases, emphasising human rights and aligning reporting with both regional and global standards.

There are other international resolutions covering specific aspects of VAWG such as Women, peace and security, digital violence and sexual harassment in the workplace.

Box/Table: International and National Frameworks

International Frameworks

United Nations and other International Bodies

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
- Refugee Convention, 1951
- Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1967
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted on 16 December 1966
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979 and its Optional Protocol, 1999
- Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 1984
- Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, 2000
- United Nations Convention Against Transactional Organised Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 2000
- Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 1993

- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), 1995
- United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) on Women, Peace and Security Addressing Sexual and Gender-based Violence in conflict and calling for participation of women and girls in peacebuilding and conflict resolution such as UNSCR 1325 (2000), UNSCR 1820 (2008), UNSCR 1888 (2009) UNSCR 1889 (2009), UNSCR 1960 (2010), UNSCR 2106 (2013) UNSCR 2467 (2019).
- International Labour Organisation (ILO) C190 - Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019
- The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998

African Union and other Regional Bodies

- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990
- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), 2003
- African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), 2009
- OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, 1969.

Other Resolutions and Soft Laws

- Ouagadougou Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children, 2006
- ACHPR Guidelines for Combating Sexual Violence and its Consequences in Africa, 2017
- Resolution on the Protection of Women Against Digital Violence in Africa - ACHPR/Res. 522 (LXXII). 2022

National Frameworks

- Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) Act, 2015 and various state VAPP Laws
- Protection Against Domestic Violence Law of Lagos State, 2007
- Ekiti State Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Law, 2011
- Child Rights Act (CRA), 2003
- Penal Code
- Criminal Code
- Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2015
- Cybercrimes Act (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act, 2015
- Trafficking In Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015
- Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018
- Administration of Criminal Justice Act, 2015
- Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended)

Policies and Action Plans

- i. National Gender Policy, 2021
- ii. National Policy and Plan of Action for the Elimination of FGM in Nigeria (2013-2017).
- iii. National Reproductive Health Policy, 2017
- iv. Policy on the Health and Development of Adolescents and Young People in Nigeria, 2007
- v. National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

4.2 Media's Legal Responsibilities When Reporting on VAWG

When reporting on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), journalists must navigate legal responsibilities carefully to ensure

compliance with national laws and international standards while safeguarding survivor dignity. Violations can result in legal consequences for media outlets, but following these guidelines also reinforces ethical reporting and public trust. Nigerian journalists should be particularly mindful of specific laws and ethical standards to maintain responsible reporting.

Key Legal Responsibilities for Journalists and Media Outlets

1. Protecting Survivor Privacy

Laws such as Nigeria's Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) outline specific obligations to protect survivor privacy. Journalists should avoid sharing identifying information about survivors, such as names, addresses or other potentially revealing details unless the survivor has given explicit, informed consent. Media professionals should consider using pseudonyms or anonymising details, particularly in cases involving minors or other vulnerable individuals, to comply with legal obligations and ethical best practices.

Survivor privacy is also safeguarded by the Child Rights Act (CRA) for minors, requiring additional reporting discretion. This legislation implies that even non-consensual information dissemination if it indirectly identifies the survivor could result in penalties.

2. Avoiding Defamation

Defamation laws in Nigeria protect individuals against false information that could harm their reputation, particularly relevant when journalists report on VAWG involving specific individuals or institutions. Inaccurate or sensationalised reporting that tarnishes someone's reputation could lead to legal action for libel or slander. For this reason, journalists must thoroughly verify facts, especially when the allegations are criminal, sensitive or potentially damaging.

Since the Nigerian Criminal Code, Penal Code and various states' criminal laws include provisions against defamation, understanding these guidelines is essential when covering high-profile VAWG

cases to prevent accusations that could escalate to lawsuits against the publication or journalist.

3. Adhering to Cyber Harassment Laws

In the digital era, online harassment is a frequent aspect of VAWG, and Nigeria's Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc) Act addresses online abuse, including cyberbullying and doxing. Journalists must take particular care when reporting on VAWG in online contexts. The Cybercrimes Act criminalises acts such as stalking, intimidation or incitement, meaning that a journalist or media outlet contributing to online harassment could be held accountable. Sensitive reporting in digital spaces should also avoid unnecessary exposure of personal information to protect survivor privacy and avoid violating data protection laws.

4. Compliance with Ethical Standards and Regulatory Bodies

Nigerian media regulatory bodies, like the Nigerian Press Council and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), enforce standards for responsible reporting. The Nigerian Press Code and the NBC's broadcasting guidelines emphasise the importance of dignity, accuracy and fairness. Therefore, in cases of gender-based violence, reporting that sensationalises, victimises or distorts the facts of a VAWG case can result in penalties or fines, emphasising the importance of accuracy and discretion.

Moreover, adhering to these standards requires journalists to avoid language or content that may exploit the survivor's experiences for publicity or sensationalise violence. Ethical reporting also involves being trauma-informed, as the press code outlines, to minimise re-traumatisation and public backlash.

5. Balancing Freedom of Expression with Legal Constraints

The Nigerian Constitution protects freedom of expression and the press, but these rights are not absolute regarding VAWG. Journalists need to respect boundaries set by defamation laws, privacy protection laws and ethical guidelines. Balancing these factors with public interest reporting can be challenging, especially when dealing with sensitive or high-profile cases. However, prioritising legal and ethical obligations over sensationalism ensures

that media coverage serves as a tool for justice rather than a vehicle for secondary victimisation.

Learning Box

While Nigerian laws provide specific guidelines, international frameworks also inform media responsibilities in VAWG reporting. Treaties like the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)* and the *Maputo Protocol* emphasise that states should enact and enforce measures to prevent and address VAWG, including through media responsibility. Journalists should aim to align their practices with these frameworks, which promote respectful, accurate and human rights-centred coverage.

4.3 Case Studies of Legal Implications in VAWG Reporting

Case Study 1: Privacy Breach in a Domestic Violence Report

A prominent privacy breach case highlighted legal responsibilities for journalists reporting on VAWG. This involved a local newspaper that disclosed sensitive information about a domestic violence survivor, including her name, photo and workplace, without her consent. This led to further harassment of the survivor and demonstrated the importance of Nigeria's Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP), which mandates privacy protections for survivors. The case concluded with a settlement favouring the survivor, emphasising that media outlets must respect survivor privacy to avoid legal repercussions and uphold ethical reporting standards.

In another case, a journalist faced defamation claims after publishing a VAWG report that incorrectly implicated an individual in a domestic violence incident. This case underscored the importance of verifying facts thoroughly, as Nigeria's defamation laws protect individuals from false information that could damage their reputations. The legal proceedings were resolved after the newspaper issued a public retraction, reinforcing

the necessity for factual accuracy to prevent defamation in sensitive cases.

These cases illustrate journalists' legal and ethical obligations in Nigeria, especially regarding privacy and defamation in VAWG reporting. The VAPP Act and Nigerian privacy and defamation laws provide a framework that helps protect survivors and guides responsible media practices.

Case Study 2: Defamation in Reporting Sexual Harassment at a Prominent Nigerian Bank

A journalist from an Abuja-based publication faced significant backlash after publishing an article that reported on allegations of sexual harassment against a high-ranking official at a leading Nigerian bank. The article named the executive and included unverified claims, leading to the executive filing a defamation lawsuit against both the journalist and the publication. The court ultimately ruled in favour of the executive, recognising that the publication of unsubstantiated claims had caused unwarranted reputational damage.

This case exemplifies the potential legal repercussions journalists face under Nigerian defamation laws, which protect individuals from false statements that could harm their reputations. It emphasises the critical importance of accuracy and thorough verification in reporting on sensitive topics such as sexual harassment, especially when they involve named individuals. Failure to adhere to these principles jeopardises journalistic integrity and exposes media outlets to significant legal liabilities.

Case Study 3: Online Harassment and the Cybercrimes Act in a High-Profile Activist Case

A prominent women's rights activist was subjected to severe online harassment. This situation intensified after a local news outlet published a story detailing her experiences while failing to redact her social media profiles, which inadvertently exposed her to further attacks and threats. The activist subsequently filed a lawsuit against the media outlet, claiming that their reporting not only failed to protect her identity but actively contributed to the online harassment she was facing. This case underscored the legal obligations imposed by the Cybercrimes

(Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act, which is designed to prevent online abuse and protect individuals from harassment.

The outcome of this case emphasised the necessity for media outlets to exercise caution in their reporting, especially regarding sensitive topics involving individuals vulnerable to online threats. It highlighted the requirement for news organisations to be vigilant about the personal information they disclose, particularly in cases involving violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Case Study 4: Sensationalised Reporting in a Forced Marriage Case (Northern Nigeria)

The case study involved sensationalised reporting in a forced marriage case in Northern Nigeria, reflects broader concerns regarding ethical journalism in sensitive topics like Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). While this specific case may not have been documented in mainstream media with identifiable details, it represents common issues faced by journalists in the region.

In this instance, a report published by a local media outlet concerning a forced marriage garnered criticism for its graphic and sensationalised portrayal of the survivor's experiences. The article dramatised her trauma, suggesting familial complicity without presenting verified evidence or sourcing. This reporting style raised alarms among local authorities and press councils, stressing the importance of adhering to ethical standards established by the Nigerian Press Council.

Such standards explicitly prohibit sensationalism in VAWG reporting, aiming to protect survivors from further harm and stigmatisation. The outlet faced penalties in response to the backlash, including fines and a mandate to retract the sensationalised story. This case underscores the legal risks associated with irresponsible reporting and highlights the need for media outlets to adhere to guidelines prioritising survivors' dignity and well-being.

SECTION 5: Practical Tools for Journalists

5.1 Interviewing Survivors: Do's and Don'ts

When interviewing survivors of violence, particularly gender-based violence, journalists bear a profound responsibility. Survivors have often endured trauma and may be in a vulnerable state, so handling interviews with empathy, respect and sensitivity is essential. This guide provides practical tools to ensure the interview process respects survivors' dignity and safety, avoiding re-traumatisation and safeguarding their privacy.

Do's

1. **Establish Trust:** Begin by creating a rapport with the survivor, explaining who you are, your role and the purpose of the interview. Building trust helps the survivor feel safe, giving them control over their narrative, which is essential when discussing trauma. Establishing this rapport can set a supportive tone for the conversation, allowing the survivor to open up comfortably.
2. **Prepare Thoroughly:** Conduct background research on the survivor's experience and relevant cultural, social or legal contexts before the interview. This preparation enables journalists to approach the interview sensitively, avoiding questions that could inadvertently cause distress or discomfort. Knowing the context of the survivor's story reflects respect and dedication, which are crucial for maintaining ethical standards in journalism.
3. **Ensure Confidentiality:** Discuss confidentiality measures, offering options like pseudonyms or anonymising personal details unless the survivor explicitly consents to reveal their identity. Survivors of VAWG are often at risk of societal stigma or backlash, making privacy protection essential. This attention to confidentiality demonstrates respect for the survivor's safety and can help them feel more secure in sharing their experiences.
4. **Explain the Interview Process:** Transparency is vital. Outline the interview process, explain what the survivor can expect, and clarify

how the information will be used. Remind them they can skip questions, take breaks or stop the interview anytime. This openness ensures they feel in control, reducing vulnerability and building trust in the process.

5. **Offer Control and Agency:** Allow the survivor to decide which parts of their story they wish to discuss and at what pace. Remind them that they can pause or end the interview if need be. Offering this level of control is particularly empowering, as it provides them with a sense of autonomy that their experience may have compromised.

6. **Use Empathy and Active Listening:** Practice active listening by maintaining eye contact, nodding and acknowledging their responses without interruption. Empathetic listening involves reading non-verbal cues, showing compassion and allowing survivors to express themselves fully without feeling rushed or pressured. This approach can make survivors feel understood and validated, which is crucial in handling traumatic narratives.

7. **Provide Information on Support Services:** After the interview, share information on support resources such as counselling services, legal aid or hotlines. Offering these resources shows that you care about the survivor's well-being beyond the scope of the interview, providing tools for ongoing support and healing.

Don'ts

1. **Avoid Pressuring for Details:** Respect the survivor's boundaries and avoid probing into areas they are uncomfortable discussing. Pressing for details, particularly about traumatic incidents, can lead to re-traumatisation. Instead, allow survivors to share only what they feel comfortable with. An example of respectful questioning would be, "What would you like to share about your experience?" rather than directly asking for graphic details.

2. **Refrain from Judgemental Reactions:** Survivors may fear judgement, and even subtle reactions like changes in tone or facial expressions can make them feel uncomfortable. Avoid showing surprise, disbelief or disapproval, as these responses can stigmatise or retraumatise the survivor. Instead, respond with supportive and neutral statements such as, “Thank you for trusting me with your story”.
3. **Do Not Promise Confidentiality You Can’t Guarantee:** Be upfront about the limits of confidentiality, especially if the story could involve legal obligations or editorial policies that may reveal details. Explain potential risks and discuss options for anonymising their identity. Misleading promises about confidentiality can erode trust and potentially endanger the survivor.
4. **Avoid Sensationalism:** Sensationalism can exploit the survivor’s story for attention, trivialising their experience. Avoid graphic descriptions or dramatic language, which can retraumatise survivors or reduce their narrative to a spectacle. Ethical reporting should prioritise the survivor’s dignity and the broader social implications of VAWG rather than sensationalising trauma.
5. **Do Not Make Assumptions:** Survivors have unique experiences and emotional responses to trauma. Avoid assumptions or preconceived notions about how they should feel or act. Instead, ask open-ended questions that allow them to share their emotions authentically, like “How do you feel about sharing your story today?” rather than projecting feelings onto them.
6. **Do Not Use Leading or Suggestive Questions:** Leading questions can distort the survivor’s story by implying a particular answer. Avoid phrasing that could influence their response, such as “You must have felt scared.” Instead, frame questions neutrally to allow survivors to narrate their experience in their own words, helping them feel fully in control of their narrative

7. **Do Not Ignore Cultural Sensitivities:** Survivors come from diverse backgrounds, and their cultural beliefs may shape how they perceive and express trauma. Be mindful of cultural norms and preferences, as they may affect the survivor's comfort in discussing certain topics. Researching their cultural context can help you approach sensitive questions more appropriately, thus creating a respectful interview environment.

5.2 Fact-Checking and Verifying Information in VAWG Cases

Fact-checking and verifying information are essential to ethical and accurate reporting on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Given the sensitive and potentially stigmatising nature of VAWG stories, journalists must handle these cases with rigour, compassion and integrity. Fact-checking ensures that reports are both credible and respectful of survivors, avoiding the risk of perpetuating misinformation, harming reputations or re-traumatising those affected.

Why Fact-Checking is Critical in VAWG Reporting

Accurate reporting on VAWG is not only a journalistic obligation but a moral imperative. Survivors of VAWG may already face stigma and discrimination, and inaccurate or sensationalised reporting can exacerbate their suffering. Misinformation can also mislead the public, diverting attention from systemic issues and reinforcing harmful stereotypes. By verifying information, journalists provide a trustworthy account that respects the survivor's dignity and promotes informed discourse around VAWG.

Steps for Journalists in the Fact-Checking Process

1. **Define Verification Needs Early**

- Before starting the fact-checking process, outline the critical elements that require verification, such as timelines, specific events and individuals' roles. Having a clear plan reduces the need for repeated inquiries, which can be distressing for survivors.

2. **Double-Check Details with Independent Sources**

- Aim for at least two independent sources when confirming key details, such as police reports and medical records.

- If there are conflicting accounts, report these differences transparently to allow readers to form a well-rounded understanding without obscuring facts.

3. Consult Specialists as Needed

- For cases involving legal proceedings or accusations, consult a legal advisor to understand the implications and ensure compliance with defamation laws.
- In cases involving cross-cultural contexts, seek input from cultural specialists to accurately represent the survivor's perspective without misinterpretation or bias.

4. Document Verification for Accountability

- Maintain a log of sources, interview notes, and cross-checks. This documentation provides an accountability record, particularly valuable if the story faces scrutiny or legal challenges.
- Share documentation with editors or fact-checkers within your organisation to maintain internal accountability.

5. Centre Survivor Voices While Fact-Checking

- The survivor's experience should guide the story. Any fact-checking that alters or questions their account should be handled with transparency and respect, consulting them when necessary to avoid misrepresentation.

5.3 Writing and Editing Sensitive Content

Writing and editing content on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) requires a thoughtful approach that balances factual reporting with sensitivity and respect for survivors. Effective VAWG reporting aims to inform the public, advocate for change and avoid re-traumatising survivors. Here are some best practices for handling sensitive content ethically:

1. Centre the Survivor's Dignity

- **Use Empowering Language:** When referring to individuals affected by VAWG, use "survivor" instead of "victim," which conveys

resilience and agency. However, if the survivor prefers a specific term, respect their preference.

- **Avoid Graphic or Intrusive Details:** Focus on the systemic context or broader impacts of VAWG rather than graphic details of the incident. Intimate descriptions may re-traumatise survivors and sensationalise the experience rather than contribute to understanding.

2. Contextualise the Violence Within a Larger System

- **Focus on Systemic Issues:** Link individual stories to broader societal issues, such as legal gaps, economic inequalities or cultural norms, to give readers insight into the causes of VAWG.
- **Use Relevant Statistics and Facts:** Data helps illustrate the scope of VAWG and can offer context to individual cases, encouraging readers to view these stories as part of a larger issue rather than isolated incidents.

3. Avoid Victim-Blaming Language

- **Remove Implicit Blame:** Be mindful of any phrasing that could imply that the survivor is responsible for the violence. Avoid words that suggest the survivor “allowed” or “provoked” the situation, and instead emphasise the perpetrator’s responsibility.
- **Focus on the Perpetrator’s Actions:** For example, instead of writing “she was assaulted,” use “the assailant attacked her,” which places accountability on the perpetrator rather than passive language that centres on the survivor.

4. Use Trauma-Informed Editing Techniques

- **Balance Factual Reporting and Sensitivity:** Journalists should ensure the language used in final drafts is neutral, precise and avoids dramatising events.
- **Revisit Content for Harmful Language:** Consider how each line might impact the survivor or community while editing. Avoid stigmatising terms, gender stereotypes and words that may diminish the gravity of VAWG.

Editing Checklist for Sensitive Content

- Double-check survivor anonymity and remove any unnecessary identifying details.
- Ensure language is neutral, respectful and free from sensationalism.
- Verify that statistics and sources are accurate and used responsibly to provide context.
- Remove phrases or sections that could re-traumatise survivors or imply blame.

5.4 Guidelines for Visual Reporting and Imagery

Imagery in VAWG reporting can significantly influence how stories are received. Responsible visual reporting should maintain survivors' dignity, avoid graphic or invasive visuals and focus on promoting understanding and awareness.

1. Obtain Informed Consent for Imagery

- **Explain Purpose and Reach:** Before photographing or filming survivors, explain the purpose of the visuals, where they will be used and how widely they might be distributed.
- **Consent for Online Publication:** Digital platforms increase the risk of images being shared or repurposed. Make sure survivors understand these risks and give explicit consent for online use.

2. Ensure Survivor Anonymity

- **Anonymise Facial and Location Details:** Avoid showing survivors' faces if they have not given consent. Blurred faces, silhouettes or alternative angles can protect identity without reducing the story's impact.
- **Choose Non-Identifiable Backgrounds:** Photographs that reveal too much about a survivor's environment, such as recognisable locations or community settings, could inadvertently lead to identification.

3. Avoid Graphic or Sensational Imagery

- **Focus on Symbolic or Abstract Images:** Use imagery representing the themes of resilience, solidarity or justice without depicting explicit aspects of the survivor's trauma.
- **Avoid Posing Survivors in Vulnerable Positions:** Ensure survivors appear empowered rather than vulnerable or distressed, which can inadvertently reinforce harmful narratives or stereotypes about VAWG.

4. Consider Alternative Visual Approaches

- **Use Artistic or Illustrative Depictions:** Illustrations, abstract images or non-human visuals (such as close-ups of objects) can effectively convey themes of resilience and justice without compromising privacy.
- **Highlight the Broader Context:** Visuals that focus on locations, community movements or protests against VAWG can draw attention to the systemic nature of the issue rather than individual cases alone.

Suggested Alternatives for Visual Storytelling

- **Silhouettes or Shadows:** These can represent survivors without identifying them.
- **Symbolic Imagery:** For example, hands reaching out or symbolic items (scales of justice, flowers, etc.) that convey hope, resilience or support.
- **Community or Support System Imagery:** Photographs of shelters, women's support groups or community events promoting awareness can convey support and resilience.

5.5 Sample Scripts and Templates for News Reports

Sample News Report Template

Introduction

- Briefly outline the incident, focusing on verified facts and omitting sensational details. Keep the language straightforward and non-dramatic.

Background and Context

- Provide relevant background information, such as statistics or laws related to the issue to help the audience understand the broader context of VAWG.

Survivor's Experience (If Consent Is Given)

- Share aspects of the survivor's experience with permission, focusing on resilience and challenges rather than graphic or traumatic details.

Expert Commentary

- Include quotes from experts (e.g., counsellors, law enforcement, advocates) who can provide further insight into the issue and its societal implications.

Conclusion and Call to Action

- Summarise the need for awareness and highlight resources for support, such as contact information for local shelters or hotlines.

Sample Broadcast Script for VAWG Report

Opening Line: "Today's report focuses on violence against women and girls, examining its prevalence and the social factors that contribute to this pervasive issue."

Contextual Background: "In [Location], statistics show that [number] women experience [type of violence] annually, highlighting the urgent need for systemic change."

Survivor's Perspective (If Applicable): "We spoke with a survivor, who wishes to remain anonymous. She hopes her story will encourage others facing similar situations to seek help and raise awareness about the resources available."

Expert Insights: "[Expert's Name], a [Professional Title], explains, 'VAWG affects entire communities, and tackling it requires comprehensive societal action.'"

Closing and Resources: “If you or someone you know is in need of support, please contact [Organisation Name] at [Contact Information].”

Sample Template for Digital Articles on VAWG

Title

“Understanding Violence Against Women: Systemic Issues and Pathways to Change”

Introduction

Begin with a brief overview of VAWG in the context of [specific location or community] and highlight the need for public awareness and systemic reform.

Body Sections

- **Section 1: The Scope of VAWG in [Location]:** Introduce current statistics or trends related to VAWG in the community.
- **Section 2: Survivor Experiences:** Share survivor stories (with consent) to illustrate the human impact of the issue and highlight challenges faced in accessing justice or support.
- **Section 3: Expert Analysis:** Provide insights from experts, advocates and legal professionals on VAWG’s underlying causes and potential solutions.
- **Section 4: Legal Framework and Policy Solutions:** Summarise relevant laws, such as the VAPP Act, and discuss current advocacy or legal efforts to improve protections against VAWG.

Conclusion

- Reinforce the need for systemic change and the community’s role in prevention and support. Provide contact information for local and national resources.

NOTE: These scripts and templates are designed to support journalists in producing balanced, respectful and impactful stories on VAWG.

SECTION 6: Data-Driven Reporting on VAWG

Data-driven reporting is a powerful tool for journalists covering Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). By incorporating accurate and comprehensive data, journalists can present stories that highlight individual cases and underscore the broader systemic issues, prevalence and societal impact of VAWG. This section provides journalists with the necessary resources, tools and strategies to enhance their reporting on VAWG using data.

6.1 How to Access and Use VAWG Data

Accessing reliable data is foundational for data-driven reporting on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). In this section, we explore key sources of VAWG data, including government databases, international organisations, NGOs, academic research, crowdsourced data and the ethical considerations necessary for using VAWG data responsibly.

Key Sources for VAWG Data

1. Government Databases and National Statistical Agencies

Government agencies and national statistical bodies are primary sources for comprehensive, regularly updated data on VAWG.

- **National Bureau of Statistics (NBS):** In Nigeria, the NBS releases annual and biennial reports that provide crucial insights into VAWG's prevalence and geographic distribution. These reports often cover different aspects of gender-based violence, such as domestic abuse, sexual harassment and psychological violence. The data is typically categorised by demographic variables (age, education level, urban/rural) that can help identify populations at higher risk.
- **Collaborations with International Bodies:** For example, NBS has collaborated with **UN Women** to conduct the Violence Against Women Survey, which provides targeted, detailed data on VAWG issues within Nigeria. Such collaborations ensure that data reflects both national trends and the global context, giving journalists valuable, credible statistics to underpin their reporting.

- **Other Government Departments:** Ministries dedicated to women's affairs, social welfare, or health also release relevant data, often through reports or publications about public health and safety. These departments may track data on sexual assault, trafficking, and other VAWG-related issues and they may also publish data on support services and survivor outcomes, allowing journalists to track the availability and impact of resources for survivors. **Example:** In Nigeria, data from the Ministry of Women Affairs can reveal trends in shelter and support services for survivors of VAWG, indicating gaps in services or areas needing further funding and attention.

2. International Organisations

International organisations offer robust, globally comparable data, which is particularly valuable for journalists looking to contextualise national VAWG trends within broader, global frameworks.

- **UN Women:** Publishes annual global and regional reports on the status of women, often including statistics on gender-based violence. These reports may provide data on the rates of intimate partner violence, workplace harassment and other forms of VAWG across different countries, enabling comparisons that highlight both progress and persistent challenges.
- **World Health Organisation (WHO):** WHO provides data on the health impacts of VAWG, including physical injuries, reproductive health issues and mental health consequences. WHO's resources often connect health data with socio-economic factors, giving journalists insights into how violence affects survivors' long-term health.
- **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA):** Focuses on reproductive health and rights, publishing data that often intersects with VAWG. For instance, UNFPA reports may contain data on forced marriages, adolescent pregnancies and female genital mutilation (FGM), shedding light on areas of intersection between reproductive health and violence.

Example: In 2020, UN Women released a report highlighting a surge in VAWG during the COVID-19 pandemic, attributing it to

stressors like economic hardship, lockdowns and restricted movement. Journalists can use this data to frame local VAWG cases within a pandemic-related “shadow pandemic,” thereby drawing attention to systemic factors that exacerbate violence.

3. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Advocacy Groups

NGOs and advocacy groups often conduct fieldwork and gather primary data through interviews, surveys and community engagement. These organisations may focus on marginalised groups, offering in-depth perspectives on issues that government agencies may overlook.

- **Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International:** These organisations release reports based on investigative research that often includes firsthand accounts and case studies of VAWG. Their reports cover a range of VAWG issues, from domestic violence to trafficking, providing rich qualitative data that can add depth to a story.
- **Local Organisations:** In Nigeria, organisations like **ActionAid** publish detailed annual reports that address VAWG at a community level. These reports often highlight specific trends, such as increased violence in certain regions or discuss the challenges local shelters and advocacy groups face.

Example: ActionAid’s annual reports on gender-based violence in Nigeria offer granular data on VAWG prevalence in specific Nigerian communities, revealing insights about local challenges and resource gaps. This data helps journalists present a localised view of VAWG, which is often more relatable to readers and more actionable for policymakers.

4. Academic Research and Journals

Academic studies provide both quantitative and qualitative insights into VAWG, often exploring the socio-economic, psychological and cultural factors that influence VAWG patterns.

- **Peer-Reviewed Journals:** Journals like *Violence Against Women*, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* and *Gender & Society* frequently publish articles that explore VAWG through various lenses,

including psychology, sociology and criminology. These studies offer data on VAWG prevalence and delve into complex topics like survivor behaviour, perpetrator profiles and societal attitudes.

- **Open-Access Repositories:** Platforms such as **ResearchGate** and **Google Scholar** allow journalists to access recent studies on VAWG for free. Many of these studies include region-specific data on VAWG, which journalists can use to highlight unique issues different demographics face.

5. Crowdsourced Data and Local Surveys

Though often less formal, crowd-sourced data can offer a grassroots perspective on VAWG that traditional statistics might not capture.

- **Platforms like *Ushahidi*:** Community-level surveys or crowdsourced data on platforms like *Ushahidi* allow users to report incidents of violence in real-time, providing journalists with timely information. Crowdsourced data is particularly useful in remote or underserved areas where government statistics are limited or unavailable.

Caution: While valuable for real-time insights, crowdsourced data must be verified with more formal statistics where possible to ensure accuracy, as it may lack validation.

Ethical Considerations for Data Use

When using VAWG data, ethical considerations are paramount to ensure respectful, accurate and responsible reporting. The following practices help journalists maintain integrity while protecting the rights and dignity of survivors.

1. Confidentiality

When reporting on VAWG, confidentiality is critical. Journalists should avoid sharing any identifiable information about survivors, such as names, addresses or specific locations, particularly in small communities where survivors may be easily identified. This respect for privacy aligns with ethical standards and protects survivors from potential retaliation or stigmatisation.

- **Best Practice:** Use pseudonyms, generalise locations and ensure any quotes or descriptions do not inadvertently reveal the survivor's identity.

2. Transparency

It is essential to be transparent about the limitations of VAWG data, which may include underreporting due to fear, stigma or mistrust in legal systems. Acknowledging these limitations maintains trust with the audience and gives them a realistic understanding of the data's reliability.

- **Example:** When discussing domestic violence statistics, a journalist might note that social stigma often leads to significant underreporting, particularly in conservative regions.

3. Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural beliefs and societal norms can influence how VAWG is reported and perceived. Journalists should be aware of these sensitivities and avoid framing data in a way that could be misinterpreted or stigmatising. For example, reporting on VAWG in culturally conservative areas may require careful wording to avoid backlash or to prevent reinforcing harmful stereotypes.

4. Responsible Framing

Using data to highlight systemic issues rather than individual blame helps frame VAWG as a societal problem rather than one solely affecting survivors. Emphasise factors like inadequate laws, lack of resources or cultural norms that perpetuate violence instead of framing incidents in a way that isolates or stigmatises individuals.

- **Example:** Instead of focusing on "high rates of violence in community X," a responsible framing would be "community X faces challenges in addressing VAWG due to limited resources and social stigma, as reflected in recent data."

6.2 Interpreting Statistics and Trends in VAWG

Interpreting data on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is essential for journalists to present an accurate and comprehensive picture of the issue. Effective interpretation requires careful consideration of how data is presented, awareness of underreporting factors, attention to intersectional nuances and a connection to systemic causes. These approaches enable journalists to move beyond raw numbers and communicate the societal context, disparities and complex factors underlying VAWG statistics.

Key Considerations in Interpreting VAWG Data

1. Understand Rates versus Raw Numbers

VAWG data is most effectively presented in terms of rates or percentages rather than absolute numbers. This approach makes it easier to grasp the prevalence of VAWG in relation to the population size and allows for more accurate comparisons across different groups or regions.

- **Prevalence Rates:** Using rates, such as the percentage of women affected, help contextualise the scope of VAWG, especially when comparing different populations or geographical areas. For instance, saying that “20% of women in Nigeria have experienced intimate partner violence” provides clearer insight into the scale of the issue than simply stating the number of reported cases. This clarity is crucial for readers, as it helps them understand VAWG in relation to the broader population.
- **Comparing Regions or Demographics:** When comparing data across various regions or demographics, rates allow journalists to draw meaningful conclusions without distorting the data. For example, a region with a smaller population may report fewer cases, but when viewed as a percentage, it might have a higher prevalence of VAWG than more populous areas.

Example: In a hypothetical report where one state has 500 reported cases of domestic violence (10% prevalence), and another has 1,000 cases (5% prevalence), interpreting the data as rates reveal that the former has a higher relative incidence of VAWG despite having fewer absolute cases.

2. Identify and Address Underreporting

Underreporting is a significant challenge in VAWG data due to factors like stigma, fear of retaliation, cultural taboos and distrust in law enforcement. Underreporting can lead to data that might appear lower than the actual prevalence of VAWG, especially in conservative or rural communities.

- **Contextualising Low Figures:** When presenting statistics that may appear low, it's essential to include context explaining why underreporting may occur. This helps readers understand that the statistics likely underestimate the true scope of the issue and prevents the data from being misinterpreted as an indicator of low prevalence.
- **Acknowledge Reporting Barriers:** Journalists can educate their audience by explaining the barriers survivors face to reporting incidents. Barriers include lack of access to justice, fear of social consequences and sometimes punitive measures against survivors. **Example:** In reporting on sexual harassment cases in a rural Nigerian community, journalists could note that underreporting is prevalent due to social stigma and fear of retribution from community members. Acknowledging these challenges gives audiences a fuller picture of the data's limitations.

3. Examine Intersectional Data

VAWG affects various groups differently, with factors like age, location, disability and socioeconomic status playing a role in vulnerability and impact. Examining intersectional data allows journalists to highlight these variations and communicate how intersecting identities can exacerbate experiences of violence.

- **Demographic Breakdowns:** Analyse data by demographics to uncover which groups are most at risk. Intersectional data provides insight into how certain groups, such as rural women, disabled women or LGBTQ+ individuals experience higher levels of violence due to systemic marginalisation or lack of resources.
- **Highlighting Vulnerabilities:** Reporting on intersectional differences in VAWG can reveal how isolation, limited access to services or cultural norms disproportionately affect some groups,

underscoring the need for targeted interventions.

Example: A report showing that rural women experience higher rates of domestic violence compared to their urban counterparts could explore factors like isolation, limited transportation to support services and local cultural pressures that deter reporting.

4. Consider Systemic and Structural Factors

To fully understand VAWG trends, journalists must situate data within broader societal, economic or political contexts that contribute to or exacerbate violence. By connecting VAWG data with systemic issues, reporters can provide a richer, more comprehensive narrative that goes beyond numbers.

- **Economic and Social Contexts:** Highlighting factors like economic instability, conflict or inadequate healthcare can help readers understand the conditions that perpetuate violence. For instance, research shows that financial stress can increase domestic violence, particularly during times of economic downturn.
- **Impact of Legislation and Policy:** Examining data in light of government policies or social programmes allows journalists to show how laws and support services influence VAWG trends. For example, regions with stronger VAWG protections may report different trends compared to areas with weak legal frameworks.
Example: If data shows an increase in domestic violence during an economic recession, a journalist could explore the correlation with financial insecurity, highlighting how job loss and poverty can exacerbate household tensions, leading to a rise in violence.

Example of Interpreting Data in Context

Suppose data indicates that incidents of domestic violence increased by 15% during a public health crisis. Rather than reporting the increase alone, journalists should consider exploring factors like lockdown restrictions, financial strain and limited access to support services during the crisis. This approach transforms raw data into a nuanced narrative, showing how external stressors can escalate violence. Such an analysis emphasises the importance of preventive measures, support networks and policy interventions during crises.

Ethical Considerations in Data Interpretation

- **Avoiding Sensationalism:** Reporting on VAWG statistics can be powerful, but avoid using numbers solely for shock value. Present data with the intent to inform and promote understanding rather than sensationalise or trivialise the issue.
- **Transparency on Data Limitations:** Clearly communicate any limitations or potential biases in the data, such as underreporting or lack of data from certain regions. This transparency builds trust with readers and allows them to interpret the information more critically.
- **Respecting Survivor Privacy:** When interpreting data that includes demographic or geographic information, ensure it does not reveal identifiable details about survivors, particularly in small communities where individuals may be easily recognised.

6.3 Incorporating Data into News Stories

Effectively incorporating data into news stories on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) allows journalists to present evidence-based reporting that not only informs, but also amplifies the urgency of addressing this societal issue. Data adds depth and credibility, reinforcing a journalist's work and enabling audiences to understand the scale, causes and potential solutions to VAWG. Below are strategies to leverage data effectively in VAWG reporting.

Strategies for Incorporating Data in VAWG Stories

1. Strengthen the Story with Data

Using data to bolster the story's core message provides an authoritative foundation that grounds the narrative in facts.

- **Lead with Key Statistics:** Opening a story with a relevant, compelling statistic provides a powerful hook that draws readers in and underscores the issue's importance.

Example: Beginning a piece with, "In Nigeria, one in three women will experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime"

immediately sets a serious tone, inviting readers to consider the widespread nature of VAWG. This statistic can then serve as a basis to explore specific cases, societal implications or policy initiatives designed to combat VAWG.

- **Reinforce Key Points with Supporting Data:** Throughout the story, use additional statistics to strengthen specific aspects, such as describing VAWG's economic or psychological impact. Statistics on health outcomes, for example, could highlight how intimate partner violence often leads to increased healthcare costs and long-term mental health consequences.

Example: “Studies show that survivors of domestic violence are four times more likely to experience depression and PTSD, illustrating the profound mental health impact of VAWG.” This approach deepens the reader’s understanding by connecting the data directly to real-world outcomes.

2. Humanise Data through Personal Narratives

Data can sometimes feel abstract but combining it with personal narratives allows readers to grasp the human impact of the statistics.

- **Use Data to Frame Individual Stories:** Pairing statistics with personal accounts creates an emotional resonance that helps readers connect with the data personally. This combination can show readers that each statistic represents an individual’s experience and helps bridge the gap between numbers and human stories.

Example: If 60% of women in a specific region report workplace harassment, following up with a profile of a woman’s experience in that environment highlights the data’s human impact. This approach enables readers to understand that these numbers represent real individuals facing real challenges.

- **Quote Directly from Affected Individuals:** When possible, include direct quotes from survivors that complement the data. Their words bring authenticity to the story, giving a voice to those represented by the statistics.
- **Example:** In an article on the prevalence of sexual violence on campuses, a quote from a survivor expressing the fear and lasting

effects of the incident adds depth and personalises the reported statistic of “30% of female students have experienced harassment on campus.”

3. Visualise Data for Clarity

Visualising data makes it easier for audiences to understand as it enhances the impact by making trends and disparities more apparent.

- **Infographics and Charts:** Simplify complex data points with visual aids like bar charts, line graphs or pie charts. Infographics allow readers to digest information at a glance and are especially useful for summarising multiple data points.
- **Example:** A bar chart showing the percentage of women in various Nigerian states who report intimate partner violence can quickly convey where rates are highest, prompting questions about why certain regions are more affected.
- **Use Geographic Visualisations:** Maps and geographic visuals such as heat maps can help illustrate regional disparities in VAWG. By highlighting differences across locations, geographic data can reveal how cultural or economic factors may influence the prevalence of VAWG in certain areas.
- **Example:** A heat map showing domestic violence cases across Nigerian states visually communicates which areas are most affected. This visualisation clarifies the data and encourages readers to think about underlying causes, like regional resource allocation or legal enforcement differences.

4. Embed Data within the Narrative Structure

Embedding data within the story narrative allows journalists to explain what the data shows, why it matters and what actions are being taken.

- **Contextualise with Background Information:** Situate statistics within a broader context to add meaning to the numbers. For example, explaining cultural norms or historical factors that influence reporting rates can provide insight into why data may vary significantly between regions or communities.

Example: In a story on child marriage rates, contextualising the data with information about the socio-economic pressures that drive families to marry off daughters at a young age helps readers understand the broader picture beyond the numbers alone.

- **Highlight Efforts to Address the Issue:** Data can be used to show the effectiveness of interventions, where possible. When data indicates improvements due to specific policies or programmes, journalists can incorporate this to demonstrate the tangible impact of those efforts.

Example: “Following police training initiatives on handling domestic violence cases, reports show a 20% increase in case referrals and a 15% decrease in recurring incidents in Lagos state.” By embedding data that shows intervention results, journalists can provide hope, emphasise successful strategies and highlight areas for continued progress.

- **Use Comparative Data for Trend Analysis:** By comparing data overtime, journalists can show whether incidents of VAWG are increasing, decreasing or stable. Trend analysis can uncover patterns that may correlate with social, political or economic changes, helping audiences see how current conditions impact VAWG.

Example: “Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, reports of domestic violence in Nigeria have risen by 30%, reflecting increased household tensions due to lockdowns and economic strain.” Such an interpretation provides and contextualises the data within the ongoing public health crisis, helping readers understand how external events can impact VAWG trends.

Ethical Considerations in Data Usage

- **Accuracy and Honesty:** Always present data as accurately as possible and avoid exaggerating or minimising the numbers for dramatic effect. Misleading use of data can distort public perception and may erode trust.
- **Transparency on Data Limitations:** Be upfront about any potential limitations, such as sample size, possible biases or underreporting issues. Providing this transparency allows readers to interpret the data responsibly.

- **Protecting Privacy:** When using data that may include geographic or demographic details, be careful to protect the anonymity of survivors, particularly in small or close-knit communities where they may be identifiable.

Example of Incorporating Data into a News Story

In a report on workplace harassment, a journalist might begin by stating, “60% of women in Lagos report experiencing harassment in their workplace.” To humanise this statistic, the journalist could introduce a story about a woman facing these challenges. The article might include a bar chart comparing harassment rates in various Nigerian states and conclude by discussing recent legislation to reduce workplace harassment. This combination of data and personal narrative helps readers understand both the scale and the human impact of VAWG while also emphasising the need for policy interventions.

6.4 Tools and Resources for Data Journalism

Data journalism involves specialised tools to gather, interpret and present data in a compelling and informative way. When reporting on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), data tools help journalists showcase trends, demographics and the impact of interventions, adding credibility and depth to their stories. Here’s a detailed look at essential tools and resources for data-driven VAWG reporting.

Data Analysis and Visualisation Tools

Organising, analysing and visualising data is crucial in data journalism, especially for complex topics like VAWG. Below are tools that support these processes effectively:

Spreadsheet Software

Spreadsheet tools are foundational for organising and analysing datasets. They enable journalists to perform calculations, filter data and create charts.

- **Microsoft Excel / Google Sheets:** These are essential for managing data due to their ease of use and functionality in sorting,

filtering and analysing data. Journalists can utilise formulas to calculate statistics, such as the prevalence rate of VAWG across demographics or regions.

Example: A journalist investigating VAWG in different Nigerian states could use Excel to sort data by state and calculate rates of VAWG incidents, then identify patterns or areas with high prevalence. This is a powerful starting point for further analysis.

Visualisation Tools

Data visualisation tools allow journalists to present complex data in an accessible, engaging way. By visualising data, journalists can help audiences better grasp the scale, distribution and trends associated with VAWG.

- **Tableau Public:** A free version of Tableau is an excellent tool for creating dynamic and interactive charts, dashboards and graphs that make data exploration intuitive for readers. Tableau's strength lies in its ability to manage complex datasets and present them visually.
- **Flourish:** Known for interactive charts and data visualisations, Flourish is ideal for creating scatter plots, timelines and even animated data visualisations. This tool is especially useful for online platforms where interactive content can engage audiences.
- **Datawrapper:** This tool allows journalists to create simple, clear data visualisations like bar charts, line graphs and geographic heat maps. Its ease of use and quick sharing capabilities make it a go-to choice for newsrooms, especially when working with location-specific data.

Example: A journalist could use Datawrapper to map the concentration of VAWG incidents across different Nigerian states, making regional disparities visually apparent.

Mapping Tools for Geographic Analysis

Mapping tools help visualise VAWG data geographically, enabling journalists to showcase regional patterns and disparities. Geographic data visualisation can emphasise areas where VAWG is more prevalent and highlight service gaps.

- **Google My Maps:** With this tool, journalists can create custom maps to display the geographic spread of VAWG cases, shelters

or legal support centres. Google My Maps is accessible and straightforward, making it an excellent choice for quick mapping tasks.

- **Mapbox:** Known for its customisation options, Mapbox enables journalists to create detailed maps with layered data points. This tool highlights regional disparities in VAWG prevalence and showcases local resources' availability (or lack thereof).

Example: Using Mapbox, a journalist could overlay data on the incidence of domestic violence with locations of nearby support services, illustrating gaps in service availability in underserved areas.

Key Resources for Learning Data Journalism

Journalists covering VAWG may need to develop data literacy skills to understand, analyse and present data effectively. The following resources offer foundational training in data journalism:

- **Google News Initiative Training Centre:** This platform provides free courses in data journalism, covering essential skills such as data sourcing, cleaning and visualisation. It's an excellent resource for beginners seeking to strengthen their data analysis abilities.
- **DataJournalism.com:** This site offers tutorials, articles and case studies on data journalism, covering topics like visualisation, data storytelling and ethics. It's tailored for journalists, making it particularly helpful for those looking to report on sensitive issues like VAWG.
- **International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ) Data Journalism Handbook:** This comprehensive guide introduces journalists to data journalism with real-world examples and practical tips. The handbook covers everything from sourcing data to visualising and contextualising it, providing a strong foundation for journalists new to data reporting.

Essential Data Sources for VAWG

Having access to reliable data sources is crucial for accurate reporting on VAWG. Below are key data repositories and sources that provide relevant, credible data on VAWG at national and global levels:

- **UN Women Data Hub:** This hub provides gender-related statistics on VAWG and other gender equality issues, offering global, regional and country-specific data. The data hub is an excellent resource for understanding the broader context of VAWG, from incidence rates to government response efforts.
- **World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Database on Violence:** WHO offers data on violence and health, including detailed reports on the health impacts of VAWG. This data helps journalists connect VAWG to broader public health issues, showcasing how violence affects physical and mental well-being.
- **The World Bank Gender Data Portal:** The portal provides data on gender equality, economic conditions and social factors linked to VAWG. Journalists can leverage this data to analyse how societal factors—like poverty or education—correlate with VAWG prevalence.

Example of Using Data Sources in a Story

Consider a journalist covering VAWG during economic downturns. They might use the World Bank Gender Data Portal to show how financial stress can exacerbate VAWG and cite WHO data on health outcomes to demonstrate the toll of VAWG on women's health. Complementing these statistics with UN Women Data Hub insights on the increase in VAWG during crises provides a well-rounded, data-backed story that resonates with readers and informs policy discussions.

Ethical Considerations when Using Data

Data-driven reporting on VAWG demands a thoughtful, ethical approach, especially when handling sensitive information:

- **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Data must be presented in a way that doesn't compromise the privacy of individuals or communities. Journalists should ensure that data is aggregated or anonymised to avoid identifying survivors.
- **Transparency About Data Limitations:** Always be transparent with readers about any limitations or potential biases in the data, such as underreporting. This honesty helps readers interpret the data responsibly and prevents misinformation.

SECTION 7: Case Studies and Best Practices

Section 7 showcases impactful examples of media campaigns, key lessons from global VAWG reporting and profiles of journalists championing change in VAWG coverage. These case studies illustrate how strategic, ethical and data-driven reporting can raise awareness, influence policy and foster a more compassionate understanding of gender-based violence.

7.1 Successful Media Campaigns on VAWG

Media campaigns addressing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) have the potential to spark public discourse, challenge societal norms and push for policy reform. Here are key examples of successful media campaigns on VAWG from Nigeria and around the world:

1. #MeToo Movement (Global)

- *Overview:* Originally started by activist Tarana Burke in 2006 and popularised on social media in 2017, the #MeToo movement became a global phenomenon, encouraging survivors to share their experiences of sexual violence.
- *Strategies Used:* #MeToo harnessed the power of social media, creating a viral platform where survivors could share their stories. The movement gained further traction with support from high-profile individuals, who helped bring global attention to systemic harassment and abuse.
- *Impact:* #MeToo led to numerous legal and organisational reforms worldwide, sparking other regional campaigns such as #BalanceTonPorc in France and #MeTooNigeria. The movement prompted companies and institutions to re-evaluate their policies, address workplace harassment and commit to protecting survivors.
- *Best Practice Insight:* Use of accessible digital platforms allowed #MeToo to reach diverse audiences, empowering survivors across demographics and creating a global shift toward accountability and cultural change.

2. Stand to End Rape Initiative (STER) – Nigeria

- *Overview:* STER is a Nigerian non-profit organisation working to combat sexual violence through advocacy, media engagement and survivor support services.
- *Strategies Used:* STER leveraged social media and partnerships with Nigerian media outlets to share stories of gender-based violence, organise advocacy campaigns, and educate the public on issues such as consent and reporting violence.
- *Impact:* The organisation's efforts have spurred discussions about sexual violence in Nigeria, highlighted gaps in survivor support and put pressure on authorities to adopt stronger measures for protecting women and girls.
- *Best Practice Insight:* STER's approach of combining media outreach with on-the-ground support services underscores the importance of pairing awareness campaigns with tangible support and policy advocacy.

3. The Mirabel Centre and Media Advocacy – Nigeria

- *Overview:* The Mirabel Centre, Nigeria's first sexual assault referral centre, has partnered with local media to raise awareness about available support services for VAWG survivors.
- *Strategies Used:* The Centre uses press releases, survivor narratives (with consent) and collaborative initiatives with journalists to make VAWG issues visible in the public sphere.
- *Impact:* Increased awareness led to greater public support for survivor services, bolstered policy discussions around funding and resources for similar centres and encouraged survivors to seek help.
- *Best Practice Insight:* Working directly with journalists, the Mirabel Centre's approach demonstrates the importance of media partnerships in normalising discussions around survivor support services and reducing stigma.

5. Ring the Bell Campaign (India)

- *Overview:* Known locally as *Bell Bajao*, this campaign urged people to take action when they suspected domestic violence, symbolised by literally "ringing the bell" to intervene in situations of suspected violence.

- *Strategies Used:* The campaign utilised television ads, community outreach and celebrity endorsements to promote community responsibility in addressing domestic violence.
- *Impact:* Ring the Bell reached millions, fostering a sense of communal responsibility and helping to shift cultural attitudes toward domestic violence intervention.
- *Best Practice Insight:* Simple yet actionable messages can engage audiences effectively and empower them to take concrete steps in addressing VAWG, promoting bystander intervention as part of the solution.

6. North Africa: HarassMap (Egypt)

- *Overview:* HarassMap is an initiative launched in Egypt to combat sexual harassment by leveraging technology, grassroots campaigns and public awareness activities.
- *Strategies Used:* HarassMap utilized digital mapping technology to crowdsource reports of sexual harassment incidents, enabling the identification of harassment hotspots. The initiative also conducted awareness campaigns to challenge societal acceptance of harassment.
- *Impact:* HarassMap fostered a culture of accountability by empowering individuals to report incidents, resulting in increased public awareness and policy discussions on sexual harassment in Egypt.
- *Best Practice Insight:* Combining innovative technology with grassroots mobilization can amplify individual voices and influence public and institutional responses.

7. Southern Africa: Take Back the Night Campaign (South Africa)

- *Overview:* Part of a global initiative to end sexual violence and empower survivors, adapted to the South African context where gender-based violence is prevalent.
- *Strategies Used:* The campaign involved community marches, vigils and storytelling events where survivors shared their experiences, fostering solidarity and challenging norms around silence and victim-blaming.

- Impact: It created safe spaces for survivors, raised awareness about the extent of GBV in South Africa and mobilized communities to advocate for stricter policies on GBV prevention.
- Best Practice Insight: Creating platforms for survivor voices and engaging communities in activism can challenge harmful norms and drive collective action against VAWG.

8. East Africa: Kivulini Women’s Rights Organization (Tanzania)

- Overview: Kivulini has led campaigns to prevent domestic violence in Tanzania, combining media advocacy with community engagement.
- Strategies Used: The organization worked with local radio stations to broadcast programmes on women’s rights and domestic violence prevention. It also trained community leaders to identify and respond to domestic violence cases.
- Impact: The campaigns reduced stigma associated with reporting violence and encouraged community-led responses to domestic violence.
- Best Practice Insight: Partnering with local media and community leaders ensures that campaigns are culturally relevant and resonate with target audiences.

9. Central Africa: Girl Advocacy Alliance (GAA) Campaign (Democratic Republic of Congo)

- Overview: The GAA focuses on addressing child marriage, sexual violence and gender inequality through advocacy and media campaigns in the DRC.
- Strategies Used: The campaign involved youth-led advocacy, storytelling through media outlets and lobbying policymakers to address gender-based violence.
- Impact: GAA’s efforts led to increased awareness of child marriage and gender-based violence, with some local governments adopting stricter regulations.
- Best Practice Insight: Youth-led campaigns can be powerful in mobilizing communities and influencing policies, especially when combined with strong media partnerships.

10. West Africa: HeForShe Campaign (Nigeria and Ghana)

- **Overview:** HeForShe is a global solidarity movement for gender equality, with strong campaigns in West Africa aimed at involving men and boys in preventing VAWG.
- **Strategies Used:** The campaign organized workshops, social media advocacy, and public events to promote positive masculinity and challenge harmful gender norms.
- **Impact:** HeForShe sparked conversations about male involvement in gender equality and inspired local adaptations of the campaign in schools and communities.
- **Best Practice Insight:** Engaging men and boys as allies in combating VAWG fosters a broader cultural shift and addresses root causes of gender inequality.

7.2 Lessons Learned from VAWG Reporting Around the World

Media coverage of VAWG brings unique challenges that require ethical consideration, cultural sensitivity and contextual awareness. Here are lessons learned from effective VAWG reporting around the globe:

1. Protecting Survivor Privacy and Ensuring Informed Consent

- *Case Example:* In Kenya, a major publication faced criticism after failing to anonymise identifying details of a domestic violence survivor, which led to public backlash.
- *Lesson Learned:* Journalists must prioritise survivor confidentiality by using pseudonyms, concealing identifiable information and securing informed consent. Respecting survivors' privacy builds trust, mitigates risks of retaliation and strengthens journalistic integrity.

2. Reporting in Culturally Sensitive Contexts

- *Case Example:* In the Middle East, where discussions of VAWG often clash with cultural norms, journalists have collaborated with local NGOs to frame stories appropriately while raising awareness.
- *Lesson Learned:* In culturally conservative contexts, partnering with local advocates and tailoring language to respect community values can help reduce backlash and encourage open dialogue. Adapting

stories to cultural frameworks without compromising the facts allows for more impactful and widely accepted coverage.

3. Highlighting Data within Socio-Economic Contexts

- *Case Example:* In Nigeria, journalists reporting on the rise in domestic violence linked it to socio-economic stressors like inflation and unemployment, painting a broader picture of VAWG.
- *Lesson Learned:* Data should be contextualised within broader socio-economic or political trends to give readers a more holistic understanding. Situating data in a societal context can shift blame from individuals to systemic issues and spark constructive discussions about solutions.

4. Prioritising Ethical Reporting in Online Harassment Cases

- *Case Example:* In a Nigerian case, a journalist reporting on a high-profile activist's cyber harassment took precautions to anonymise her online presence in the story.
- *Lesson Learned:* In cyber harassment cases, publishing identifiable information may worsen online abuse. Journalists should adhere to ethical standards, avoid details that could escalate the harassment and educate readers about the cyberbullying issues surrounding VAWG.

7.3 Profiles of Journalists Leading Change in VAWG Reporting

Journalists worldwide champion change in VAWG coverage by pushing boundaries, shedding light on hidden issues and advocating for survivors. Here are profiles of journalists making a significant impact in this field:

1. Kiki Mordi (Nigeria)

- *Contribution:* Kiki Mordi is an award-winning Nigerian journalist known for her BBC Africa Eye documentary *Sex for Grades*, which exposed rampant sexual harassment in Nigerian and Ghanaian universities.
- *Impact:* The documentary led to nationwide discussions on sexual harassment, increased awareness in higher institutions and catalysed policy changes aimed at safeguarding students.

- *Key Approach:* Mordi's approach demonstrates the potential of undercover journalism in exposing systemic abuses. Her work emphasises the importance of thorough investigative research and ethical considerations when covering sensitive topics.

2. Rana Ayyub (India)

- *Contribution:* Indian journalist Rana Ayyub has reported extensively on gender-based violence and state accountability, focusing on cases that highlight government and institutional failures to protect women.
- *Impact:* Ayyub's fearless approach has encouraged others to hold powerful institutions accountable, highlighting underreported stories and marginalised communities.
- *Key Approach:* Ayyub combines a commitment to survivor-centred storytelling with an in-depth analysis of structural inequalities, ensuring her reporting remains empathetic and impactful.

3. Catherine Gicheru (Kenya)

- *Contribution:* A veteran Kenyan journalist, Gicheru has advocated for gender-sensitive reporting standards across Kenyan media, mentoring journalists to cover VAWG responsibly.
- *Impact:* Gicheru's work has shifted Kenyan media standards towards ethical VAWG reporting, inspiring future journalists to address gender violence thoughtfully.
- *Key Approach:* Through mentorship and advocacy, Gicheru emphasises the importance of adhering to ethical guidelines, prioritising survivor dignity and educating journalists on the nuances of gender-sensitive reporting.

4. Oluwaseun Ayodeji Osowobi (Nigeria)

- *Contribution:* As the founder of the Stand to End Rape (STER) Initiative, Osowobi collaborates with Nigerian journalists to ensure responsible media coverage of VAWG. She advocates for survivor-centred reporting and supports media campaigns that break the silence around gender-based violence.

- *Impact:* STER's initiatives have raised awareness, provided platforms for survivors and advocated for systemic reforms in how Nigerian media addresses VAWG.
- *Key Approach:* Osowobi's work highlights the importance of collaboration between NGOs and media, empowering survivors through respectful storytelling while advocating for societal change.

SECTION 8: Collaborating with Stakeholders

For journalists covering Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), collaboration with various stakeholders critically supports producing accurate, ethical and impactful stories. These partnerships offer valuable resources, insights and access, enriching the narrative and ensuring that the reporting remains sensitive and informative. Below is a guide on collaborating with key stakeholders to enhance VAWG reporting.

8.1 Building Partnerships with Civil Society Organisations

Civil society organisations (CSOs), including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local advocacy groups and shelters, play a pivotal role in addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG). These organisations operate on the frontlines, offering critical services such as survivor support, data collection, advocacy and policy reform. Often embedded within communities, CSOs build trust with survivors, gain insights into the cultural and systemic factors contributing to VAWG and create safe spaces that might otherwise be unavailable. By partnering with CSOs, journalists gain access to regional data, survivor narratives and expert opinions, which allow them to create nuanced and impactful stories on VAWG.

Best Practices for Building Partnerships with CSOs

1. Respect Their Expertise and Mission:

CSOs possess in-depth knowledge and experience related to VAWG, often having a deeper connection with local communities than external entities. Journalists should approach CSOs as collaborative partners, respecting their expertise and unique mission rather than viewing them solely as sources. Journalists can foster trust and establish long-term, constructive relationships by clearly communicating reporting objectives and identifying potential mutual benefits. For instance, sharing intended outcomes and publication timelines can help align the CSO's advocacy goals with the journalist's storytelling objectives, creating a shared vision for positive impact.

2. Collaborate on Data Collection and Research:

CSOs frequently engage in data-gathering efforts, conducting surveys, compiling statistics and performing community outreach to understand the scope of VAWG in specific areas. Journalists can access credible data and analysis by working alongside these organisations, ensuring that their reporting is grounded in factual, community-specific insights. For example in Nigeria, organisations like Stand to End Rape Initiative (STER) compile reports on sexual violence, including social and environmental factors that influence it. Through collaboration, journalists can amplify the CSO's research, create stories that inform the public and support the CSO's advocacy efforts.

3. Highlight CSO Programmes and Services:

Reporting on VAWG provides an opportunity to increase visibility for the support services offered by CSOs, such as counselling, shelters and legal assistance. Mentioning these resources in articles or broadcasts serves a dual purpose: it informs survivors and their families of available support while raising community awareness of the CSO's work, potentially leading to increased funding, volunteers or policy attention. This approach can be transformative in helping survivors understand they are not alone and encouraging community-wide engagement in supporting VAWG prevention and response.

4. Maintain Ethical Boundaries and Transparency:

Ethical considerations are paramount when working with CSOs, especially regarding confidentiality, informed consent and survivor privacy. Journalists must adhere to the CSO's protocols for handling sensitive information and ensure that the survivor's dignity and safety are respected. Prior agreements about confidentiality and content sharing should be established to maintain trust and prevent harm to survivors. For instance, discussing consent for photo usage, anonymising survivor accounts and avoiding re-traumatisation through overly graphic language are critical ethical practices.

Example: Collaborations with the Mirabel Centre in Nigeria

The Mirabel Centre, a prominent sexual assault referral centre in Lagos, Nigeria, exemplifies successful CSO-media collaboration. By providing

journalists with anonymised survivor data, insights into case trends and expert opinions, the Mirabel Centre has contributed to stories that highlight the demand for comprehensive support systems. Such collaborations have increased public awareness about the lack of sexual assault referral centres across Nigeria, leading to heightened advocacy for expanding these essential services. Partnerships like this enhance journalistic reporting and amplify the CSO's mission, reinforcing community calls for systemic change in VAWG response.

Additional Benefits of Partnering with CSOs

1. Access to Survivor Networks:

CSOs often have access to survivor networks and peer support groups, allowing journalists to connect with individuals willing to share their stories within a safe, trusted context. These connections enable reporters to include survivor perspectives while respecting privacy and ensuring survivors are not exploited or harmed.

2. Localised Insights and Cultural Context:

CSOs understand the cultural and social dynamics that shape VAWG in their communities. Their insights enable journalists to craft culturally sensitive narratives that reflect local realities, avoiding stereotypes or generalisations. For instance, CSOs working in Northern Nigeria might provide critical context about cultural practices influencing reporting rates or survivor protection, helping journalists navigate complex social nuances.

3. Strengthening Accountability through Joint Advocacy:

Journalists and CSOs can strengthen accountability mechanisms by working together and pressuring government bodies, law enforcement and community leaders to address VAWG effectively. Media coverage backed by CSO research and advocacy amplifies public demands for policy reforms, such as stricter enforcement of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) Act or increased funding for support services.

8.2 Working with Law Enforcement and Legal Experts

Law enforcement agencies play a crucial role in the criminal justice response to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Police and investigative units handle critical aspects, such as arresting perpetrators, gathering evidence and preparing cases for prosecution. Collaborating with law enforcement offers journalists insights into crime statistics, procedural details and the obstacles authorities face in prosecuting VAWG cases. However, journalists must approach these collaborations carefully to respect survivor privacy and rights and avoid reinforcing biases or stigmas that may exist within the justice system. For example, while law enforcement can provide context on arrest rates and crime trends, it is essential to recognise potential gaps in their approach to handling VAWG cases, such as delays in filing reports or lack of survivor sensitivity.

Engagement with Legal Experts:

Legal experts, including attorneys and human rights advocates, bring a nuanced understanding of VAWG laws, the legal rights of survivors and the complexities of prosecution. These professionals can clarify legal terms, interpret case outcomes and offer insights into policy reform, helping journalists navigate complex legal territory. For instance, a lawyer specialising in gender-based violence can shed light on the limitations of existing laws or the legal hurdles that survivors encounter, such as limited access to legal representation or inadequate protective orders. Legal experts can also provide context on how landmark cases may set precedents that influence future VAWG cases, thereby adding depth and accuracy to journalistic reporting.

Best Practices for Collaboration

1. Establish Clear Communication Channels with Law Enforcement:

Many police departments and law enforcement agencies have public information officers (PIOs) who liaise between the police and the media. Journalists should contact these officers to ensure a structured, respectful information exchange. Having a designated

point of contact facilitates access to accurate information and establishes a formal route for requesting case updates, data or clarifications. For example, in cases of domestic violence, PIOs can provide statistics on reporting rates and arrest patterns without compromising the confidentiality of individual cases.

2. Balance Objectivity with Sensitivity:

While insights from law enforcement are valuable, an over-reliance on police or investigative perspectives may lead to an imbalanced narrative. Journalists should actively seek survivor perspectives and insights from advocacy groups to present a more comprehensive view of VAWG cases. For instance, a story that incorporates both law enforcement statistics on domestic violence and personal accounts from survivors or advocates will present a fuller, more nuanced picture. This balanced approach helps avoid inadvertently reinforcing biases or one-sided views that may exist within the justice system.

3. Consult Legal Experts for Complex Cases:

Consulting legal experts is crucial in cases involving legal complexities, procedural issues or systemic failures. Legal professionals can clarify procedural nuances, case outcomes and legal precedents that may be too complex for general reporting. For example, in cases involving high-profile perpetrators or appeals that challenge existing laws, legal experts can guide journalists on how these cases might impact future legal interpretations or policies. This consultation ensures accurate, context-rich reporting that reflects the legal landscape without oversimplifying the issues.

4. Highlight Legal Challenges and Reforms:

Use insights from legal experts to shed light on systemic issues such as low prosecution rates, limitations in legal protections and enforcement gaps. Journalists can leverage this knowledge to discuss barriers within the justice system that hinder survivor justice, including outdated laws, lack of specialised training for law enforcement and slow judicial processes. Reporting on these obstacles informs the public about survivors' challenges and encourages advocacy for necessary legislative improvements and resource allocation.

Example: Collaborating with Legal Experts and Activists in Nigeria

In Lagos, Nigeria, partnerships between journalists, lawyers and human rights activists have enhanced media coverage of the implementation of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP). By consulting legal professionals and advocacy groups, journalists have uncovered challenges in enforcing VAPP provisions, such as limited training for law enforcement officers on handling VAWG cases and inconsistencies in applying protective measures for survivors. For example, lawyers may point out instances where cases were dismissed due to technicalities or insufficient evidence, underscoring the need for improved investigative procedures. This collaboration has enabled journalists to highlight enforcement challenges, gaps in survivor protection and potential solutions, such as calls for specialised VAWG units within police departments and advocacy for better survivor support services.

Additional Benefits of Collaborating with Law Enforcement and Legal Experts

1. Access to Data and Case Studies:

Law enforcement agencies can provide anonymised data on case outcomes, trends in reporting, and other valuable metrics. Legal experts, on the other hand, can provide case studies on past VAWG prosecutions that illustrate systemic strengths and weaknesses. These insights help journalists substantiate their stories with factual data while providing real-life examples that demonstrate broader trends.

2. Informed Policy Advocacy:

Legal experts are often involved in policy discussions and legislative reform efforts. By working with these professionals, journalists can gain insights into ongoing legal reforms and advocate for policy changes. For example, insights from human rights lawyers about the challenges of securing convictions for sexual harassment can encourage journalists to advocate for clearer legal definitions or stronger protective measures for survivors.

3. Improved Public Understanding of Legal Rights:

Engaging with legal experts allows journalists to educate the public about their rights within the justice system, particularly for survivors of VAWG. Explaining survivor rights, such as the right to legal

representation, the right to an effective remedy and the right to dignity, empowers readers with knowledge that may encourage more individuals to seek justice.

Ethical Considerations in Collaborations

- **Ensure Survivor Consent:**

Journalists must verify that survivors' identities and privacy are protected when using case details or seeking statements from law enforcement, especially in sensitive cases.

- **Avoid Prejudgement:**

Legal experts and law enforcement personnel may have differing perspectives on a case. Journalists must remain objective and avoid drawing conclusions before legal processes are complete.

8.3 Engaging with Survivor Networks and Advocacy Groups

Role of Survivor Networks and Advocacy Groups:

Survivor networks and advocacy groups are invaluable allies in addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG). Often survivor-led or survivor-informed, these organisations provide essential services such as crisis counselling, legal aid, housing and trauma support. They also play a vital role in empowering survivors, giving them a platform to share their stories, advocate for justice and fight for policy reform. Through public campaigns, educational workshops and policy advocacy, survivor networks and advocacy groups work tirelessly to shift societal norms and promote systemic change. Journalists collaborating with these groups can gain unique insights into survivors' lived experiences and access to a trusted community that can lend credibility and depth to VAWG reporting.

Best Practices for Engagement

1. **Respect Boundaries and Seek Informed Consent:**

Working with survivors requires sensitivity, empathy and a commitment to ethical journalism practices. Journalists should

ensure that survivors are fully informed about how their stories will be used and are comfortable with the level of exposure involved. Survivor networks typically have established protocols to protect survivor privacy and well-being, adhering to these guidelines is essential. Before sharing survivor narratives or details, always obtain explicit, informed consent, as the trauma associated with VAWG can make some survivors vulnerable to re-traumatisation. For example, Nigerian-based organisation Stand to End Rape (STER) has clear guidelines on survivor confidentiality and informed consent. Journalists who work with STER must respect these guidelines, as they prioritise the safety and comfort of survivors throughout the storytelling process. Following these protocols fosters trust between journalists and survivors and upholds the credibility and ethical standards of the media outlet involved.

2. Amplify Advocacy Efforts and Survivor Voices:

Reporting on VAWG is an opportunity to raise awareness and foster change. By including information on the missions, services and advocacy efforts of survivor networks, journalists can help expand the reach of these organisations. For instance, highlighting a group's recent campaign to increase penalties for domestic violence or their push for better access to healthcare services for survivors can inform and mobilise the public. Including survivor perspectives also humanises the statistics and makes the reporting relatable, which can increase reader empathy and engagement. Many survivor networks, such as the Mirabel Centre in Lagos, advocate for public awareness campaigns and legal reforms. By mentioning their work in articles, journalists can bring visibility to the pressing issues these groups address, reinforcing their advocacy efforts and underscoring the need for societal support and legislative action.

3. Highlight Policy and Systemic Change Initiatives:

Survivor networks often advocate for policy changes, such as enhanced law enforcement training, better access to legal recourse for survivors or improvements to healthcare services. Journalists can leverage these insights to present a fuller picture of the structural changes needed to address VAWG effectively. Reporting on these initiatives educates the public and aligns journalism with the advocacy goals of survivor networks, adding to the collective

push for systemic change. For example, the Mirabel Centre and Project Alert in Nigeria frequently advocate for stronger enforcement of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP), highlighting gaps in current enforcement and the need for specialised survivor support units in police departments. Journalists who report on these initiatives bring attention to systemic weaknesses, helping to inform the public and build support for policy reforms that survivor networks are fighting for.

4. Provide Resources and Support Information:

Journalists can contribute to survivor support by including information on how to access survivor networks and advocacy groups at the end of articles covering VAWG. Including contact information, website links or helpline numbers provides readers with concrete options for support and can help survivors connect with resources for healing and empowerment. This approach extends the impact of the article by not only informing readers about VAWG but also actively directing survivors to supportive networks, reinforcing a cycle of empowerment. For instance, in an article on intimate partner violence, a journalist could include a sidebar or note with details about Project Alert's crisis hotlines, shelter information or counselling services. Such resources offer immediate help to those in need and demonstrate a commitment to survivor well-being beyond the scope of reporting.

Example: Partnership with Project Alert on Violence Against Women

Project Alert on Violence Against Women, a Nigerian NGO, provides survivors with legal aid, counselling and temporary shelter. The organisation actively campaigns for survivor-centred policies and raises awareness about domestic violence through educational workshops and community programmes. Journalists partnering with Project Alert can access valuable case studies, survivor narratives and firsthand insights into the realities of VAWG in Nigeria. By collaborating with Project Alert, journalists can ensure that their reporting reflects both the lived experiences of survivors and the expertise of those working to support them. This partnership can also help amplify Project Alert's advocacy campaigns, rallying public support for policy reforms that promote survivor protection and welfare.

Additional Benefits of Engaging with Survivor Networks and Advocacy Groups

1. Enhanced Credibility and Depth:

Survivor networks often have strong relationships with their communities and can provide nuanced perspectives that add authenticity and depth to journalistic stories. Their insights into community dynamics, stigma and cultural factors surrounding VAWG can help journalists approach reporting with greater understanding and respect.

2. Access to Training and Resources:

Many advocacy groups offer media training on how to cover VAWG respectfully and effectively. By engaging with these organisations, journalists can improve their skills, learn how to handle survivor interviews, navigate complex trauma topics and avoid re-traumatising language. For example, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) often collaborates with local advocacy groups to provide resources on ethical reporting, which can help journalists uphold best practices when covering VAWG.

3. Mutual Advocacy and Awareness Building:

Working with advocacy groups creates opportunities for mutual support. As journalists highlight the work of advocacy groups, they help these organisations gain visibility, which in turn can lead to increased public awareness, donations or volunteer support. Advocacy groups may also refer survivors to journalists who are known to be sensitive and ethical in their reporting, creating a cycle of trust and positive impact.

8.4 Leveraging International Support and Resources

Role of International Organisations:

International organisations such as UN Women, the World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) play a critical role in supporting

journalists who report on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). These organisations provide resources that go beyond simple data access, including training programmes, funding opportunities and advocacy initiatives. They also promote global standards for ethical reporting, trauma-informed journalism and survivor protection. By engaging with these organisations, journalists can enhance the depth and quality of their reporting, align their work with global standards and access networks that promote impactful VAWG storytelling.

Best Practices for Leveraging International Support

1. Access Global Data for Context:

International organisations collect and publish data that allows journalists to compare national and regional VAWG statistics with global trends. For example, UN Women's Global Database on Violence Against Women compiles data on intimate partner violence, sexual harassment and more, allowing journalists to contextualise local issues within global patterns. This comparative framework can help to illustrate the extent of VAWG in a specific country and emphasise the universal nature of the issue, demonstrating that VAWG is not isolated to one region but part of a global crisis.

Example: In Nigeria, journalists have used UN Women's statistics to draw attention to the increase in domestic violence during COVID-19 lockdowns, showing that similar spikes occurred in many countries worldwide. This broader context not only highlights the pervasive impact of pandemic-related stressors but also underscores the importance of policy measures to protect women globally during crises.

Participate in Training Programmes:

Many international organisations offer training in areas such as trauma-informed reporting, ethical interviewing, data journalism and gender-sensitive storytelling. These programmes equip journalists with the skills needed to cover VAWG sensitively and responsibly, reducing the risk of re-traumatising survivors. For instance, the WHO offers training on handling survivor data with confidentiality,

while the ICFJ and CPJ provide workshops on trauma-informed approaches in conflict zones or post-crisis reporting.

Example: Nigerian journalists participating in ICFJ's training on data journalism have learned how to accurately interpret VAWG statistics and integrate them into stories in informative and engaging ways. This approach has helped to improve the quality of VAWG reporting by ensuring accuracy and enhancing public understanding of the issue's complexities.

2. **Apply for Grants and Fellowships:**

Funding opportunities from international organisations can enable journalists to pursue in-depth investigations, multimedia storytelling and advocacy-focused projects that budget limitations might otherwise constrain. Grants from organisations like the Pulitzer Center or ICFJ can cover costs associated with travel, research and production, empowering journalists to create more comprehensive and impactful stories. For instance, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women offers project-based grants that allow journalists to report on undercover VAWG issues, spotlighting areas that require urgent attention.

Example: A journalist in Nigeria, funded through an ICFJ fellowship, produced a documentary series on the challenges faced by survivors of intimate partner violence in rural areas. The series combined data with survivor testimonials, drawing attention to rural women's barriers to accessing legal and health services. This fellowship-supported project provided a platform for survivor voices and encouraged local policymakers to improve support systems in remote communities.

3. **Follow International Ethical Standards:**

International organisations such as the United Nations and WHO provide guidelines on ethical reporting for journalists covering VAWG. For example, the UN's guidelines emphasise survivor-centred reporting, informed consent and confidentiality while WHO resources focus on protecting sensitive health data related to VAWG survivors. By adhering to these standards, journalists ensure their reporting aligns with global best practices, fostering respect for survivors' dignity and rights and reducing the risk of re-traumatisation.

Example: A Nigerian newspaper following the United Nations' ethical reporting standards has successfully covered VAWG issues while prioritising survivor confidentiality and protection. This adherence to global standards has enhanced the publication's credibility and set an example for other media outlets in Nigeria, showing that responsible reporting is essential for meaningful and respectful coverage of sensitive topics.

4. **Utilise Networking and Advocacy Opportunities:**

International organisations often facilitate networks where journalists can connect with fellow reporters, researchers and activists from around the world. These networks allow journalists to share best practices, collaborate on cross-border stories and gain support from peers working on similar issues. Organisations like the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) host forums and conferences, creating spaces where journalists can learn from each other and develop strategies for effective VAWG reporting.

Example: Nigerian journalists attending GIJN's annual conference had the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from other countries on a multi-country investigation into human trafficking and VAWG. By pooling resources and expertise, they created a comprehensive report that addressed VAWG as a cross-border issue, demonstrating the power of international collaboration in raising awareness and advocating for change.

SECTION 9: Addressing Challenges in VAWG Reporting

Reporting on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is complex and often fraught with challenges that require journalists to navigate editorial pressures, personal risks, censorship and limited data access. These issues pose significant obstacles but can be managed with strategic approaches and partnerships that prioritise ethical reporting, safety and respect for survivor stories.

9.1 Managing Editorial Pressures and Commercial Interests

In the competitive media landscape, there is often a push to capture audience attention with sensationalised content, especially on sensitive topics like Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Media outlets may resort to provocative headlines, graphic descriptions or other sensational elements that, while drawing readers, can detract from ethical standards. This type of reporting risks re-traumatising survivors, reducing complex issues to mere spectacle and potentially compromising audience trust. Journalists are responsible for advocating for coverage that respects survivors and educates the audience on VAWG as a pervasive societal issue rather than an isolated incident.

Strategies to Navigate Editorial Pressures:

1. Centre on Survivor Dignity and Agency

Journalists should emphasise that ethical reporting earns long-term audience respect and trust, which is crucial for sustained engagement. Rather than focusing on graphic or shock-inducing elements, stories can focus on survivors' resilience, healing journeys or advocacy efforts. According to Duncan (2019), framing stories around survivor experiences, perspectives and strengths produces powerful narratives that respect agency, align with ethical guidelines and resonate deeply with readers without exploiting trauma.

2. Lead with Data and Contextualisation

Data-driven reporting offers a powerful way to convey the scope and impact of VAWG without dramatising individual incidents. For example, using data such as "One in three women globally

experiences gender-based violence” (WHO, 2021) can help audiences understand the issue’s magnitude without sensationalism. Including local and global data contextualises incidents, showing that VAWG is part of a systemic issue that affects a broad spectrum of society, thus inviting a more empathetic and informed response from readers.

3. Educate Editorial Teams on Ethical Standards

Journalists can play a critical role in promoting ethical practices within their organisations by sharing established guidelines from credible sources, such as the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (n.d.). Regular workshops, discussions or resource sharing can help editorial teams understand the importance of survivor dignity, ethical reporting and the harmful impact of sensationalism. Encouraging discussions around these standards fosters a shared commitment to integrity in reporting on sensitive issues.

4. Promote Balanced Reporting Amid High-Pressure Situations

During high-profile cases or crises that elevate VAWG in the media, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, journalists can resist editorial pressures by finding a balance between engaging readers and preserving survivor dignity. For instance, as reports of domestic violence rose in Nigeria during the pandemic, journalists referenced data from the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) to contextualise the increase in cases within a factual framework. This approach informed the audience of trends without reducing incidents to sensational headlines, promoting public awareness of VAWG as a pressing societal issue rather than an isolated event.

5. Emphasise the Value of Responsible Storytelling

By showing how ethical storytelling builds credibility and strengthens the publication’s brand, journalists can make a case for responsible coverage. Ethical, data-driven and dignified reporting attracts discerning readers who value quality journalism and fosters a positive public image for media outlets. Journalists may cite examples where well-executed, ethically reported stories gained widespread acclaim, proving that impactful reporting does not need to sacrifice ethics for engagement.

Example:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigeria witnessed a rise in gender-based

violence incidents. Media outlets, responding to increased public interest, faced pressure to cover domestic violence and VAWG incidents extensively. By collaborating with advocacy groups and utilising data from the NBS and international organisations like UN Women, journalists presented stories reflecting the surge in violence while focusing on the structural issues behind these trends. They avoided sensationalism by framing stories with data, survivor testimonials and expert insights, setting an example of handling VAWG coverage under editorial pressure.

9.2 Protecting Journalists from Retaliation and Threats

Reporting on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) exposes journalists to various risks, including threats and retaliation. This is particularly true in regions where discussing gender-based violence challenges deeply ingrained cultural norms, family structures or religious beliefs. In these settings, journalists can face backlash from communities that view public discussion of such topics as taboo or threatening social cohesion. Additionally, in cases that uncover institutional failures or name powerful individuals, journalists may receive threats from perpetrators, influential figures or groups protecting those implicated. Freelance journalists face additional exposure as they tend to work alone without the safety net affiliation a media house provides.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ, 2020), journalists who report on gender-based violence may be seen as adversaries of the state, society or certain community leaders, particularly in countries with weak press freedom protections. Thus, protecting journalists' well-being is essential, ensuring they can pursue sensitive stories without risking personal safety.

Strategies for Ensuring Safety:

1. Employ Secure Communications

It is crucial to use secure communication platforms when handling sensitive information, including survivor accounts, journalist sources or whistleblower insights. Encrypted messaging and email services

like Signal, WhatsApp (with end-to-end encryption enabled) or Proton Mail provide a layer of security that standard platforms may lack. Secure communication protects both journalists and their sources from unauthorised access to sensitive exchanges. Using these tools effectively can shield journalists from exposing personal data or confidential sources to potential threats. The CPJ (2020) emphasises the importance of digital security training for journalists, particularly those reporting on VAWG. Journalists should also consider anonymising their data storage methods, avoiding cloud services for sensitive documents and implementing password protection on all devices handling VAWG-related content.

2. Conduct Comprehensive Risk Assessments

Journalists should conduct thorough risk assessments for high-stakes stories, particularly those involving institutional failures or powerful individuals. This includes evaluating physical, digital and social risks that might arise from the investigation. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ, 2019) advises journalists to create contingency plans in case of emergencies, which may involve safe reporting routes, backup plans for evacuating high-risk locations and contact with emergency resources. Risk assessments should include a survey of the community climate around the issue of VAWG, potential conflicts and the level of awareness of the investigation by individuals who may be implicated. Journalists can also implement security protocols like establishing regular check-ins with editors or colleagues, using pseudonyms in bylines for controversial pieces and avoiding sharing their locations on social media.

3. Develop Support Network

Establishing connections with advocacy organisations, press freedom groups and journalist networks create an important safety net. Organisations like Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) provide resources, legal assistance and protective services to journalists under threat. Many of these organisations offer emergency funding, legal support and safe housing for journalists facing immediate dangers. Collaborating with local advocacy groups can also help build

protective alliances. In Nigeria, for instance, journalists reporting on sensitive VAWG topics have worked with organisations like Project Alert and Stand to End Rape Initiative (STER). These partnerships provide a buffer against retaliation and offer access to legal advice, community support and resources, enabling journalists to continue their work safely and with added support.

4. Leverage Digital Safety Protocols

In today's media environment, digital safety is paramount. Journalists can employ Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to obscure their location when accessing the internet and two-factor authentication for email and social media accounts to enhance security. Additionally, using pseudonyms, concealing metadata in photos and encrypting files are all effective methods for journalists to protect themselves and their sources when reporting on VAWG.

5. Engage Editors and Media Outlets in Safety Planning

Safety and protection must be a collaborative effort between journalists and their media outlets. Editors and publishers play a critical role in understanding and supporting the specific needs and challenges of VAWG reporting. By establishing protocols for assessing and mitigating threats, media organisations can provide a safer working environment for journalists. This may include assigning security experts to support journalists in high-risk situations, funding security measures or taking on legal responsibility for cases involving retaliation.

Example

In Nigeria, journalists reporting on gender-based violence within prominent institutions have experienced challenges due to backlash from powerful community and institutional figures. To mitigate these risks, some journalists have worked closely with local advocacy groups such as Mirabel Centre, which provides counselling and support services for survivors, and STER. These organisations offer legal advice and emotional support and assist in amplifying the journalists' work through their networks, ensuring that these stories gain traction and impact without compromising safety. This collaboration model has enabled journalists to continue their

investigative reporting without fear of retaliation, illustrating the value of support networks in sensitive reporting.

9.3 Navigating Censorship and Freedom of Press Issues

Censorship is a significant barrier in reporting on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), particularly in countries where freedom of the press is restricted, and reporting on sensitive topics is discouraged. In certain cultures and political settings, reporting on VAWG may be seen as an affront to traditional norms or exposing institutional or government inadequacies. Governments or influential institutions may directly or indirectly pressure journalists to alter or suppress stories on VAWG, especially if they involve powerful individuals or public officials. In Nigeria, for example, topics like domestic violence, sexual abuse within religious institutions or abuses by security forces may invite scrutiny and even threats against journalists, making censorship a pervasive issue.

Freedom House (2021) notes that governments often employ tactics like enforcing media blackout orders, placing surveillance on journalists or threatening media organisations with fines or licence revocations to control the narrative around VAWG. In extreme cases, journalists may face legal repercussions, arrests or harassment to prevent the publication of stories that might challenge traditional power dynamics, particularly those that highlight the plight of marginalised groups.

Strategies for Overcoming Censorship:

1. Leverage International Platforms

Publishing VAWG stories through international outlets can mitigate censorship risks by bypassing local restrictions and ensuring the stories reach a broad audience. International media organisations such as *Al Jazeera* and advocacy groups such as Human Rights Watch provide an alternative avenue for journalists facing censorship domestically. This approach helps circumvent local restrictions and brings global attention to VAWG issues that might otherwise remain hidden. Freedom House (2021) highlights that

journalists can amplify their stories by publishing through international platforms, generate public pressure for change and even catalyse international advocacy efforts.

Example: During the COVID-19 lockdown, Nigerian journalists collaborated with international organisations like UN Women to report on the spike in domestic violence cases. These partnerships allowed journalists to document the systemic issues in handling VAWG cases, even when local media faced constraints.

2. **Use Anonymous Sources and Protect Whistleblowers**

Anonymous sourcing and strong whistleblower protections are essential when reporting sensitive VAWG issues that might lead to retaliation against the sources. By anonymising names, locations and other identifying details, journalists can still access critical insights without endangering the safety of survivors, witnesses or other informants. The Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN, 2020) emphasises the importance of using secure platforms for communication, such as Signal, to maintain confidentiality and ensure sources' identities are not revealed. Implementing robust source protection measures helps journalists gather credible information in environments where open dialogue is risky. Journalists should also be transparent with sources about the limits of confidentiality, particularly in legal contexts where they may be compelled to reveal sources under certain conditions.

3. **Document and Store Evidence Securely**

Maintaining accurate and secure records of interviews, documents and any corroborating evidence is vital, especially if stories face suppression attempts or legal challenges. Journalists should back up their work on secure, encrypted cloud storage platforms or external hard drives that are not directly accessible. Documenting and safely storing evidence ensures that journalists retain the materials needed to verify their findings and defend their reporting in the event of censorship or confiscation attempts. To avoid confiscation or accidental deletion, journalists can also use secure backup platforms such as Tails (a live operating system that leaves no trace on the device) or ProtonDrive, which offers encrypted cloud storage. These tools are especially useful in regions where police

raids, surveillance or sudden governmental crackdowns are common tactics used to intimidate journalists or stifle information.

4. **Collaborate with Press Freedom and Advocacy Organisations**

Organisations like the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) offer legal and practical support for journalists facing censorship. Collaborating with these organisations can provide both the resources and support networks needed to navigate censorship safely. Additionally, advocacy organisations can help amplify suppressed stories, increasing their reach and public impact even when local media faces limitations.

Example: Nigerian journalists working on VAWG stories have successfully collaborated with advocacy groups such as the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID) to bring awareness to censored cases. This partnership not only lends credibility to journalists' work but also provides them with a layer of protection, as advocacy groups can exert pressure on authorities and offer legal support.

5. **Practice Cross-Border Collaboration**

Cross-border journalism allows reporters to collaborate with international colleagues, sharing data, research and findings. This approach is especially effective in addressing censorship, providing a distributed, multi-national approach to VAWG reporting. By sharing resources and findings across borders, journalists create a wider support system to effectively combat efforts to censor or stifle information on sensitive topics. Cross-border collaboration can also introduce varied perspectives on VAWG, drawing connections between local and global issues that enhance the depth of reporting. For example, the Forbidden Stories project enables journalists from different countries to continue each other's work when they face risks, ensuring that stories are completed and published even if a journalist is detained or silenced. Nigerian journalists covering VAWG can explore similar cross-border initiatives, working with journalists in other countries facing parallel challenges in reporting on gender-based violence.

9.4 Overcoming Barriers in Data Access and Reporting

Accessing comprehensive, reliable data on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) poses significant challenges for journalists. Underreporting remains a central issue, often driven by cultural stigmas, fear of retaliation and systemic failings in legal and health institutions to record such incidents. In regions where survivors face social or legal repercussions, VAWG cases are frequently unreported or inaccurately recorded, leading to incomplete datasets. Furthermore, government-held statistics on gender-based violence (GBV) may not always be accessible to journalists, with some data restricted due to privacy laws or bureaucratic barriers. Limited resources also hinder data collection, with government bodies often lacking the capacity or funding to conduct thorough, disaggregated studies on VAWG.

Additionally, VAWG data is often unavailable or fragmented across various sources, such as police records, healthcare facilities and NGOs, making it difficult for journalists to gain a holistic view. As a result, journalists seeking to report on VAWG face the dual challenge of finding reliable data and accurately representing it within the constraints of cultural and systemic obstacles.

Strategies for Addressing Data Barriers:

1. **Collaborate with Civil Society Organisations and Research Bodies**

Partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), research institutions and advocacy groups are invaluable for journalists needing reliable VAWG data. Organisations like ActionAid Nigeria, Project Alert and the Mirabel Centre frequently conduct fieldwork and collect primary data on gender-based violence in communities. Collaborating with these groups provides journalists with access to localised and firsthand insights that may not be available in public records. For instance, ActionAid Nigeria's annual reports on gender-based violence include detailed regional data, offering journalists context and evidence to substantiate their stories.

These partnerships can also serve as an ethical framework for data usage, as NGOs often work directly with survivors and can guide

journalists in handling sensitive information respectfully. Working closely with CSOs allows journalists to access specific cases, survivor testimonials and local statistics highlighting the lived experiences behind the data.

2. Utilise Crowdsourced Data and Grassroots Surveys

Crowdsourced data platforms, such as Ushahidi, can help gather real-time information on VAWG incidents, particularly in areas where formal data collection is limited. By enabling communities to report incidents anonymously, these platforms circumvent traditional data-gathering challenges and offer grassroots perspectives on the prevalence and nature of VAWG. However, journalists must validate crowdsourced data to ensure credibility and avoid spreading misinformation. Cross-referencing crowdsourced insights with NGO reports, interviews or regional data can add legitimacy to the findings. Platforms like Crowdmap can be used for creating interactive maps that display incident locations and frequency, helping journalists illustrate trends while prioritising survivor anonymity. For example, a map highlighting reported VAWG incidents during certain periods can provide visual evidence of trends that may otherwise remain hidden in data-poor areas.

3. Advocate for Transparency in VAWG Data Collection

Journalists, alongside advocacy organisations, play an essential role in pushing for government transparency and improved data availability on VAWG. By participating in campaigns, publishing opinion pieces and engaging in policy dialogues, journalists can encourage government entities to release comprehensive, disaggregated data on VAWG cases. Press freedom and advocacy groups like the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) suggest that consistent media pressure on governments can lead to adopting policies mandating transparent VAWG data reporting. When advocacy succeeds and government bodies make VAWG data more accessible, journalists benefit from a richer pool of reliable information to inform public discourse. Furthermore, through partnerships with press councils and rights organisations, journalists can work toward establishing frameworks where data transparency becomes an expected norm in VAWG reporting.

4. Leverage International Resources and Databases

Global organisations such as the United Nations, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Bank offer open-access databases with gender-based violence statistics from various countries. By accessing international reports, journalists can compare local VAWG data with global or regional statistics, providing context and framing their stories within broader trends. UN Women's Global Database on Violence Against Women, for instance, includes valuable insights on the prevalence of different forms of violence and the effectiveness of local interventions. International reports, like WHO's assessments of VAWG's health impacts, help journalists connect the dots between local challenges and international responses to gender-based violence. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, data from UN Women highlighted a global rise in domestic violence, and Nigerian journalists used this context to report on increased VAWG cases in Nigeria, attributing them to lockdown measures and economic stressors. By drawing on these global databases, journalists can enrich their reporting with comparative perspectives that underline the systemic nature of VAWG issues.

Example:

Journalists have effectively combined multiple data sources in Nigeria to overcome access challenges in VAWG reporting. Nigerian journalists have published comprehensive reports on the state of VAWG by collaborating with ActionAid Nigeria, using crowdsourced reports from grassroots networks, and incorporating global data from organisations like WHO and UN Women. For instance, journalists reporting on the prevalence of domestic violence in rural areas have combined insights from CSO reports and regional data to provide an accurate portrayal of the unique challenges these communities face, such as limited access to law enforcement and support services. This multi-source approach allows journalists to deliver well-rounded, data-backed narratives even when official data is scarce or difficult to access.

SECTION 10: Media Literacy and Public Engagement

In covering Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), the role of media extends beyond reporting incidents; it involves educating the public, fostering awareness and empowering communities to identify, respond to and prevent VAWG. Media literacy initiatives and public engagement efforts can play a transformative role in changing societal attitudes and reducing violence.

10.1 Educating the Public on VAWG through Media

The media's role in shaping public opinion on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) extends far beyond reporting individual cases. As a powerful societal influencer, media has the capacity to inform, educate and engage audiences on complex issues, helping to transform societal attitudes, challenge harmful norms and ultimately contribute to reducing VAWG. Thoughtful, informed reporting can debunk common misconceptions, educate the public on the underlying causes and build greater empathy and understanding for survivors. The following strategies illustrate how journalists can utilise their platforms to educate the public on VAWG in an impactful and responsible manner.

Incorporate Educational Content into News Reports

Educating the public on VAWG requires more than simply reporting incidents; it involves actively embedding educational content into stories to inform readers and viewers.

- **Explain Forms and Warning Signs of Abuse:** Journalists can enhance public knowledge by describing the various forms of VAWG, such as emotional abuse, financial control and psychological manipulation, alongside more widely understood forms like physical violence. Including the subtle signs of abuse helps audiences recognise VAWG in various contexts, supporting community-wide vigilance and intervention.
- **Provide Resources and Legal Information:** Including information on survivor resources, hotlines, local support services and legal protections available in specific regions equips readers with actionable knowledge. This is particularly valuable in places where

awareness of such resources is low. Information about protective laws, such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) in Nigeria, can educate the public on survivors' rights and encourage community support for these protections.

- **Consult Experts:** Including insights from professionals—such as psychologists, social workers and legal experts—helps to deepen the audience's understanding of the complexities of VAWG. Experts can clarify issues like trauma responses, the psychological impacts of abuse and the societal factors that sustain VAWG, giving audiences a more comprehensive perspective.

Highlight the Root Causes of VAWG

Effective reporting on VAWG situates incidents within broader societal and systemic contexts, helping audiences understand the underlying factors that contribute to such violence.

- **Contextualise VAWG in Relation to Societal Norms:** Patriarchy, traditional gender roles and cultural expectations are deeply embedded in many societies and often serve as enablers of VAWG. By explaining how these societal norms contribute to inequality and violence, journalists can shift the narrative from seeing VAWG as an isolated incident to recognising it as a product of structural issues.
- **Discuss Economic Dependence and Power Dynamics:** Economic factors are often overlooked in discussions about VAWG despite their significant role in perpetuating cycles of abuse. Reporting on how economic dependence can trap survivors in abusive relationships or how poverty exacerbates vulnerability to abuse educates the public on the need for socioeconomic support systems as part of VAWG prevention.
- **Address Legal and Institutional Gaps:** Journalists can educate the public on how legal and institutional inadequacies contribute to the persistence of VAWG. By highlighting issues like limited police resources, weak enforcement of protection laws and barriers to accessing justice, media coverage can underscore the need for systemic change and promote public accountability.

Feature Survivor Stories with Dignity and Respect

Survivor narratives are among the most impactful tools for educating the public on VAWG, as they provide relatable, firsthand accounts that challenge stereotypes and encourage empathy. When survivor stories are shared ethically and with the survivor's consent, they can be a powerful way to convey the human impact of VAWG and inspire collective action.

- **Centre Survivor Dignity:** Ethical reporting on survivor stories emphasises the resilience and agency of survivors rather than focusing on their victimisation. This approach not only empowers survivors but also challenges stigmatising narratives that often portray survivors as weak or passive. By centring dignity, journalists can help shift the public perception of survivors and foster greater empathy.
- **Avoid Sensationalism and Graphic Details:** Journalists should prioritise survivor safety and emotional well-being over sensationalism. Avoiding graphic or intrusive details respects the survivor's experience and prevents re-traumatisation. Respectful storytelling emphasises the survivor's journey and the societal changes needed, rather than dramatising the abuse.
- **Highlight Survivor-Led Advocacy:** Many survivors become advocates and work to prevent VAWG within their communities. By showcasing these individuals' efforts, journalists can educate the public and show positive examples of how survivors contribute to change. This also helps audiences understand that VAWG is a communal issue requiring a collective response.

Example: Media Campaigns During the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

The annual **16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence** provides a prominent example of how media can effectively engage the public on VAWG. During this period, news outlets, social media platforms and public broadcasters worldwide amplify educational content about VAWG through informative articles, documentaries and panel discussions.

- **Thematic Coverage and Public Dialogues:** Media outlets often organise talk shows, live interviews and public discussions with survivors, activists and experts, creating spaces where the public can learn about VAWG from diverse perspectives. This programming raises awareness and fosters community conversations about prevention and intervention.
- **Data-Driven Reporting:** Many outlets use this campaign period to release data-driven reports, illustrating the prevalence of VAWG through statistics, maps and infographics. Data on issues like domestic violence rates, regional disparities and the economic costs of VAWG are presented to emphasise the scale of the problem and advocate for policy responses.
- **Highlighting Local Support Services:** Campaigns during the 16 Days of Activism often highlight resources available to survivors, such as shelters, counselling services and hotlines. By raising awareness of these services, media campaigns ensure survivors and community members know the available support, potentially increasing access and encouraging reporting.

10.2 Media Literacy Programmes for Communities

Media literacy programmes play a critical role in enabling communities to critically engage with and understand the portrayal of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in media. By fostering skills to assess media content, recognise bias and question narratives, these programmes empower individuals—particularly youth—to distinguish between sensationalist reporting, ethical and responsible journalism. Media literacy on VAWG goes beyond just interpreting news stories; it promotes awareness, empathy and accountability in how violence against women is represented in the public sphere.

Workshops on Identifying Media Bias

Workshops dedicated to identifying media bias provide community members with tools to critically evaluate VAWG coverage. These sessions can include:

- **Understanding Bias in Language and Imagery:** Participants learn how language choices (e.g., “victim” versus “survivor”) and image selection can impact perceptions of VAWG. For instance, workshops may illustrate how certain headlines or graphic images can sensationalise or trivialise violence, reinforcing harmful stereotypes.
- **Analysing Tone and Framing:** Workshops teach participants to identify the subtle ways that stories may shift responsibility, such as implying blame or downplaying violence as “domestic disputes.” This helps audiences demand respectful, unbiased reporting that does not reinforce stigma.
- **Case Studies and Role-Playing:** Using real-world examples, participants can practice identifying biases and discussing alternative ways stories could be framed to promote empathy and understanding. Role-playing exercises encourage community members to reframe problematic headlines, fostering a more nuanced understanding of ethical reporting.

These workshops help people become informed consumers of media and create a culture where communities hold media outlets accountable for responsible VAWG reporting.

Involve Schools and Universities

Educational institutions offer an ideal setting for media literacy programmes, as they can reach young people at formative stages, embedding critical thinking skills that last a lifetime.

- **Integrating Media Literacy into Curricula:** By embedding media literacy into secondary school and university courses, students are encouraged to analyse media critically from a young age. Lessons can focus on how to identify sensationalism, spot misinformation and recognise the framing of gender-based violence stories.

- **Promoting Media Production Skills:** Students can be given assignments to create their own media pieces on VAWG, learning how to handle the topic responsibly. This experience deepens their understanding of the media's role in shaping public perceptions and highlights the importance of empathy, accuracy and ethical considerations.
- **University-Community Collaborations:** Universities can collaborate with local organisations to offer workshops, seminars and panel discussions on ethical reporting. These initiatives create a space for dialogue on sensitive issues like VAWG, encouraging students to be advocates for responsible media practices within their communities.

Empowering students through these programmes lays the groundwork for a new generation of media consumers who value accuracy, empathy and fairness in VAWG reporting.

Train Community Leaders as Advocates

Community leaders, such as educators, religious leaders and influencers, influence public opinion significantly and are well-positioned to spread media literacy and VAWG awareness within their communities.

- **Media Literacy and VAWG Awareness Training:** Training programmes for community leaders equip them with an understanding of media bias, ethical reporting practices and the socio-cultural dimensions of VAWG. Leaders can use these skills to educate their communities, promoting more respectful and accurate portrayals of VAWG in local media.
- **Support for Community-Led Advocacy:** Community leaders can liaise between the public and the media, advocating for stories prioritising survivor dignity and contextual accuracy. Leaders who understand the principles of media literacy can challenge harmful narratives within their circles, helping dismantle myths and biases surrounding VAWG.
- **Engaging Community Leaders in Public Dialogues:** These leaders can host or participate in public dialogues, seminars or discussions, promoting a culture of awareness and respect. For instance, a religious leader trained in VAWG media literacy might

address myths related to victim-blaming, encouraging followers to support survivors rather than stigmatise them.

Example: ActionAid Media Literacy Workshops in Nigeria

ActionAid has collaborated with local organisations in Nigeria to conduct media literacy workshops across schools, focusing on VAWG awareness and ethical media consumption. These workshops include:

- **Discussions on Gender Sensitivity:** Educators teach students to recognise gender-sensitive reporting and challenge biased portrayals of women and survivors.
- **Creating Community Advocates:** Students are encouraged to advocate for respectful and accurate depictions of women and survivors within their own networks. This approach empowers young people to become advocates for positive change, both in the media they consume and the narratives they share.
- **Interactive Learning:** Activities such as analysing news articles, role-playing and peer discussions allow students to actively engage with the material, helping them retain key concepts around media bias, ethical reporting and the impact of media on public perceptions of VAWG.

These programmes foster a well-informed youth population that understands the impact of media narratives on VAWG and champions respectful and responsible media practices.

10.3 Using Social Media for VAWG Awareness and Advocacy

Social media is a powerful tool for raising awareness, promoting advocacy and driving social change around Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). With its vast reach, especially among younger audiences, social media enables journalists, advocates and organisations to share stories, amplify campaigns and foster an informed, engaged public. To maximise its impact, VAWG advocacy on social media should be strategic, data-informed and empathetic

Develop Engaging Campaigns with Clear Calls to Action

Social media campaigns on VAWG must be engaging, informative and actionable. To sustain attention and drive meaningful participation, campaigns should incorporate:

- **Dynamic Content Formats:** Utilising videos, infographics, live discussions, testimonials and data visualisations makes information more accessible and engaging. Short-form videos, for example, allow advocates to convey complex information quickly while personal survivor testimonials can foster empathy and support.
- **Clear Calls to Action:** Each post or campaign should encourage followers to take specific actions, such as signing a petition, joining a webinar, participating in a survey or sharing a resource. Calls to action should be direct, empowering users to feel part of the solution. For instance, a post on domestic violence statistics could end with a prompt to share a helpline number or link to support services.
- **User-Generated Content:** Encouraging followers to share their own stories, thoughts or messages of support can build a community-centred campaign. For example, using prompts like “Share how you support survivors in your community” can inspire personal involvement, making the campaign feel more inclusive and impactful.

Use Hashtags to Build Momentum

Hashtags are essential tools for organising and amplifying social media content on VAWG. Well-chosen hashtags make it easier for users to discover, follow and participate in conversations.

- **Global and Local Hashtags:** Popular hashtags such as #EndVAWG, #16Days (for the annual campaign against gender-based violence), and #MeToo have successfully built communities of support and awareness. Locally-focused hashtags like #StandToEndRape in Nigeria create a national context, making issues more relatable and actionable within specific cultural and legal frameworks.

- **Campaign-Specific Hashtags:** Creating unique hashtags for specific campaigns can unify messages and simplify tracking engagement. For instance, a campaign raising awareness on VAWG during the COVID-19 pandemic might use a hashtag like #SafeAtHome to highlight the risks of lockdowns for survivors of domestic violence. Campaign-specific hashtags enable organisations to monitor participation and measure the campaign's reach.
- **Hashtag Challenges and Activations:** Interactive elements, such as hashtag challenges (e.g., posting a solidarity message with a hashtag) encourage user participation. Challenges increase campaign visibility and empower users to become advocates by sharing the hashtag across their networks.

Counter Misinformation and Promote Ethical Narratives

Social media can be a source of both support and misinformation about VAWG. Harmful myths and stereotypes are often amplified online, making it crucial for journalists and advocates to actively counter false narratives.

- **Educational Content to Address Myths:** Posting factual information about VAWG—such as the prevalence, causes and impacts—can help dismantle myths. For instance, graphics explaining that “VAWG is not a private family matter but a public health issue” can challenge stigma and misconceptions.
- **Debunking Misinformation:** Misinformation, such as victim-blaming narratives, can harm survivors and prevent others from seeking help. Journalists and organisations should monitor trends and discussions to identify and address common falsehoods, using data, survivor testimonies and expert opinions to present alternative perspectives.
- **Promoting Empathetic, Survivor-Centred Narratives:** Content should centre survivors' experiences in a dignified manner, avoiding sensationalism. For instance, sharing stories of survivors who have overcome challenges while focusing on systemic factors (rather than personal details) promotes understanding and respect. Ethical narratives encourage the audience to view VAWG as a societal issue requiring collective accountability and systemic change.

Engage Influencers and Partnerships

Collaborating with influencers and advocacy organisations can greatly expand the reach and impact of VAWG awareness campaigns. Influencers—particularly those committed to social justice and women’s rights—can bring credibility and visibility to the cause.

- **Selecting Relevant Influencers:** Choosing influencers who align with the values of VAWG advocacy, especially those who consistently support gender equality and survivor rights, strengthens the campaign’s authenticity. Influencers with personal stories or a strong stance against gender-based violence often resonate more deeply with followers.
- **Co-Hosting Live Sessions or Q&As:** Hosting live discussions with influencers or experts allows followers to ask questions and learn in real-time. For instance, an *Instagram* Live event featuring a psychologist, a survivor advocate and a women’s rights influencer can engage diverse audiences, providing expert advice and survivor support information.
- **Cross-Platform Campaigns:** Coordinating campaigns across platforms like *Instagram*, *Twitter* and *Facebook* enables broad reach. Engaging with multiple influencers across different platforms also ensures the message reaches various demographics, from teenagers on *Instagram* to professionals on *LinkedIn*.

Example: #StandToEndRape in Nigeria

The Stand to End Rape Initiative (STER) has effectively used the hashtag #StandToEndRape to raise awareness about sexual violence and provide resources to survivors. Through a combination of personal stories, educational infographics and data-backed posts, the campaign has managed to:

- **Raise Public Awareness:** By sharing real survivor stories and statistics on sexual violence, STER has sparked public discourse on the severity of the issue and challenged cultural taboos surrounding discussions of rape and sexual assault in Nigeria.

- **Influence Policy Discussions:** The momentum generated by #StandToEndRape has reached policymakers, contributing to increased discussions on improving legal protections for survivors. This highlights the potential of social media campaigns to effect systemic change.
- **Connect Survivors to Support Services:** The campaign frequently shares helplines, legal resources and counselling services, making it easier for survivors to access help. This practical support educates the public and empowers survivors to seek assistance.

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