

National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking

Ethical Standards for Media Sources Conducting Interviews with Public Officials and Victims of Human Trafficking

Standards for Media Interviews: TV, Radio, Newspapers, Other Printed Materials, Internet, Electronic Materials

1) Ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

By nature of the crime, victims of human trafficking are at high risk of being harmed by their traffickers or organized crime ring. Exposure of their stories through media will often put the victim or their family at a heightened risk, including death threats or murder. Therefore, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity is paramount for the safety and protection of the victim. Journalists wanting to report on human trafficking should do so with utmost consideration to protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the victim. Confidentiality refers to keeping the details of the information private. Anonymity refers to not revealing the name of the victim. The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking is committed to protecting victims and will not, under any circumstances, discuss case-specific victim information with the media. Media sources are requested to refrain from asking victim-specific questions or referencing case-specific examples. They may instead, ask questions about general trends and patterns identified in human trafficking in the UAE.

2) Minimize harm to victims and their families.

Media sources must be fully aware of the harm that their reporting could have on the victims or their families. They should exercise extreme caution when interviewing or reporting on victims of human trafficking. It is their ethical obligation to refrain from reporting a story if that exposure has the potential to put the victim or her family in danger. Traffickers may hear the story and threaten her life or the lives of her family members.

3) Know the subject and assess the risks.

It is the responsibility of the journalist to take a full assessment of the situation prior to reporting a story on human trafficking. Great care and discretion should be taken when deciding to report on victims of human trafficking. Reporting that results in the endangerment of a victim and/or her family, may be punishable by law.

4) Do not retraumatize victim or family.

Journalists must assess if retelling of the victim's story will retraumatize her or her family. This means do not ask questions that could evoke strong, negative emotions from the victim. In most cases, victims are experiencing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The retelling of their stories may trigger unmanageable emotions that could be detrimental to the victim. Great care should be taken by journalists when assessing whether to have a victim share her story.

5) Do not change the facts or sensationalize the story.

When speaking about human trafficking, the story should not be fabricated or changed. Only the facts should be reported. Sensationalizing stories must also be avoided. Harm to victims of human trafficking can result from stories that glamorize or sensationalize the crime of human trafficking and may serve the traffickers rather than the victims.

6) Do not report case-specific information.

Media sources should reframe from reporting case-specific information on active or recent human trafficking cases. This is to protect the safety of the victim and her family. Changing victims' names is not enough to conceal the identity of the victim. Any reference to case-specific information should be avoided.

7) Give victims the choice to be interviewed.

In cases where it is deemed safe to interview a victim of human trafficking, a journalist must ensure that the victim has been given the choice to be interviewed. The victim should fully understand both the positive and negative ramifications of such an interview. Offer victim interviewing options, including not showing her face, using voice overlay, covering identifying body marks, etc.

8) Obtain informed consent and explain rules of interviewing.

When conducting interviews with victims of human trafficking it is imperative to obtain their informed consent. This means that the victims must be fully informed of the reason for the interview, what will be asked, who will be the viewing audience, the possible positive and negative outcomes of participating in the interview, her right to participate in and end the interview at anytime, and any other information that would help her make an informed decision about participating in the interview. The rules of media interviews should be explained to victims prior to an interview. This means they should be explained what it means to say 'off the record' or 'on the record.' They should know that the final decision about what is published in a story is not the victims, but the media source.

9) Interviewing with an Interpreter.

When utilizing an interpreter, the interpreter must be informed about her role and maintaining basic confidentiality. She must be instructed to translate exactly what is said by the victim, without any changes to the victim's testimonial. The interpreter must not give her opinion or pass judgment on the victim. She must maintain respect for the victim and her story. The interpreter must also not disclose any information shared with her after the interview.

10) Use information appropriately and with discretion.

Any information gathered about victims of human trafficking should be used to facilitate the protection and empowerment of victims of trafficking. Careful thought and discretion should be used when deciding how to use the information gathered. Information dissemination should be aimed at supporting the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking efforts to end human trafficking.

The World Health Organization has also put out a set of 10 Guidelines for Interviewing Women Who Have Been Trafficked and may also be referenced by journalists for ethical guidelines specific for conducting interviews with trafficked women.

References:

Breslin, J. *Ethical guidelines for the media's coverage of crime victims* (2007). Washington,DC: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Dubai Foundation for Women and Children (2010) *General policies and procedures*. Dubai, UAE.

Zimmerman, C & Watts, C. *WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women* (2003). World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland: WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.