



# HOPE BASED

## SOLUTIONS ORIENTED

Guide for News and Media Producers



## Guide for News and Media Producers on Developing Hope-Based and Solutions-Oriented Journalism about Human Trafficking

Premise: Professional journalism in a democracy aims to contribute constructively to society by providing audiences with information necessary to make informed decisions about their lives, communities, and government. Reporting that focuses narrowly on the problem of human trafficking can cause harm, because the problem is only part of the story that needs to be told. Journalists can maximize positive impact by reporting more holistically on the many efforts to combat HT being advanced within and across multiple sectors, including by survivors themselves. Stories have the ability to heighten public awareness in identifying potential survivors and not criminalizing victims. Responsible reporting can influence policy development and provide a means to hold exploiters and beneficiaries of trafficking accountable (e.g. businesses profiting from exploitation or buyers of a trafficked person). This guide centers on why and how to produce hope-based and solutions-oriented journalism on HT.

Journalists can maximize impact and minimize harm through:

- ▶ Understanding both vulnerabilities and strengths of HT survivors.
- ▶ Practicing trauma-informed and respectful interviewing with cultural responsiveness when appropriate.
- ▶ Reporting on the complexity of HT and evidence-based responses to combating HT.
- ▶ Crafting survivor-focused, restorative narratives.

Guidance regarding each of these is provided below.

### Understanding both common vulnerabilities and strengths of HT survivors

- Because some journalism on HT has been damaging to survivors, many survivors are wary of talking with journalists, and their advocates are hesitant to facilitate and connect journalists to survivor-clients. Advocates who do so risk having their clients feel obligated to speak to a journalist because of the position/power dynamic that may exist between the survivor and an advocate who provides them housing or other services.
- Although some schools of journalism encourage keeping emotional distance in an effort to be objective while reporting, it is still possible to approach HT survivors with empathy and humaneness.
- There is no “typical” HT case, but there are core messages that victims need

to hear, ways to make resources and communication tools more easily accessible, and actions a survivor may take to get themselves to safety.

- Survivors are resilient, and many are engaged in countering HT in creative and influential ways.
- Survivors are telling their stories to help other people, not to seek media attention.
- All HT survivors have been profoundly disrespected and exploited and are wary of further disrespect and/or exploitation.
- All HT survivors have experienced multiple forms of trauma that affect them in many, ongoing ways, potentially impacting their:
  - Ability to remember
  - Sense of safety
  - Capacity to trust people
  - Willingness to risk further harm
- Trauma can also make an individual more vulnerable to future harm and impact their ability to assess risk or boundaries. Journalists should be mindful of pressuring or pushing boundaries in order to reveal more details, which a survivor may later regret disclosing.
- What has been done to survivors does not define who they are, nor determine their future.
- Survivors own their stories and have the right to determine what they share about their past, to whom, and for what purposes.
- Understanding of the potential implications for survivors' lives from telling their story.
  - Viewing or reading about themselves can be retraumatizing, especially if they experience a lack of control over what happens with their story.
  - Survivors may face shaming if their family and/or community learns about the case through the media.
  - Survivors may have expectations of justice coming out from telling their story.
  - Survivors or their loved ones may be at-risk of harm by their exploiter even if they have already been held accountable.

### **Trauma-informed and respectful interviewing**

- In order to identify a survivor interested in speaking to a journalist, consider contacting a local service provider organization or attorneys who work with HT

clients. Service providers will have a better sense of survivors who are not only interested in engaging but in a healthy space to do so.

- Provide a survivor with potential interview questions ahead of time. This will help them prepare and minimize potential retraumatization.
- Be culturally responsive, including being aware of government systems that criminalize victims and cultural aspects that may normalize types of violence, while acknowledging that no culture affirms violence of this kind and no one group is pathologically more inclined to traffic people. If relevant, ensure a survivor has an interpreter in their preferred language or dialect.
- Give options to survivor interviewees so they can feel free to make choices that increase their sense of safety. Options should include:
  - To have an advocate present during the interview.
  - To remain anonymous by being unnamed, unrecorded, and/or not displaying survivors' faces in video recordings.
  - To choose where to be interviewed and where to sit in the space where the interview is taking place.
  - To take breaks during the interview as needed, if possible.
- Be prepared for unexpected emotions and avoid judgment. Tissue paper and water are helpful!
- Demonstrate trustworthiness by explaining the journalist's aims and publication venue/timeframe and providing examples of prior reporting by journalist/news outlet on HT or other sensitive issues.
- Be clear about potential and likely outcomes of the news story, and don't overpromise.
- Ask about—and report on—survivors' successes and hopes for the future.
- Consider how the story's publication may impact a survivor's life.
- If the news story does not run, communicate back to the interviewees what happened with the story.
- For more guidance, see "[Putting the Human Into Human Trafficking Reporting: Tips for Interviewing Survivors](#)", written by Minh Dang for The Irina Project, UNC School of Media and Journalism, November 2013.

### **Reporting on the complexity of HT and evidence-based responses to combating HT**

- Cover any and all forms of HT, not just sex trafficking. Labor trafficking is more prevalent worldwide and is often harder to identify because it appears to be legitimate at first glance, i.e. a victim being exploited while working in a restaurant, in the beauty industry or as a janitor. Often, there are intersections with labor and sex trafficking, or sex trafficking and domestic violence. Limiting the scope of the issue is detrimental to identification of cases of trafficking.

- Stop the Traffik summarized [seven commonly-reported forms of HT](#) worldwide.
- The Polaris Project identified [25 types of HT in the US](#) between 2007–2016, and the business model of each.
- Investigate the root causes and contexts of any HT case being reported. This may include environmental and social risk factors that made the HT survivor vulnerable to exploitation.
- Find out what’s being done by whom to address multiple aspects of the problem of HT and highlight promising practices. Investigate and report on what helps efforts to combat HT succeed.
  - Illuminate successful collaborations in counter-HT efforts.
  - Engage in sustained inquiry that shows how communities come together to counter HT, and reveal the hard work of healing over time. Do not solely focus on law enforcement response.
  - Consider the implications of any news story on HT and do follow-up reporting on the larger complexity, e.g. breaking news story followed by deeper analysis.

### **Crafting survivor-focused, restorative narratives**

- Take care to avoid glorifying in any way the abuse and exploitation endured by HT survivors.
- Avoid sensationalism and portrayals of survivors that provide an “emotional hook” at the expense of a survivor. For example, images of bound or gagged survivors is used as an emotional hook that is harmful to survivors. Avoid use of terms, like “child prostitute” or “sex slave”.
- Craft the news story in ways that convey respect for survivors. Often survivors want to engage with media to raise awareness and it is an opportunity for empowerment.
- Include survivors’ agency, courage, resilience, recovery, and/or civic engagement.
- Craft restorative narratives that present hard truths, address complexity, and show progress without giving false hope or suggesting superficial answers.
- Avoid the illusion that journalism can “save” anyone, and avoid putting anyone on a pedestal.
- Review guides for journalists reporting on HT regarding ethical considerations and specific words and phrases to avoid, such as:
  - [“Modern-Day Slavery: A Necessary Beat -- With Different Challenges”](#) by E. Benjamin Skinner, Nieman Reports, January 10, 2011.
  - [“Sexual Assault, Human Trafficking & Child Abuse 2018 Media Guide”](#) (especially pp. 7–8) by the Monterey County Rape Crisis Center.
  - [“Language and Media Guide”](#) by Love146.

- Sections 4 and 5.2 of the “[Human Trafficking Toolkit for Journalists](#)” by The Arab Initiative to Build National Capacities to Combat Human Trafficking in the Arab Countries and UNODC.
- [The Journalism Centre on Global Trafficking](#)

### **Authorship, copyright, and citation:**

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