

GUIDELINES

for Gender Sensitive Media

Reportage

in KASHMIR

2021





ZANAAN WANAAN

in collaboration with

FE-MALE

has drafted these guidelines for sensitive media reportage to develop and foster an understanding of gender sensitivity in the media and to prioritize ethical considerations. The purpose of these guidelines is to encourage media organizations and practitioners in Kashmir to assess their gender-sensitive responsiveness at an individual and an institutional level. This document forms a practical guide aimed at identifying dimensions and frameworks to enable media coverage that is sensitive, particularly to the portrayal of the women and girls in an armed conflict.





About ZW

Zanaan Wanaan (ZW) is an independent feminist collective based in Kashmir. Zanaan Wanaan are Kashmiri words for 'women speak'. ZW engages in feminist activism on the ground, produces independent scholarship, and works towards strengthening the women's movement in Kashmir. Our advocacy work is focused on bringing international attention to women's human rights and the crisis in Kashmir. ZW's action-research based approach is rooted in the commitment to upholding principles of peace, equality, and justice

About Fe-Male

Fe- Male is a civil feminist collective based in Lebanon aiming to achieve a just world free of patriarchy. Fe-Male works with women and girls to eliminate injustice by building a young feminist movement, empowering agents of change, and campaigning against discriminatory norms and policies.

Fe-Male was the first feminist organization in Lebanon that raised the issue of women's objectification and their stereotypical image in media and advertisements. For their project, 'Challenging Women's Objectification and Stereotyping in Media and Ads (2013- Ongoing),' Fe-male campaigned to challenge women's objectification in traditional and social media, mobilizing more than 2500 women and men for the cause. They also engaged policy-makers, media, and advertising agencies' owners to stop exploiting women. This cause is one of the strategic themes Fe-Male is working on, and it expanded and continued beyond an individual project to day-to-day work.

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MEDIA IN KASHMIR

Media in Kashmir operates in some of the most hostile and challenging conditions. From intimidation, harassment, incarceration, assaults, internet shutdowns, censorship, and surveillance, Kashmiri media practitioners have, and continue to work under immense pressure and unfavourable conditions. Despite these challenges, the media here has been integral to disseminating information and speaking truth to power irrespective of the hostility of the state. The Media Policy, 2020[1], is one example of how the state exerts its control over all aspects of media in Kashmir and limit media here as the mouthpiece of the government which disseminates ‘news’ that is within the political acceptability.

Such an extraordinary situation forces the media to exist in binaries- to either portray events through a dehumanizing lens, in order to make a case for the brutal conditions of life in Kashmir, or to project a semblance of ‘normalcy’ in the region. There is barely any framework in place for the media to function, to seek accountability, and even to monitor and evaluate its own practice.

As a collective, ZW is concerned with these difficult questions of narrative construction and structural problems that shape the way media operates. People’s narratives are documented through a specific prism that is largely dictated by the state. Amidst all this, gender barely surfaces as a subject of primary concern. Our larger aim here is to ask a broader question about narrative change. Is it possible? And if so, could gender be a starting point?

These guidelines are aimed at setting a scene; in finding and thinking aloud about alternative ways of reporting and disseminating news. This is long-term work that requires thinking, re-thinking, and incorporation of media practitioners in these conversations. These conversations around gender sensitivity are challenging and made worse by the absence of any institutions or a lack of a rule of law, which would otherwise protect vulnerable groups.

INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDELINES

In Kashmir, women's representation is mainly limited to violence against them or their glorified representation in, say protests, funerals or other public settings. Their representation is reliant on individual reporters or editors' discretion and not moderated within a framework of codes of conduct or regulation policies. Even outside of the non-existent domestic frameworks, there is no applicability of international resolutions dedicated to women in armed conflict say. These conventions and treaties pertaining the rights of women in an armed conflict remain ineffective like any other universally protected fundamental human rights in Kashmir.

What is required is not simply more attention to these issues in reportage but to holistically locate gender bias in the context of Kashmir in which media operates. Our aim is not only to dedicate more efforts to coverage of gender issues but to promote 'genderization' [2] in all the processes that entail journalism-from education in media, to employment, to content production, reportage, editing, policy-making, and regulation. We insist that the media personnel use a gendered lens in reportage of not only matters 'of women' but across the board.

While the content produced in media runs on strict timelines and there may not be scope to delve deeper into the gender issue in each story; what we are proposing is a holistic understanding that is long-term and sustainable. These practices can be cultivated over time. A gender-sensitive approach can make the work of journalists more credible and effective. These guidelines are a reference point that has been curated with experts and professionals in media to create a resource on gender sensitivity that is contextual to Kashmir. We hope that media organizations assess their gender responsiveness and adapt these guidelines within their own mechanism to enhance an overall culture of gender sensitivity of and in media.





OBJECTIVES

Providing information that would assist the media practitioners in producing media coverage that is gender-sensitive.

Enabling practitioners to understand and identify the dimensions, frameworks, forms, and types of GBV in the context of armed conflict in Kashmir.

Integrating gender in the policy framework and facilitating the involvement of women stakeholders in decision-making at an institutional level.

Promoting ethical codes and policies for gender portrayal and sensitive reportage.

Proposing a shift from generalizations, stereotyping, objectification, and romanticization in gender portrayal in media.

Encouraging organizations to make gender issues transparent and comprehensible to the public and analyzing internal policies and practices to take necessary actions for change.

Creating a safe work environment for people of all genders and taking adequate measures to address instances of sexual harassment in the workplaces.

Fostering Gender Equality within Media Institutions and Organisations

1

Education, training and targeted action to increase women students in the media.

To have more women in media, we need more women media students. Even though there has been a gradual increase in women both taking up media academically and professionally, more concerted efforts need to be made in this regard. Media organizations can conduct workshops and capacity-building training with students in school as well as colleges across districts in Kashmir. These focused exercises should also propose gender-sensitive modules and awareness programs. Organizations can offer internships and volunteering programs so more students get hands-on experience in media.

2

Equal treatment in the workplace.

There should be equal treatment of staffers regardless of their gender. It is important that women staff feel heard and valued in the organization and their opinions and contributions are taken seriously. There should be equal compensations for the same work, and equal opportunities should be provided to the employees across the board.

3

Gender equality in associations, clubs, and organizations of journalists.

Representatives of professional associations, media self-regulatory bodies, or even representatives of public institutions are often men. Even if there are a few women members, their role is often tokenistic and barely ever in a leadership role. The associations/bodies should actively include women in administrative, decision making and other levels. Affirmative action can also enable designated leadership positions within these media structures.

4

Gender balance in decision making.

Women journalists should be considered active participants in decision-making as well as in their abilities to highlight pertinent causes and issues to public opinion. There should be active efforts to ensure women are given equal opportunities and are valued for their work and opinions. Media organizations can conduct a periodical gender audit to assess their overall gender balance. This can also be enhanced through affirmative action aimed at increasing opportunities for women in the organizational structure.

5

A safe working environment.

Include staff in discussions on what constitutes a safe working environment for them, and have policies against sexual harassment and bullying. There should be no room for casual sexism in the workplace. Organizations must have basic necessities from separate toilets and pick and drop services to facilitate women journalists' mobility especially given the frequent lockdowns and shutdowns. Journalists should be provided appropriate safety gear while covering violent events like protests, CASO & encounters.



Gender Portrayal in Media Content

1

Review language and expressions in media coverage.

Use gender-neutral language in reportage. A gender-neutral language refers to neither men nor women when the gender of the person is not relevant to the subject matter. It is important to shift from using 'man' as a generic noun, using neutral professional descriptions and especially paying careful attention to headlines. Especially in GBV reportage, priority should be given to not reinforcing stereotypes, and the usage of active/passive language should be used with caution. Similarly, adjectives used to victimize women should be avoided.

2

Content Regulation Policies.

Create a gender-sensitive content regulation policy, in case there isn't one in place- in consultation with women journalists, experts, and civil society members. There should be a focus on ethics, gender representation, balanced and multi-dimensional portrayal of women.

3

Considerations for privacy and ethics.

There should be a code of conduct pertaining to ethics of reportage on women which should be circulated with and discussed with all practitioners and people involved in the organizations. Journalists should minimize harm through their reports and ensure that privacy and confidentiality in sensitive matters are prioritized.





4

Graphics and Visualization.

Often images of violence focus on women as victims and distressed figures while the perpetrator often surfaces as a distant shadow. These sensational images use visual tropes wherein the focus is entirely on the victim-survivor; reiterating the notions of loss and honour placed upon women's bodies. These tropes further the conditions that create an environment of gendered violence in the first place. Kashmiri women are also often photographed in their most vulnerable conditions, in funerals or in the aftermath of incidents of violence. Media organizations should steer clear of using this graphic imagery and visual techniques should be used to protect the privacy of the people involved in the reports.

5

Content on Minors.

Special consideration should be employed when engaging with minors (people below the age of 18). Practitioners must protect their privacy, seek consent from their guardians for interviews as well as reportage on the subject matter. Careful considerations should be taken for the safety of the child and the cultural ramifications of the media reportage. Through their reportage, journalists should aim to protect a child's best interests and promote child rights.

Reporting Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence stems from power relationships and in the context of armed conflict, it is disproportionately exacerbated- affecting women and other marginal identities as they are more disempowered and vulnerable.

Reporting gender-based violence requires caution and sensitivity on the part of media professionals, especially, given how closely it impacts the lives and perception of not just one incident but towards the phenomenon of GBV.

A gender-sensitive approach would situate GBV in the ambit of power, or rather, powerlessness, of women which often creates the conditions for GBV in the first place. Violence against women is a manifestation of this power imbalance where women have been put in disproportionately marginal positions not only socially but politically and legally as well. With the absolute lack of any redressal mechanisms in Kashmir, it is all the more important for the media to share the responsibility of sensitive reportage. This would foster a culture beyond the narratives of shame and victim-blaming. Journalists covering GBV should be trained with gender-sensitive techniques aforementioned like adopting appropriate terminology, informed consent, and conducting interviews sensitively. Reporting GBV sensitively would also entail:

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Privacy and Confidentiality

Respecting and ensuring privacy in cases of gender-based violence is of the utmost importance because it is directly related to ensuring the safety and security of the survivors. Also, source protection is important as GBV is a sensitive topic that is often not discussed and could potentially put the source at risk. Organisations must refrain from vindictive and counterproductive information regarding the survivor that might adopt a tone of victim-blaming.

Fair Representation

Avoid the usage of stereotypical and graphic imagery. Journalists should not attribute the act of violence to the survivor. For example, instead of saying 'x was assaulted by b', instead use, 'b assaulted x', putting the onus of the crime on the perpetrator.

Sensationalist visuals and vocabulary like 'scandal' should be strictly avoided whilst reporting cases.

Sensitive Engagement

Treating the survivors humanely and ensuring the preservation of the mental health of the survivors. People should be informed of all the details of the possible press coverage and its consequences. Particular attention should be paid while engaging with children.

4

Interviews for GBV Reportage

Journalists should be made aware of the practical, ethical, and humane steps to be followed when conducting an interview with a survivor of violence. It is important that standard practice of the interview is adopted which prioritizes privacy, confidentiality, mental health, and safety of the survivor. The reporter should give the survivor time for psychological preparation before the interview and employ the use a language that is comfortable to them. No information about the survivor's identity should be disclosed in the media content; informed consent should be taken prior to the publication. Ensuring the survivor has easy access to the journalist. Therefore, providing them with the contact information is important. In most cases, survivors are more comfortable in the presence of a woman journalist. There should be a woman team member while covering and interviewing such issues. Do not push their boundaries and respect their wishes if they want to stop the interview in-between.





In addition to the aforementioned best practices, media organizations should also develop and think of civil mechanisms which can allow readers or their audience to flag and report triggering content. Within the regulatory bodies, an official monitoring mechanism should be put in place for promoting best practices for gender-sensitive reportage. These bodies should also facilitate the awareness against stereotyping, objectification, and exploitation of women in the media. The aim should not only focus on creating change in the media discourse but also impact and inform public opinion. Through these practices, we aim to make media practice in Kashmir more inclusive and to create a space for women to not only exist but thrive in this sphere.

Ultimately prioritizing the issues of gender through media on a social, political, legal, and cultural level is a crucial step for building a just and equal society.

RESEARCH AND FURTHER READINGS

IFJ (2014) Guidelines for Reporting on Violence Against Women.

UNESCO. (2012) Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media: Framework of Indicators to Gauge Gender Sensitivity in Media Operations and Content.

UNESCO. (2019) Reporting on Violence against Women and Girls.

UNICEF. Ethical Reporting Guidelines: Key Principles for Responsible Reporting on Children and Young People.



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[1] On June 2, the Government unveiled its the Media Policy 2020 which outlines their power to monitor content in the media, determining the accreditation of Kashmiri journalists and control allocations for government advertising. The local journalists or editors were not consulted at all before drafting this policy. This policy enhances the control of the government over media and poses a serious threat for local media. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) in its article calls this Policy as a " nail in the coffin for free press."

[2] 'Genderisation' is a framework put forth in Missing Half the Story (2010) proposing a gender lens in all aspects of journalism and news coverage including reporting, editing and feature writing.

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