COVERING TRAUMA

A Training Guide

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INTRODUCTION

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WHY TRAUMA STORIES ARE SENSITIVE

As journalists, we cover everything – politics and business, environment and health, education and development, war and peace. Stories about any of these topics can become controversial; we may uncover a big corruption story, or we may discover that a senior government official has broken a law.

But there are other kinds of stories that are sensitive in a different way. Stories about sexual and gender-based violence, child soldiers, or sex trafficking, for example, are stories that require thoughtful and careful reporting and production. All stories about an ordinary person who becomes the victim of abuse require extra sensitivity, because survivors of abuse – whether the abuse is physical, emotional or political – are usually survivors of a traumatic event.

There are many kinds of traumatic events. A terrible car crash, an earthquake, and a war can all be traumatic events. In this guide, we will focus on trauma caused by violence – civil or political unrest, war, genocide, communal violence, domestic violence, and sexual violence.

Experiencing a traumatic event affects survivors in many ways. Journalists should be aware of these effects because they will also affect how journalists can – and should – work. This guide will give working journalists concrete tools for understanding the effects of trauma and for conducting sensitive reporting and writing on trauma stories. It is written for group use and for self-study.

This guide will cover the following topics:

- What is trauma?
- How should journalists report trauma stories?
- What methods can journalists use to write effective stories about trauma?
- How can journalism help communities heal after trauma?

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WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Language often feels limited when talking about massacres, rape, and the abduction of children to serve as soldiers, or other sensitive topics. Many things cannot be stated precisely, and the words we reach for are often emotion-laden. These are both problems for storytellers.

The science of trauma offers some clues about how to deal with these storytelling dilemmas. This guide is about covering sensitive issues in conflict-afflicted communities, and many of those issues touch on – or are directly about – trauma.

The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, the world's leading organization on reporting about loss, disaster, and violence, defines "traumatic stress" in this way:

> "Traumatic stress is the pressure, force or strain on the human mind and body from a specific event of major dimension that shocks, stuns and horrifies."

The definition contains several important elements. Trauma is about an event or events. That event, or moment, is significant in scope. In other words, trauma is not an ordinary experience. In our day-to-day lives, we face challenges; we feel fear; we encounter hardships. These are *not* the same as trauma.

Another important element of this definition is that traumatic events affect our minds *and* our bodies. Scientists have found that trauma can alter memory and disrupt how the brain understands time. Journalists need to know that trauma affects how people understand and re-tell their stories.

You may have already experienced this in your reporting: a survivor of a violent attack re-tells his story, but he tells the details out of chronological order. Or perhaps he omits things, even "very obvious" things, and remembers them later, when you ask a direct question. The details of the story may even change between interviews.

These are not necessarily signs of an untrustworthy source. They could be symptoms of trauma.

The other important part of this definition of traumatic stress is that time has little bearing on traumatic effects to brain and body. Survivors may feel stress while watching events unfold in real time, or months or even years later – or at all of those times.

Many of our sources may experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), in which they feel the effects of their ordeal long after it ends. As Dr. Frank Ochberg, an expert in traumatic stress and the founder of the Dart Center, puts it, "Whenever a reporter meets a survivor of traumatic events, there is a chance that the journalist will witness - and may even precipitate – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Therefore, it is important that working journalists (including grizzled veterans) anticipate PTSD, recognize it and report it, while earning the respect of the public and those interviewed. The recognition

of PTSD and related conditions enhances not only a reporter's professionalism, but also the reporter's humanitarianism."

Being aware of the science of trauma can improve our work in several ways.

- We will ask better and more sensitive questions.
- We will write better and more sensitive broadcasts.
- We will think of better stories.

But trauma is also about something un-scientific: It is about power and powerlessness. For radio professionals working in peacebuilding, there will be many people whose tragic stories are also about a loss of control – over their families, their homes, their communities, their bodies.

Thus, journalists should never, ever, make their subjects or sources feel powerless.

HOW SHOULD JOURNALISTS REPORT TRAUMA STORIES?

Working on trauma stories requires different journalistic practices while reporting and writing. In this section we will focus on useful ways to adapt standard journalism practices to sensitive subjects.

THE 5 W'S AND AN H OF TRAUMA REPORTING

Traditional journalism is supposed to answer six basic questions, usually taught as "The 5 Ws and an H." Traditional journalism tells us *what* happened, *who* did it, *when* it happened, *where* it happened*, why* it happened and *how* it happened. These questions need some adjustment when our work involves sensitive reporting on trauma.

WHAT

"What" is usually about the content of the story. In trauma journalism, content remains important, but there is also another "what" to consider. *What is the purpose of this story?*

Without a clear purpose, trauma journalism becomes sensationalism. Violence is always dramatic, and people are drawn to drama. Take some common examples: When a car slides off the side of the road, everyone comes to see what happened. When two people argue in the street, a crowd surrounds them to see what will happen next. The darker side of human nature means we are all potential voyeurs; good journalists must avoid that inclination, and help their listeners avoid it as well.

One way to do that is to focus on the purpose of the story. Trauma journalism should have a larger purpose than simply recounting the grisly details of violence for curious listeners. Here are some questions you might ask yourself to determine if your story has a bigger purpose, or if it only indulges in voyeurism:

1. *Does this story illuminate a larger public policy problem?*
   A story about the rape of a teenage girl should not talk only about what awful things happened to one teenager. It could focus on her recovery, if it is a profile, or on what her story means in her community, if it is a news feature. It could shed light on the problem of rape more broadly. This can make the interview easier on the survivor because it gives a bigger meaning to her individual story, and it can make the story easier for listeners to hear because they understand that the journalist is talking about a problem in their communities.

2. *Does this story help people understand the plight of trauma survivors?*
   Sometimes your bigger purpose can be helping communities better understand victims of violence. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, journalist Chouchou Namegabe broadcast the

first-person stories of women who were raped on Bukavu's community radio station. At first, the community reacted angrily. "They said, it is a shame – it is a shame for you women," she recalled recently. Over time, Namegabe has seen that those radio broadcasts helped local communities to realize that rape is not the woman's "fault" and to find ways to help estranged rape survivors return to their families and communities.

We'll talk more about how to use profiles, features and news stories in the next chapter: "How Should Journalists Produce Trauma Stories?"

3. *Does this story help – with information or with examples – communities recover from trauma?*
   In peacebuilding radio, we will inevitably broadcast to communities affected by trauma. In a single village there could be rape survivors, ex-combatants, and former child soldiers. Another village may be torn apart by the rape of one of its young girls. Radio for peacebuilding must think not only about giving these communities information, but also about how these stories can help communities to heal.

4. *Does this story help survivors?*
   A trauma story told with sensitivity can also help survivors of similar violence. In South Kivu, rape survivors who heard Chouchou Namegabe's programs told her that the stories comforted them and made them feel less alone. Stories can help victims feel heard; sometimes, stories can even help restore a sense of power to people who have survived horror.

More information on how journalism can help communities heal is available on page 15.

WHO

Who should be our sources? For many stories, we look for experts to explain and frame issues, sometimes in a detached or academic way. Good trauma journalism begins with the premise that individuals are experts on their own lives.

For profiles or feature stories, our primary sources must be survivors themselves. But even when we're focusing on a single person's story, we should talk to other people. Corroborating facts in a trauma story is as vital as it is in any other story – but more delicate. We have to be careful not to state or imply that a survivor's story is not believable.

For example, let's say we're working on a series about women's experiences in war. One woman wants to tell the story of being raped during an attack on her village, and how she has struggled afterward to rebuild her life. In this case, you would not want to ask other villagers to verify the truth about her rape, which would likely invite unhelpful rumors and imply that you doubt that woman's story. Instead, you might ask other villagers what happened on the day the village was attacked – what time of year was it? What time of day was it? How many people came? What violence did they see or hear?

There are many kinds of questions to ask other sources. Questions about general historical details will help us ensure our reports are accurate. They can also help give us the kind of detail a good story needs. Questioning eyewitnesses of violence can often unearth useful information (although eyewitnesses may

experience trauma and the effects described above, as well). Talking with other victims can bring us valuable information and perspectives. Just like more traditional reports, there are many kinds of sources for many different kinds of information.

However, victims of violence are the experts on the violence they experienced, and in both reporting and writing, journalists should take care to balance the accounts of survivors, ordinary people and outside experts.

WHEN

Not all sensitive stories are features. For example, if a village has moments ago been attacked, we have to work quickly and respectfully to report that news. We have to interview witnesses of the attack, even though they may be experiencing trauma as we talk to them. Working respectfully in these conditions means identifying ourselves immediately, asking sources politely to tell us what they saw, and reserving follow-up questions for details that need to be clarified, like “Did the attackers come from the north or the south?” “Were they wearing uniforms?”

This is an important time to steer clear of questions whose purpose is simply to show how gruesome the attack was, like “How many times did the man with the machete hack the child?” These questions call forward the lurid details of voyeurism, not the carefully reported information of journalism.

Other times, good journalism practice can mean backing off. For example, if we find out a young woman has just been raped moments ago, that is not the time to ask to interview her about the rape. She is vulnerable, she is powerless, she is possibly traumatized, and she may be physically injured. She is not capable of giving true informed consent to an interview in such a condition. If there is a reason to focus a program on her individual story, we should allow her time to begin to heal, physically and psychologically, before we ask her to recount what happened to her.

WHERE

In interviews for sensitive stories we should strive to protect the privacy of our subjects. Don’t ask sensitive questions like “Did your husband beat you?” or “Did you fight with the rebel forces?” in front of crowds. Let your subjects tell you where they want to meet for an interview, and where they want to sit. Be diligent about where *you* sit: Don’t block a trauma survivor’s path to the door or otherwise seem like an obstacle. You should use your physical presence and your body language, in addition to your words, to make people comfortable and to reinforce that they are in control of the encounter.

WHY?

Unlike traditional journalism, your story will never satisfactorily answer the question “Why did this happen?” You may find experts who can explain political or economic causes for war or violence, or psychologists who study why men abuse women, for example. But for individuals or communities who have survived something horrible, you can never explain why it happened *to them.* This is an existential question they will be asking for the rest of their lives.

Don’t pretend that your story will give them a solution, and don’t say, “I understand your experience.”

INTERVIEWING IN TRAUMA STORIES

The most important skill a journalist can hone for reporting about trauma is interviewing. Interviewing survivors of a traumatic violence – whether they are women who were raped by militias or boys who were forced to join those militias – is not the same as interviewing ordinary civilians.

CONSENT

In traditional journalism, getting consent for an interview is straightforward: you ask people if you can talk to them, and they say “yes” or “no”. In trauma journalism, consent involves more steps. Here are some of those steps; depending on the situation, additions to this list may be needed.

The general principle is this: Trauma happens to people without their permission. Responsible journalism should make certain, at every stage of reporting and writing the story, that survivors are giving their permission freely.

***Identify yourself immediately*.** Sometimes journalists are afraid that they will get angry reactions from trauma survivors or their families, and they may be tempted to delay explaining who they are because of that. But trauma survivors and their families often feel like their trust in the world has been broken. If you withhold that you are a journalist, you will reinforce that feeling – and lose the story.

***React to any reaction with respect*.** Trauma survivors may react angrily, cynically or otherwise negatively when you identify your purpose. It’s important that *you* don’t respond with anger or disrespect: no one should feel coerced or bullied into talking to you.

***Explain how you will use the interview*.** It’s not enough simply to say, “I’d like to interview you for my program.” You should explain why your program is including stories on trauma and how you expect the survivor’s sound bites will be used. You should assure them you will keep them informed as the program progresses – and be sure to do that.

Confirm how you will identify the survivor. No matter who your source is, you should agree with them about how you will identify them at the start of your interview. With trauma survivors, you should find a mutually agreeable way to use their information without violating their safety or trust. Never name minors.

Confirm permission to use sensitive details several days after your interview. In the course of an interview, people sometimes say things that they later may regret, or perhaps even forget they said. With professional sources who have significant political or economic power and experience talking to – even using – the media, like politicians or businessmen, it is fair to disregard their post-interview regrets. But with survivors of violence, whose stories are about powerlessness, that’s not fair. If a woman talks about intimate details of a rape, or a child soldier tells a story about brutalizing his neighbor, go back to them several days after the interview and confirm that you can use those elements. If they ask you not to use a certain part of the interview, don’t use it. If it’s crucial, explain to them why you think so and exactly how you will present the information.

This is not the same thing as handing off veto power over your story. Your story probably has other voices and other ideas within it. Give the survivor the final say over what information about their experience – as a sound bite or in summary – you will broadcast.

***Always fact check*.** You should review every detail of a survivor's story which you plan to broadcast with the survivors before the program goes on air. They are frequently distracted or confused when retelling their stories, even years later. Fact-checking ensures that the survivor told you what he or she meant to tell you – and that you properly understood. Fact-checking also avoids unpleasant surprises for survivors by giving them an idea of what they – and their neighbors – will hear on the radio.

THE INTERVIEW

Don't start with hard questions. Ask trauma survivors about themselves and get some sense of their lives *before* asking them about their most vulnerable moment. If you are interviewing the survivor of a village massacre, you might start by saying, "Tell me about your village before the violence came." This will help put them at ease – and having that context will also make your interview and ultimately your story better.

Avoid the language of blame. If a woman says she was raped on the road late at night, don't ask her, "Why were you out late at night, anyway?" If a child was abducted when getting water alone, don't ask him, "Why did you go get water alone?" Researchers have found that these questions can cause psychological damage to survivors, because the questions imply that the trauma is the survivor's fault. No matter what piece of information you need, word your question carefully to avoid the language of blame and fault.

***Remember that trauma can re-order memories*.** Many survivors of trauma do not tell what happened to them in a linear way. Chronology is often confused, and certain details are remembered at inexplicable times. Even when you need to clarify the order of events or emotions, avoid sounding like you don't believe your interview subject. Don't say things like, "But you said the militia arrived while you were in the fields harvesting rice, and now you're saying you were raped by soldiers in the rainy season. So which one is it?" Instead, ask them context-based questions about the event that can help both of you figure out the chronology or other details together. Try a follow-up like, "I hear you saying now that this happened in the rainy season. But last time, I think you mentioned that you were harvesting rice. Was it raining while you were in the fields?" Survivors themselves will recognize the discrepancy that you have also recognized, and you can talk through it together. Present yourself as a conversation partner, not a prosecutor of the truth.

Use real words. Some well-intentioned journalists try to soften their questions by using euphemisms, like "passed away" instead of "died" or "violated" for "raped." No euphemism makes the memories easier; using clear words shows you respect the dignity of the survivor.

Choose your translator carefully. Sometimes we have to do these sensitive interviews through translators. Work as hard as you possibly can to make sure your translator will not present him or herself to the subject as an intimidating presence. If you are interviewing a woman about her rape, try to find a female translator. If you are interviewing survivors of a fight between two different tribes, don't use a member of the opposite tribe as your translator. Make sure your translator understands these interview guidelines so that they don't misstep either.

Working with Translators on Trauma Stories

- *Explain your story.* Make sure your translator understands your topic, your angle, and the question(s) your program is trying to answer. Tell them how much airtime you will have, and explain how long you expect the interview to last.
- *Explain your approach*. Make sure your translator knows and understands why you work the way you do. For example, if you spend fifteen minutes talking to a source about day-to-day things you don't expect you will broadcast, tell your translator that you will do this. Otherwise, she might become impatient and frustrated.
- *Explain your language*. Sometimes, the word you choose to call something is politically controversial or culturally sensitive. In Liberia, for example, many ex-combatants prefer to be referred to as "veterans." In Rwanda, people talk about the violence in 1994 as "the genocide" and not "the civil war." Make sure you and your translator are *both* using a neutral vocabulary. If there are specific words you want to avoid using, or specific words you want to insist on, say so before you begin. Similarly, ask your translator if there are words you should avoid.
- *Finally, do some caretaking of your translator*. Translating trauma stories is difficult work. Make sure translators have breaks if you're working in long stretches, that they have time to decompress at the end of the day, and that they feel comfortable telling you if they are overwhelmed, need to slow down, or take the morning off.

HOW SHOULD JOURNALISTS PRODUCE TRAUMA STORIES?

DANGER OF "STORY"

Be careful about the "story" of your story.

The best journalists know how to spin a good yarn, and often audiences appreciate stories full of details. But in trauma journalism, details can turn against the story – and the people in it.

Take this example, the first line from a story by a Zimbabwean journalist writing for an American media outlet about rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo: "Zamuda Sikujuwa shuffles to a bench in the sunshine, pushes apart her thighs with a grimace of pain and pumps her fist up and down in a lewd-looking gesture to show how the militiamen shoved an automatic rifle inside her."

By traditional journalism standards, this is a good opening: It has a character and it has action, it has colorful details and an element of surprise. But by the standards of good trauma reporting, this is terrible: We don't know why this woman is exposing herself in public, or why she is mimicking the crime committed against her. It may capture readers' attention. It may also make readers – and the woman herself, if she read or heard this sentence – feel exploited. In trauma journalism, journalists must use traditional elements of story with care. This section will help you understand what to use – and what to leave out – of your stories.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STORY?

Above, we noted the dangers of journalism slipping into voyeurism. Here, as we think about production, we must always keep a key component in mind - audience.

Knowing the audience for a story is a crucial part of the work. Without critically thinking about who will hear the program and how we will catch, and keep, their attention, our hard work might just disappear into the air.

More information on target audiences is available in the training guide: "Target Audiences for Peacebuilding Radio" at: http://www.radiopeaceafrica.org/index.cfm?lang=en&context_id=3&context=manuals

In trauma stories, considering your audience is important for another reason: listeners of peacebuilding radio often have gone through a traumatic event themselves. Just as journalists should be careful not to re-traumatize sources whom they interview, journalists should take care not to provoke trauma in their audiences.

Sometimes, shifting the angle of a story can help the audience - instead of just reporting how brutally someone was killed. For example, a journalist can focus her program on the life of the person and how much his family or neighbors appreciated him. Another example might be reporting on how one community member has come forward to help others. These techniques illustrate different ways of telling stories on sensitive subjects while allowing communities space to listen without feeling confronted over and over again by violence.

WORKING WITH QUOTES

There are two important aspects of working with quotes in trauma stories: whose voices are included and what those voices say.

WHO TO INCLUDE

A story about the difficulties ex-child soldiers face can use many different kinds of voices. The most obvious, though, can often be forgotten: a story about ex-child soldiers should include a quotation from the ex-soldiers themselves.

Journalists are surrounded by experts – government officials, United Nations sources, lawyers and advocates, to name a few. But survivors of trauma are also experts – on the trauma they experienced. For example, a story about the progress of a government plan on reintegrating youth who fought in a conflict situation may focus largely on what the government has done, or failed to do. But there should be at least one sound bite from a youth talking about how he or she feels about the government's progress.

Ordinary people are experts on ordinary life. Ultimately, a journalist's job is to give them a voice in discussions about issues that affect them. That's especially true for trauma survivors.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

Sound bites detailing violence can be alluring. They are "gripping" or "surprising." But peacebuilding journalists need to think about several different things before using them.

It is important to ask if using a sound bite will advance the story. Use difficult details for specific reasons. In some stories, it may be important for the audience to understand the details of violence. For example, a story about the unusual brutality of sexual assaults in Conakry in 2009 likely needs to mention that rape was perpetrated with objects, including guns, rather than simply saying only that "women were raped." Other times, it may be important to the survivor that some of the space he or she occupies in the story be used to voice what he or she experienced. In a story about reconciliation between a survivor and perpetrator of the Rwandan genocide, the survivor might insist on detailing the violence committed against her.

We can use difficult details by writing into and out of them well. Sometimes that can mean summarizing the story in narration on either side of the sound bite and choosing one bite very well.

Here's an example, from a series by Joseph Shapiro about how American universities often fail to pursue justice when their students are raped on campus:

NARRATION: When a woman is sexually assaulted on a college campus, her most common reaction is to keep it quiet. Laura Dunn says she stayed quiet about what happened in April of 2004, her freshman year at the University of Wisconsin.

Ms. LAURA DUNN: I always thought that rape was when, you know, someone got attacked by a stranger and you had to fight back.

SHAPIRO: That night, Dunn was drinking so many raspberry vodkas that they cut her off at the frat house party. Still, she knew and trusted the two men who took her back to a house. That's where she says they raped her as she passed in and out of consciousness.

Ms. DUNN: I guess I didn't want to believe what actually happened.

SHAPIRO: It just didn't make sense with the way she saw her life. For one thing, she had a boyfriend. They'd been dating for four years….

Other times, writing details well means explaining overtly why the journalist is including the information. Here's an example, from a report on the mass rape of women in Bukavu, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, by American journalist Jeb Sharp:

NARRATION: It doesn't feel right to interview young girls about rape. But the hospital staff wants me to understand what's been happening here. I speak with a tiny ten year old in blue jeans named Marie.

SOUND BITE [MARIE]: I've been raped by Hutu soldiers who came in my house. They first of all killed my parents and then they raped me. There were three.

NARRATION: When you listen to the stories here you get a sense of how little security people have, how suddenly and randomly an attack can rip through their lives.

We can also use details by using all of our tape – including the places we are asking questions. Letting listeners hear our interaction with our sources can make them feel more comfortable about listening to those difficult stories and help them realize we are trying to be sensitive and ethical. Here's an example,

from Ofeibea Quist-Arcton, a reporter for National Public Radio in the United States. This is a report she filed from Guinea shortly after government troops shut down a protest and raped more than 150 women in September 2009:

Unidentified Woman #1: For five days, I did not sleep. What I saw people doing to the other women don't give me chance to sleep. I'm so afraid.

QUIST-ARCTON: You're frightened. You're afraid.

Unidentified Woman #1: Mm-hmm, because I saw so many rough things. Fear things they do to the women.

QUIST-ARCTON: Fearful things were happening to women.

Unidentified Woman #1: Yes, to the women. What I saw I received in my eyes, two eyes like film.

QUIST-ARCTON: So you say you can't eat, you can't sleep. And you keep reliving...
Unidentified Woman #1: Mm-hmm.

QUIST-ARCTON: ...the ordeal.

Unidentified Woman #1: Mm-hmm, the reality. I saw women - they catch women in the field. And when they do them, they have them finished, they will have the women.

QUIST-ARCTON: You mean they raped the women.

Unidentified Woman #1: Yes. When they do that to the women, they took the gun again and fire the women inside its privates, she's privates.

QUIST-ARCTON: They shot guns into women's private parts, you're saying, Ma'am.

Unidentified Woman #1: Yes. Yes, I saw them. That is why I don't able to sleep.

SENSITIVITY VS. CENSORSHIP

Covering these topics in post-conflict environments is *very* tricky. Journalists should be sensitive – but they should not censor. Ultimately, there is no "right" answer about when to include descriptions of violence; it depends on the story, on the community for whom the story is produced, and on the survivors who lend journalists their voices.

Very rarely is the choice, "*Should* I use this detail?" Instead, the choices are about *how* to use quotes, information, data and details in the most sensitive and responsible way. There are many things to consider: the relationship with sources, the balance of the story, the expectations of the editor and the audience, and the community for whom the broadcast is made. Every journalist must make that choice individually, of course. The important thing is being clear with yourself about why you've chosen what to use, or what not to use, and capable of defending that decision to your listeners, your sources, and your boss.

BEFORE BROADCASTING

Before your final report goes on the air, *communicate with your sources*. They should know what day and time the story will appear and what information from your interviews you are including. This is a courtesy for anyone you interview, but it's essential with trauma survivors. Remember that the principle guiding our reporting is to restore power, and not to reinforce the powerlessness survivors have already experienced. This includes making sure they know what will happen with their voices.

Another good practice is to find a way to acknowledge community response to a story. Not all stations or programs have this luxury, but it can also be simple: Set up a telephone number for listeners to text their reactions to your story. If you are running a story about the life of ex-combatants and you know it will be heard in a hundred villages where the majority of youth fought in a recent conflict, it will help them to have an outlet for reaction – and it will help make your future journalism better by improving your knowledge about that community and its needs.

HOW CAN JOURNALISM HELP COMMUNITIES HEAL?

In the spring of 2011, Japan experienced one of the worst earthquakes on record. A giant wall of water, a tsunami, followed the earthquake and destroyed several Japanese towns. An estimated 25,000 people died or are still missing.

The news in Japan and around the world, was filled with stories and pictures of destruction – of men and women sitting alone, surrounded by fallen buildings, and weeping; of families clustered together crying; of children looking terrified. Television and radio broadcast stories about survivors. Journalists asked them how they felt, and what they would do next.

After a few days, one Japanese person known as "*@Kchang40"* wrote on the website Twitter:

> "I'm a quake victim from Sendai City. As electricity has begun to be restored, I've been watching interviews of quake victims by the mass media. I am only seeing stories that inflate people's sadness and pain. What are these interviews for? For who? What I want in these trying times is hope. Yet it seems that all the media is bringing us is despair."

This story has so many lessons for journalists working after tragedy. What kind of information do our listeners need to hear – and what *don't* they need to hear? How do we give information, even unpleasant, *without* creating a sense of despair among our listeners? Can we bring people truth *and* hope at the same time?

We should *not* ignore stories because they are sad. We should *not* change stories to sound more hopeful. We should *not* avoid important information because it makes the government or the local leaders who are trying to help "look bad."

But we should be careful to make sure our journalism contributes to the greater good. We can, for one thing, air programs in which survivors talk about coping and surmounting their troubles. We can air programs that focus on some sliver of good – a neighbor who helped a neighbor in the chaos that we think of as "the news." We can broadcast those text messages we receive from listeners reacting to our reporting, whether they are complimenting or criticizing our work. There are many ways to reinforce the voices of a community in our coverage of that community.

Other times, we can broadcast a hard-hitting investigation of a local leader who is abusing his authority, or stealing money from a recovery fund, or otherwise violating the trust of the people he leads. Or we can produce a program about a football match between teams of youth affected by violence.

There are many kinds of stories, with different kinds of information, that communities which have been through tragedy need; the story from Japan reminds us that very rarely is the information people really need a retelling of the sad details of the tragedy itself.

We can also use our airwaves to facilitate healing in other ways. Call-in shows can allow many people to share their perspective on a tragedy, allowing individuals to feel heard and the community to remember that the recent trauma narrative is not the only story of their home. Dialogue programs can open discussions about the long process of rebuilding and reconciliation, allowing people to imagine together the future of their communities.

Even focusing on the mundane elements of an ordinary day can illustrate that a community or a country is more than its violent past. One beloved example of this are the short programs on several radio stations in Monrovia, Liberia, about what's for lunch; listeners call in and tell the host what they're eating. It's a simple celebration of local culture and a daily privilege – eating food.

Being a journalist in a society recovering from violence is a tremendous responsibility. Communities depend on us for reliable information and stories that rebuild trust in the country – and in each other. They do not need us to be cheerleaders for a specific politician or a specific program; neither do they need us to retell, day in and day out, stories of destruction from which everyone is trying to recover.

We have a responsibility to survivors of trauma to treat them well and handle their stories ethically. And we have a responsibility to our communities to give them reliable information – and sometimes, as the Japanese earthquake survivor reminds us, to give them hope and to help restore their sense of power.

APPENDIX I

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GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does trauma change how we do our jobs?
2. What effect might trauma have on our sources? Our listeners?
3. What are the 5 Ws and an H of trauma reporting, and why are they important?
4. When considering broadcasting quotes from survivors of violent trauma, what should you keep in mind?
5. How can journalists convey the scope of a tragedy and still give hope to the audience?
6. When interviewing survivors of trauma, what are the best ways to get a story while also being sensitive and humane?

FOCUS QUESTION I

Divide the room into small groups. Each group should talk through this scenario. Give them at least 15 minutes, and encourage them to bring in relevant lessons or examples from their own work. At the end of the discussion, bring the room back together and have one person from each small group present their ideas to everyone in the room.

An editor asks you to do a story about women recovering from rape in a rural province. They speak a different language and their province was recently attacked by a militia coming from a neighboring country. How should you find sources? How do you decide what "the story" is? Write down some interview questions and discuss how you would structure the interview. What will you say when you leave?

FOCUS QUESTION 2

Follow the same procedure.

You are preparing a feature-length program about child soldiers. You interview several men who fought as children in a conflict ten years ago. You begin to wonder if one of them is telling you the truth: the details of his story don't always match from interview to interview, and he seems reluctant to discuss certain parts of his history. How can you decide if he is a reliable source?

APPENDIX II

A SHORT GUIDE TO SELF-CARE

Journalists who write a lot about people living after trauma can be affected themselves. Journalists working professionally in countries where they have also lived through a conflict can also harbor the effects of trauma. It is important to be vigilant about your own well-being.

Here are some signs that you may be experiencing symptoms of trauma, from the handbooks "Reporting War" and "Tragedies and Journalists" from the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma:

- You miss deadlines, or fail to show up for work.
- You fall sick more often than normal.
- You stay home more often, avoiding friends and family.
- You drink alcohol noticeably more than you used to.
- You find it difficult to concentrate.
- You talk constantly about the stories you have been working on.

These are only some of the signs, and not everyone experiences all of these. Some people may become quiet and withdrawn; others may talk incessantly about their work. The bottom line is, if you don't feel like yourself – you may not be.

Here are some steps to take if you notice those signs:

***Take breaks in the office*.** Sometimes, something as simple as stepping away from the studio for a few minutes can help you refocus.

***Find colleagues you can talk to*.** Journalists tend to be independent creatures, but it's important to find someone to talk to about difficulties we face. Often, that's another colleague: other journalists understand the stress of this work best, after all.

***Turn down an assignment*.** If you find yourself overwhelmed by the idea of reporting again on a sensitive subject, ask your editor to give someone else the story. Tell editors you're willing to do anything else around the office – but that you need a brief break from these kinds of stories. That may be difficult for your editor to hear – but bit by bit, when you and other colleagues make that request, the culture of your work place may change to encourage reporters' own resilience.

***Seek professional help*.** If you live in an area where you can find professional counseling that can help you overcome the difficulties your work may be imposing on you. Often though, simply finding someone who is willing to listen to you without judging you, or trying to "fix" you, can help a lot.

You can find more helpful information on self-care for journalists, and on other issues of trauma reporting, at the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma http://dartcenter.org/.

Search for Common Ground

Founded in 1982, Search for Common Ground works to transform the way the world deals with conflict - away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative problem solving. We work with local partners to find culturally appropriate means to strengthen societies' capacity to deal with conflicts constructively: to understand the differences and act on the commonalities.

Radio for Peacebuilding Africa

Search for Common Ground's Radio for Peacebuilding Africa is a rapidly growing project working in 20 African countries to increase the knowledge and skills of radio broadcasters, particularly youth radio broadcasters, in fair and balanced reporting. The project aims to improve the communication flow between government officials, policy makers, the press and civil society. For more information, visit our website at: http://www.radiopeaceafrica.org.

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