



**JOURNALISTS
AND VICTIMS OF CRIMES**

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and unnamed victims of crimes

“To film crime, death, car crashes, arrests and similar stories... I don't have any trouble with it. One becomes detached after some time. I do not think about the relatives of victims who will watch it in the evening.”

A Czech crime reporter, TV morning broadcasting on 16th March 2007

“I had a clip which I wanted to show in the programme but I met the father of the deceased and I knew he would watch it. I really thought about what to do. Eventually, we blurred the picture and the clip took less than a second. Just a vague notion, perhaps a shadow.”

TV publicists and editor

Štěpán Vymětal, Petra Vitoušová at al.
Journalists and Victims of Crimes

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Dedicated to victims of crimes

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Preface

Dear readers,

You have just received the booklet “Journalists and Victims of Crimes” which is intended to serve journalists as a guidebook for their work with people affected by crime. Its contents are also aimed at other people working in the mass media, students, spokespersons, and all those who come across this issue in their work.

The aim of this booklet is to shed light on the basic needs and feelings of people who have been affected by criminal acts, to point out main principles and recommendations concerning what approach towards victims should be taken, to touch upon ethical aspects of the matter, and also to note risks which media staff may be exposed to within their work. This guidebook also acts as a source of contacts through which further related information can be obtained.

This booklet was written in cooperation with persons of varied professions who deal in their work with people who have been affected by crime – journalists, psychologists, crime investigators, persons working for Bílý kruh bezpečí, and others. Also victims of crime who were willing to talk about their experiences considerably contributed to the making of this booklet.

“Journalists and Victims of Crimes” is the second document drawn up by the Psychological Unit of the Ministry of the Interior as an outcome of a project based on cooperation with mass media.

At the end of 2006 the handbook “Journalists and Tragedies”, dealing with the coverage of disasters and mass accidents in the Czech Republic and abroad, was published. Both booklets are available on www.mvcr.cz.

Štěpán Vymětal

Head of the Psychological Unit of the Ministry of the Interior

Introduction

The media and journalists play an important role in providing the general public with information on levels of crime, trends in violence, risks of secondary harm to victims, and also on ways to prevent crime, the execution of justice, and legislative measures.

Providing sensitive and well-balanced information on particular cases is a very useful function of the media. On the other hand, untactful or insensitive approaches and invasion of privacy has an adverse impact on a range of individuals including victims of crime. Reporting about crime is always contradictory as it is a struggle between the right of the general public to receive information and the right of the victim and the victim's family to privacy. Principles regarding reporting on crime and secondary harm to victims are in some countries regulated by law and in others by codes of conduct or by promoting the continuing education of journalists.

The UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice recognised that the mass media are in a difficult situation when they need to make a decision, within a short time limit, as to whether specific information should be disclosed. To help with such decision making the Commission approved in 1997 at its 6th Session a particular recommendation and principles the full texts of which are published in the Annexes to this booklet.

Crime is a fascinating topic as it attracts the attention of readers or viewers and it rouses people's emotions. Crime can increase sales and ratings. The introductory part of some media news in a crime story is changed unobtrusively. How much do we know about the reactions of people caused by this specific kind of information? How much do we know about the damage inflicted on victims of crime as a result of media's insensitive approach towards them?

Petra Vitoušová
President of Bílý kruh bezpečí



1 | Main principles: facts, balance, dignity, and respect towards a victim

It is always important to take into account that for every crime there is not only an offender but also a victim. News reporting on crime should respect the facts and strive to be as balanced as possible. Information published after an offence has been committed is perceived sensitively by victims as well as their family and the people close to the victim.

During your work you are necessarily interfering in the lives of other people. Bear this in mind when providing information on a specific case. Do not devote your attention merely to the offence itself or its offender but remember also the persons harmed by the offence.

→1 **Respect the privacy of the victim.**

Do not disclose information leading to the identification of the victim – with the exception being the wish or consent of the victim (including their survivors) to have their identity be published.

- *Provided that the principle of presumption of innocence of the accused is acknowledged then there should be a symmetrical right of the victim to protection of their privacy.*

Martin Kloubek, a crime investigator

→2 **Do not force the victim to provide you with information.**

The victim's experience of a crime is a painful and predominantly private matter and the victim will usually not wish to have this published.

→3 **Through words or images one can cause the secondary trauma of the victim.**

So little is needed not to do that – to think in a human way, not to cast aspersions on the victim, not to deflate their human dignity, to listen with empathy, and to carefully select words and images. For example by disclosing details on the victim's health condition, surgery and related consequences without the consent of the victim you invade their privacy and you may bring about feelings of shame, dishonour, and disgrace. Speculations about motives can cause the victim to feel guilty.

Do as you would be done by!

- *All journalists should always bear this motto in mind before they publish their contribution to a 'crime story'. A reporter for a republic-wide Czech daily newspaper who was a convinced advocate of the principle that the general public has the right to all information changed his view after he himself became the victim of a 'decoy-duck'. He was attacked and robbed in a park. In his particular case he explicitly requested that an article about the crime did not include what had happened to him, an XY reporter of a generally known newspapers.*

Martin Kloubek, a crime investigator



2 | A criminal offence

Hunting for journalistic sensation is not appropriate at a crime scene.

If you happen at a crime scene as the first to arrive, before other professionals (rescuers, police, fire-fighters), you are obliged to provide first aid and to call professionals.

If you learn, in the context of your work, that a crime is being prepared or has been committed, think primarily of safety of people at risk.

Be aware of the duty to prevent a crime being prepared or committed and the duty to report any offences committed. Such obligations cover, for example, fraud, embezzlement, murders, abuse of a person in wardship, and sexual abuse (see the Criminal Code, Sections 167 and 168).

→1 **Behave as a polite guest at a crime scene.**

If you want professionals (rescuers, fire-fighters, police officers and others) working at a scene of crime to respect journalists you must then respect their work.

- *Cooperation with journalists who at a crime scene respect the instructions of professionals is better. In terms of professional, polite conduct of journalists there should be no difference between their being at a crime scene or a reception for 'celebrities', between talking to a publicly known person, a police officer or only a passer by.*

Martin Kloubek, a crime investigator

→2 Do not support general fascination with violence.

Depiction of the horrors of a crime or an accident which a victim has suffered by means of horrifying details leads to the further trauma of the victim or survivors. Any 'embellishment' of a story is not fair and can only hurt the victim.

- *Tabloid press published photographs of three people burnt in a car. The surviving family members of one of the victims contacted the Commission for Ethics complaining that journalists had breached ethical standards both specifically, by being insensitive to family members of the dead, and generally, since publishing such pictures is „inconsistent with upholding the dignity of the dead...”*

Syndicate of Journalists, Commission for Ethics, March 2006

→3 When meeting a victim for the first time (as well as later) behave correctly.

It is important to introduce ourselves, to use plain language, and to talk slowly in order to verify whether our counterpart understands. Do not pressure the victim, and give them space to decide whether they want to cooperate with the media.

When talking to a victim proceed sensitively and do not forget to emphasise that they do not have to answer if they do not wish to. Refrain from painful questions and do not cast doubts on what the victim is saying. Do not promise anything you cannot fulfil. Bear in mind that an individual may, under the influence of strong emotions or sedatives, understand or make decisions only slowly and may behave illogically.

People who are under extreme stress or who have suffered a traumatic experience

concentrate poorly, understand slowly, formulate their ideas improperly and are increasingly sensitive and vulnerable regarding the statements and attitudes of other people.

- *Journalists sometimes tend to use certain phrases in the hope that they are making it easier for the interviewed. A woman who lost a child answered a remark: "I understand how you feel" with the question: "Was your son also murdered?" Unhappiness is experienced individually and one never can fully penetrate the pain of others. People who have experienced wretchedness often say that they were hurt by sentences such as: "The passing of time will heal all wounds" "The Mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small", "You're lucky you have survived!", "You're alive and that's important". Giving false hope to a victim also further hurts. Therefore it is often better to be quiet when you do not know what to say, to listen to our counterpart, and to show sympathy and respect. The only sentence suitable in some situations is to say: "I'm really sorry".*

Štěpán Vymětal, a psychologist

- *A young man who was in hospital with burns on his face and arms, was, under the influence of medication, in an euphoric mood and agreed to an interview with a journalist. When his photographs were published in newspapers he felt helpless and was scared that somebody could show the newspapers to his little daughter who had not yet seen him so swollen and wounded.*

Štěpán Vymětal, a psychologist

- *“A lot of journalists think that the same communication rules apply whether they talk to a politician, a shop-assistant in a supermarket, or a crime victim. However, it is necessary to approach different people differently and to approach crime victims particularly sensitively.”*

Jiří Závozda, TV editor

→4 **Talk about victims in a way that respects their human dignity.**

Journalists as well as the general public should respect victims of crimes. The crime they were victims to has not changed their status. Always use Mr., Mrs, Miss, young man, student, employee, spouse and so forth. It is not possible to talk about a victim in an overly familiar manner.

- *“This is the place where Misha stood for the last time” is how the story about the murder of a 33 year-old woman told by a TV reporter began. Unjustifiable over familiarity is probably to support the credibility of the reporter’s words. Who permitted the reporter to talk about the young women, Miss Michaela Vavrova, in this manner? A violent, brutal act did not change in any way her human dignity.*

Petra Vitoušová, Bílý kruh bezpečí

The rule of respecting the human dignity of a victim, sensitivity and correctness applies to the work at a scene of crime, to contacts with the victim, as well as to publishing images from a crime scene and information about the victim.

- *Our granny and daughter were murdered in the flat. I was the one who found them. There were only police officers in the flat. I really begged them not to disclose anything they saw there. It was horrible. They promised that as a matter of course. The next day the main TV news opened with photographs from the crime scene. We broke down again. Moreover, this instigated inhuman reactions of people in our neighbourhood in the worst sense of the word. I wrote to all police officers who had taken the images, to the management of the TV station, and to the Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting. I asked why they had done it and how it was in fact possible. The only one who answered and apologised was a police chief.*

A man, 55 years old, father of the murdered



3 | Investigation

During investigations of a criminal offence it is not often possible, for tactical reasons, to disclose all information concerning the case, therefore only the supervising public prosecutor, a police officer authorised to investigate the case or a press spokesman of the Police of the Czech Republic are entitled to provide information concerning investigation of any case. Uncontrolled publication of information could threaten the course of investigations.

→1 **Do not disturb a criminal investigation through dangerous investigative actions.**

You must be aware of the fact that by doing this you can put yourselves or witnesses at risk. If it is possible you should try to cooperate with the police and work in all fairness and in accordance with our conscience (see Chapter 9).

→2 **A speculative, wrong and misleading version concerning an actual case may stigmatise and hurt the victim as well as the persons close to the victim.**

People tend to believe information provided by the media. Thus the victim does not have any chance to disprove such speculations. If the circumstance of a case raises questions then it is appropriate to express in the form of question without formulating any own speculative reflections.

→3 Avoid chasing a victim, and respect their feelings and needs.

The time during which a case is being investigated is for the victim as well as their close relatives very demanding. Victims try to absorb what has happened to them and to heal both emotional and physical wounds. To intrude on their privacy is cruel.

- *During a terrorist attack in Egypt in 2005 a Czech citizen was killed. As he was the first Czech victim of terrorism the media tried to get in before others to obtain information. Journalists of a renowned daily paper were literally hunting the survivors (the family of the victim), waiting for them at their place of residence as well as at their workplace, and published intimate details from their lives although these did not relate to the tragic death of their family member. Eventually, the family had to hide from the journalists and stay away from their home. Uninvited interest and the high pressure of media ranked among the heaviest burden these people experienced after the tragedy.*

Štěpán Vymětal, a psychologist

Beware of fabrications and half-truths: if these are published by the media they have the 'trademark of truth' for the general public.

- *Two days after the murder when the perpetrator had not yet been caught, a local daily paper published on the front page an article about the victim. The article said that the murdered was an entrepreneur who had changed his name for an unknown reason. The article cast among people a shadow of doubt about that person's motive and about the possible share of the victim in the crime. Such information was not true. The murdered man accepted twenty years ago at his wedding the surname of his wife and the only thing he had done to start up his business was to get a trade licence. However, he worked as an ordinary employee. His surviving family members did not have the opportunity to explain to people in the near and farther neighbourhood what was or was not true. The published article hurt and traumatised them.*

Petra Vitoušová, Bílý kruh bezpečí



4 | Trial

News from a trial after a certain lapse of time repeatedly draws attention to a cruel and painful event. The general public are not aware of procedural law and do not know that a defendant may remain silent or not tell the truth. Therefore such news which refers only to the testimony of one party is considered to be very imbalanced. Journalists can easily be unbalanced in their reporting if they stay in the courtroom only at the beginning of a trial lasting for several days.

→1 **Care about reporting balanced information from the courtroom. Do not devote attention only to what the defendant and his/her defending counsel say.**

Defendants strive to mitigate their guilt and often “plot” against the victim. It is part of their strategy to exonerate. Consider very carefully which of their statements can be published. You can easily secondarily traumatise the victim. Balanced news also gives room to the public prosecutor, experts and witnesses of the plaintiff or victim, including the injured or survivors.

→2 **To give testimony during a trial is for a victim or survivors a very demanding procedure.**

Such persons are again traumatised by reviving their memories of the criminal offence, distressed by the formal environment and procedures which they do not always understand, and unsettled by the fact that the defendant does not tell truth. They must cope with meeting the individual who hurt them and who turned their lives upside down. As a consequence, they may show strong emotions or, to the contrary, resignation and apathy. In such a frame of mind the victim or survivors are not strong enough to comment on their feelings immediately after the trial. Respect this!

- *During the trial I saw for the first time the man who had caused an accident, who had destroyed my health, and who had hurt my family. He talked about himself as an alleged guilty party to the accident – which he did not by all means feel to be. He said that because of all that injustice, stress and misunderstanding he had begun smoking! His defence counsel offended us and sought to give cause for our feeling of being guilty. There were questions which pierced our hearts. Fury, injustice, desperation, tears... And questions again... Why?*

Ivana Svitáková, victim of a car accident caused by a drunken driver

→3 **Focus more on the course of the trial and deliberations of the court than on analysis of the case prior to the judgment being taken.**

- *Ethics of ‘experienced court-room reporters’ required to strictly distinguish between the style of ‘reportage about the course of a trial (who said what, how people behaved) and their own analysis of a case which should be always left until after the judgment has been read’. After all journalists, being representatives of the lay public, are entitled to express an opinion on the deliberations of judges (the course of evidence, the length of sentence, justification of the judgement, and so forth) where there is no possibility that such opinion can be considered as perverting the course of justice.*

Martin Kloubek, a crime investigator

→4 **Positive, objective and balanced information in the media about fair trials can increase the willingness of injured persons to report criminal offences and the willingness of citizens to give testimony.**

Explicit emphasis on the negative sides of a trial (for example the commentaries of unsatisfied parties, detailed shots of justice guards, the hands of the defendant locked in handcuffs, or tears in the eyes of the victim) provide the general public with repeat information: “Try to do your best to avoid this environment!”.

- *The Commission solved a complaint regarding the publication of large photos of murderers (the Stodolas and Zelenka), who in the photos looked like non-problematic, cheerful persons, and adopted the following opinions:*
 1. *By publishing such photos, family members experience distress and all publishing offices should in similar cases work prudently and with the utmost sensitivity, and think over what is important for news and what is not.*
 2. *On the other hand the presumption of innocence cannot be omitted and thus it is impossible to call somebody a murderer if he/she has yet not been sentenced by a final and conclusive judgement – which again leads to prudence when publishing photos.*


Syndicate of Journalist, Commission for Ethics, January 2007

They are namely journalists who, as representatives of the lay public, have the right and an opportunity to ask questions to public prosecutors and judges, to seek balanced news and request answers.

- *I was not in a court-room when the defendant was questioned. As a witness, although at the same time an injured party, I did not have the right to be there – so that I was not influenced by the questioning of the defendant. The next day everyone could read in newspapers what the defendant said about me. A reporter quoted the man who had raped me: “She came out with me and she must have been aware what was going on ...she did not defend herself..” as the defendant stated in the court-room. My testimony and the testimony of judicial experts were not quoted at all. There was not a bit of truth in it but I will not be able to explain that to people and I will probably have to move. I regret the reporting of this criminal act although the whole investigation was fair, but that journalist hurt me most at the very end...*

Woman, 28 years old, victim of rape, and mother of a two-year old child





5 | Experiences of crime victims

It is important to bear in mind that a person who has never become a victim of a serious crime, in particular of a violent crime or a vice crime, cannot fully understand internal feelings of a victim. Victims of serious criminal offences are mostly affected by the feeling that they have lost optimism for life. A person who has never become a victim of a serious crime subconsciously assumes that “This can never happen to me”. The victim of a serious crime usually does not expect formal social sympathy but they are grateful for practical advice and specific help.

During certain events our mental health and body can react instinctively – by becoming stiff, by running or by attacking. Denial can be typical since our brain does not want to admit the existing situation (“it must be only a dream”), furthermore people can react by stiffening or freezing (our thinking, emotions, our motions), by changing our perception of time and space, and through various bodily changes.

We can differ between immediate reactions to extreme stress and later reactions to a traumatic experience. The following belongs among human reactions:

- **feelings of being guilty, self-accusation;**
- **feelings of shame;**
- **feelings of helplessness;**
- **pain (mental, physical);**
- **anxiety, fear, sadness;**
- **evasive behaviour;**
- **problems with sleep and eating;**
- **loss of feeling of being safe, of physical integrity, and of invulnerability;**
- **loss of faith in justice in the world, and in other people;**

- intrusive memories and thoughts about what happened;
- feelings of being lonely

→1 The majority of people are resistant towards trauma and are able to cope with trauma over the course of time themselves, however roughly one third of people can suffer from difficulties for a longer period of time.

It is important to know that such reactions are normal and that they dissipate or disappear over time! It is not appropriate to foist psychological reactions to traumas to victims but, in contrast, to support hope, solidarity and mutual assistance.

- *After that crime I was afraid to go on the street for a long time, I was sitting long hours at the window with a bandaged head and my arm in a splint. I was watching the parking place where I had been mugged and beaten. I had tears in my eyes and in vain I was searching for an answer to the question: "Why just me? I have never hurt anybody..." I did not want any publicity. I was ashamed of what they had done to me. After a lapse of years I understood that it was necessary to talk about it. Of course, in a different way than I read everyday in press and see on television. In the media victims and the impact of criminal offences on their lives is almost missing. Perhaps some other victims or other journalists may find the courage to correct that.*

Man, 72 years, victim of robbery

- *After the crash everything became silent for a few seconds. As if the electricity was shut down and you do not know how the film will end. Metal plates constrict my injured body, sticky blood is everywhere and the sound of breaking bones is dying away in my head... Pain, a cry, helplessness, begging for a chance to live... And plenty of questions. Why? The sound of sirens. Blue lights. Rescue. Hope. Somebody is touching me and tries to communicate with me .I cannot move. I can't understand what has happened. I want to wake up from a horrible dream. But it is not a dream. The pain is real. I hear the groan of others in the car. So it is true. This crash has stopped our lives. Somebody's hand is*

lifting my hanging head and I can hear from a far distance a voice saying: "We won't manage to transport her... We can't pull her out...". No! I do not want to die! Please, not yet!

Ivana Svitáková, victim of a car accident caused by a drunken driver

- When I heard his steps, how he was coming upstairs to my room, I stopped feeling my body. During all that time I was counting pictures on the wallpaper not to hear his snorting. I will never forget it.

A girl, 15 years, victim of sexual abuse

- In that moment I thought, why me. I have been working here only for a week, I'm new here. I was terribly scared. I wanted to faint but I couldn't. For about a week I saw the offender everywhere. I couldn't fall asleep and when I finally fell asleep I had horrifying dreams. Eventually, I left. I do not want to experience it again.

A woman, 45 year, victim of a bank robbery

- I was travelling by night train. I was sitting alone in a compartment when suddenly the door opened. There was a young guy who said something awfully vulgar. I was scared and paralyzed, I even couldn't shout how scared I was. Then it changed somehow. It flashed across my mind that I had not attended a course of self-defence without reason. I never want to experience what I experienced once, this I knew absolutely precisely. I looked again at that young guy. I think we looked at each other reproachfully up and down. My body was tense. I don't know how long it lasted but that man suddenly turned and disappeared. My legs were aching for a long time after that night's experience. Actually, I don't know why.

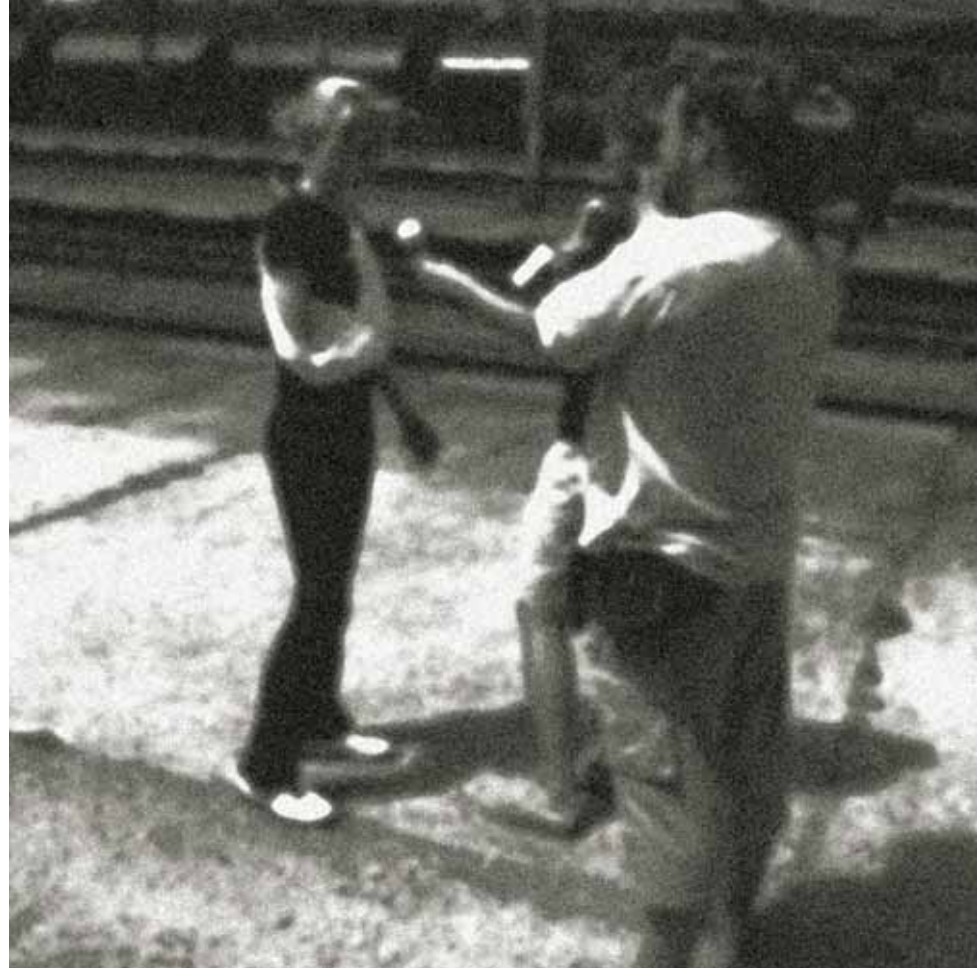
A woman, 35 years, a victim of a rape attempt

- I was lying in a hospital bed with bandages, plaster, and scars on my face. My two little sons were coming to visit me for the first time. I was afraid of their reactions. They came to my bed. They both were hiding behind my husband. Their eyes wandered everywhere but avoided looking at me. I wonder if the one who caused all this knows how it hurts. Are boozers behind wheels aware of what their recklessness can destroy?

Ivana Svitáková, victim of a car accident caused by a drunken driver

- *When we were coming to the court to give our testimony journalists were waiting for us. I had not been sleeping the whole night before as I had tried to memorise everything that had happened half a year ago. I was afraid of meeting the perpetrators who had hurt me so much. I was afraid of the formal environment of the court. I was afraid of my emotions. Everything that I had had to experience during recent months was demanding: questioning, medical tests and examinations, recognition, experts' opinions, therapy and fear that I might be pregnant or have contracted a venereal disease. However, nobody cared about my feelings, my losses and my traumas and nobody took them into account. Everything was going round and round – the crime, the offenders, their guilt, and possible punishment. I refused to answer the questions of a reporter. After the trial was over I took a breath for the first time, literally and figuratively. I do not know how, I'm not able to give advice, but I'm aware of one thing: it is important to talk about those who were raped, it is necessary to relieve a person of persisting social stigmatisation. "She is the one who was raped": such a label may forever be stuck on a woman living in a village or small town. I'm not surprised that only three out of every hundred victims of rape report such a criminal offence.*

Woman, 28 years, victim of rape





6 | Specially vulnerable victims

There is a category, among victims of crimes, of those who enjoy better protection and who require an especially considerate approach from the side of law enforcement authorities. In some countries their questioning and other necessary procedures are carried out within a different regime. Their vulnerability stems from their age or the kind of a criminal offence.

Among those people who are seriously traumatised are:

- **survivors of victims;**
- **victims of rape;**
- **victims of sexual abuse;**
- **victims of domestic violence;**
- **repeatedly victimised victims of violent crimes**

The following are also among especially vulnerable victims:

- **children;**
- **seniors;**
- **injured and ill people;**
- **people who are mentally or physically disabled**

- *It seems to me that frequent glorification of sentenced criminals is very disrespectful to victims and survivors?*

Jiří Závozda, TV chief editor

- A singular example of unsuitable media coverage of abused children is the case of Ondrej from the Brno District (Spring 2007) where TV reportages repeatedly presented shots of a naked boy closed in a little junk room without any windows. This scene was again and again included in following reportages as a main source of attracting attention no matter what the reportage talked about.

Ludmila Čírtková, a psychologist

- At hospital I stayed together with a driver who, having been drunk, had caused an accident. The staff wrongly thought that I had been his co-driver. This mistake proved to be very painful. My wounds did not allow me to take care of myself, I couldn't eat, wash or use the toilet without another person's help. The staff put me off with saying that if I travelled with a boozer what did I want? As a matter of fact, it was my fault! My roommates fed me, my bedpan was cleaned only once a day by nurses, I was able to wash myself for the first time when I was assisted by my family who delivered me a wash-bowl and all other necessary things. My presence disturbed the staff. I became a subject for contempt because of my alleged irresponsibility.

Ivana Svitáková, victim of a car accident caused by a drunken driver

- Sensitive shots acquired or filmed during police documentation of the case should absolutely not be part of TV broadcasting, with the exception being the situation where the police release such shots so that their publication can help with investigations.

Ludmila Čírtková, a psychologist

→1 Deal with victims fairly, with honour and respect.

Especially vulnerable victims show worse orientation as to what's happening around them. Do not abuse their helplessness, indecisiveness, trust, or increased level of suggestibility.

→2 Be particularly sensitive and attentive when meeting the victims and report about them.

Do not disclose the identity of especially vulnerable victims if they do not wish it. Do not disclose details about their health condition or the consequences of the criminal offence without their consent.

Do not publish data from an autopsy report or interrogation of a victim by the police although this has already been obtained. It's better to seek and publish related information – this can prevent offences from causing more hurt.

- *Authors of a TV reportage about the ‘Spartakiade’ murderer affirmed that this reportage had a therapeutic impact on the son of one of the murdered women and that a general discussion on releasing murderers is in the public interest. However, the problem was that they had published the names of other victims of the murderer and the details of how these women had been murdered. Their survivors got into troubles and personal straits... This problem is wider and it regularly appears in the Czech media when providing information both on criminal cases and on car or other accidents...*

Syndicate of Journalists, Commission for Ethics, January 2006

- *The Commission received many complaints on media processing of the death of music composer, Karel Svoboda. The Commission states that the majority of the media, when reporting about this event, failed and even breached the Code of Ethics for example by not respecting the privacy of persons and identifying relatives without their explicit consent. The media demonstrated the most serious professional mistakes – such as gossips, unproved accusations, distortion of documents and/or facts, and lies. Moreover, the persons concerned got to troubles and personal straits.*

Syndicate of Journalists, Commission for Ethics, May 2007

→3 **Never divulge the identity of child victims.**

The only exception can be reportage focusing on well-managed situations concerning child victims pointing out heroic sides of the case, or reportage which is expressly positive and shows good examples. Of course, this is provided that the journalist has received the consent of both the child and his/her parents. If you are not sure you can consult with experts on the matter (for example help lines for children or educational and psychological advisory centres).

- *There have been recently more cases where the media has provided information on offences or court disputes between adults and at the same time the media has published information on children or juveniles, including their photographs. They thus put victims under psychological pressure. An excuse cannot be that one of the parents has agreed to the taking of photographs or filming of the child. In terms of ethics of journalistic work, the rights of children are primary. Publishing the full name of a person who is a suspect can also be considered as breaching the right to privacy and the presumption of innocence...*

Syndicate of Journalists, Commission for Ethics, February 2006

- *The effort of journalists to inform the general public about the abuse of an eight-year-old boy in order to affect the apathy of citizens in similar cases does not mean that a journalist should gather and publish information contradicting the Code of Ethics which, inter alia, imposes a duty to respect the privacy of persons, in particular of victims*

of crimes, children and persons who are not able to understand the consequences of their testimonies; to strictly adhere to the principle of the presumption of innocence and not to identify family members of victims or offenders of crimes without their explicit consent. Publishing the testimony of children, their photos as well as publishing details and speculations about the course of the case is not in compliance with the public interest.

Syndicate of Journalists, Commission for Ethics, May 2007

→4 **Concentrate on the life of the victim. Avoid morbid details or sentences such as “He will rest in peace” or “A shocked society was mourning his death”.**


- A reporter presented the case of a step-father who fatally assaulted a four-year-old girl and his sentence was, in reporter’s opinion, low. The reportage three times in sequence showed the blooded body of the named girl.

Evening TV broadcasting, 10 September 2007.

Respect, honour and safety will help victims to return to life.

- This tragedy happened abroad when my daughter was assaulted and she survived a brutal attempt to rape her only by a miracle. They called us and immediately organised my flight to the country where it happened so that I could be close to her in the hospital. Nothing about her was permitted to be published in media, neither her name nor initials were allowed to be disclosed. Nothing that could lead to revealing her identity. All of this is strictly prohibited in that country, and not only in the case of rape. At Ruzyne airport Czech journalists waited for me. As I had learned a lesson abroad and I was strengthened by foreign police and their law on protection of victims I refused to say a single word to them. To my surprise they respected it. After some time my daughter returned, peacefully, without being disturbed by journalists. We can continue our lives and we are trying to forget.

A women, 42 years, mother of a victim of brutal rape



7 | Responsibility of a chief-editor, ethical aspects

- *A fundamental and vital principle of each serious journalist is to write the truth and to search for this truth by a fair means under all circumstances. Nevertheless, in the case of an abused boy from Kurim (May 2007) the editor of a republic-wide daily paper used a demonstrable lie to obtain a photo and information. To get to the brother of the abused boy she wilfully lied to the staff of Brno KlokaneK. She pretended to be a person with a different name and thanks to this lie she got to the child. To get information, although true information, through to deception and lies is unacceptable. It is true that in serious media a journalist can pretend to be somebody else only and exclusively in cases which are in the general interest; this means that thanks to a false identity a journalist can reveal corruption in public administration or prove a politician to be a thief. Nobody else, including journalists from the tabloid press has used such trick... A republic-wide daily paper, however, has damaged the reputation of journalism. And what is shocking about the approach of journalists from the newspaper concerned is the fact that they do not realise gravity of their acts and call such artifice 'a little trick'. It is not just a little trick but it is a painfully conspicuous lie. And this is absolutely unacceptable within a profession whose fundamental aim is to find the truth... To obtain true information with the help of tricks and lies is also irregular. It can be a dangerous precedent when journalists use a lie only because they wish to get, in the context of a horrible case, totally unimportant information. As a consequence, public authorities,*

the police or organisations helping victims may be unwilling to provide any further information. And finally there are readers who will be deprived of information (an extract from the article "A Journalist Lies for Truth", Rovnost, 17th May 2007).

Pavel Macků, chief-editor of Rovnost, a daily paper

- An editor or a journalist is not the one that matters at a crime scene. They are under the pressure of their superiors who tell them that it is necessary to obtain information and quotations from all parties involved. They usually do not care how that is done. I, myself, do not like to remember the case of the suicide of a twelve-year-old boy in the Blansko District. The chief-editor of the Brno editorial office of a republic-wide daily paper at that time forced me to go to the boy's family. The door was opened by the weeping granny, she told me something but I was aware of the fact that I was behaving terribly. However, it is very difficult to oppose your boss if one is in the position of an editor.

Iva Šebková, a chief-editor of a regional daily paper

There are three rules for ethical media presentation of victims of crime:

- a rule respecting the privacy of victims and their close family members;
- a rule protecting the reputation of victims of crime;
- a rule respecting the further needs and interests of victims of crime

→1 Selection of an appropriate journalist.

It is appropriate to select mature, emotionally stable and empathetic journalists for work with people affected by an accident or crime – journalists who are able to work with such people sensitively.

- It is true that some journalists are able to do anything in order for readers to become aware of them. Unfortunately, competition is so large that some journalists overstep all ethical boundaries or are insufficiently sensitive to the gravity of the case.

Iva Šebková, chief-editor of a regional daily paper

→2 Victims are not celebrities.

Bear in mind that to take and use photographs or shots of victims or their close family members is disrespectful and unethical.

→3 Do not explain a crime as a mistake made by a victim.

Every victim of crime has, as any other human being, his/her positive and negative features. In their past you can find success as well as failures. Do not search only for negatives. Even a prostitute can be raped.

→4 Try to help victims actively by:

- publishing strengthening information;
- publishing preventive information;
- expressing solidarity and human sympathy;

- publicising the impact of the crime concerned on the future life of a victim and his/her close relatives;
 - providing information on the usual reactions of victims to a criminal offence;
 - publishing examples of good practice, who has helped a victim most and how he/she did it;
 - **as regards especially serious crimes, by publishing expert opinions, proposing systematic changes in the area of prevention.**
- *Not only once I have encountered a case where victims wanted to publish their stories. It can happen especially in relation to crime against property, when victims themselves visit editorial offices and want to warn others through their stories or they want to meet people who have suffered the same damage either to aggravate the offender's situation since the damage will be higher, or they just have the feeling that they were not the only ones who suffered.*

Iva Šebková, chief-editor of a regional daily paper

Journalists and the media can help a lot!

An example can be the publication of a call by means of which close family members of a victim ask the general public for help in investigations, when they are searching for a witness or searching for an unknown kidnapper.

- *The whole thing was terrible. My wife was dying in hospital with perforation of her head due to a gunshot. After a lapse of time I must acknowledge how perfect at their work were the police officers and the chief-editor of our regional newspapers. Until they apprehended the offender the newspapers every day addressed the general public and asked for help. And at the same time information was written in such a manner that it was not painful for us, the closest family members.*

Man, 57 years, survivor of a victim of assault and robbery



8 | So, how to do that?

The following is important when dealing with a victim:

- Be receptive, ask questions sensitively; respect the victim's emotions.
- Inform truthfully a victim how her/his information will be processed and respect this.
- Provide a victim with a contact that he/she can later meet a journalist in the case that he/she makes a decision.
- When obtaining information from a victim of a crime do not use tricks or deception, in particular by providing false information.
- Do not promise a victim anything that you cannot fulfil.
- Talk slowly and calmly so that the victim can understand.
- Do not be hasty and do not be pushy.
- Be tactful and empathetic.
- Refrain from manifesting your own negative emotions. (For example, do not say that something is terrible. Such statements hurt the victim even more.)
- Learn how to listen patiently.

Perceive a victim as a human being who has survived a traumatising, extreme and dangerous situation. This internal attitude will help to find an appropriate tone of communication.

→1 **Do not support the self-accusations of a victim.**

Some persons tend strongly to blame themselves. They say: „It was my fault, I should not have...” This is a normal response. People after traumatic events often blame themselves. You need to realise that the victim did not commit any crime.

→2 **Ask directly about the needs of the victim and problems they must cope with.**

(For example, accommodation, safety, trust, peace, consideration...) By publishing such information you can contribute to improvement of the status of victims of crimes in the Czech Republic.

→3 **Do not support fascination with violence.**

Do not publish extreme images where a victim is abused or deprived of human dignity. Hunting for sensation harms victims and their close family members. They are stigmatised a long time after the crime. Carefully assess what information about a victim you will publish. Bear in mind that the tone in which you provide information on the event can influence how society will react to the tragedy. Do not contribute to spreading fear, panic and catastrophic prognosis.

- *Publication of some tragic events can also bring a wave of help for a victim. I have experienced this recently in our editing offices when we published the story of a boy who was hit by a car and the driver threw him in the forest. People continuously telephoned us and wanted contacts for the family because they wanted to help. Football players, for example, came up with an idea to bring the boy, who used to play football, a football kit to the hospital. They got to know that he played football thanks to our articles about the boy's interests.*

Iva Šebková, chief-editor of a regional daily paper

→4 **Rely only on verified information.**

Use information from private lives (property or family relations) only with the consent of the victim or his/her close family members.

→5 **Select headlines sensitively.**

A dramatic headline (such as “She Was Raped” or “The Coffin was Made of the Wire on the Bottom of the Dam”) on the one hand attracts the general public but, on the other hand, hurts and humiliates the victim and/or survivors.

→6 **Be careful when working with a victim from a small town.**

A victim from a small town can be identified by certain otherwise harmless details (a ring, clothes, pronunciation, age, residence, and so forth).

→7 **Report facts which may help victims to return to normal life and resume life in their community.**

Give room to encouraging people’s reactions and opinions. Present ways in which people can help, and how they can help the victim.

→8 **Publish examples of good practice.**

It is quite frequent that even the closest relatives do not know how to behave correctly towards the victim. For example, a father slapped his daughter in the face when she told him in tears that she had been raped. Use current cases for general elucidation and give the general public good themes and inspiration.

Be aware of the fact that as journalists you can either wear down a victim or, contrast to this, you can contribute to renewing his/her feelings of safety, self-confidence and trust in other people!

“Editors know her name and the name of her son. Due to the sensitivity of this case we, however, will not publish such details...”

An extract from an article reporting on the trial of a paedophile who sexually abused children, Český deník, 24th September 2007

“The board of editors will return to the circumstances of the case after the court’s judgement...”

“Although more detailed information about the circumstances of the case is available to editors it will not be published due to the wish of the survivors...”

Examples from press in 2007



9 | Take care of yourselves

→1 Follow principles of safe behaviour.

Sometimes people, when in full swing, do not realise the danger they are exposed to. This relates mainly to investigative actions.

→2 How can be you safety increased?

- Avoid meetings when you can assume that an offender is armed.
- Before leaving for a dangerous action inform colleagues about the place you will be going to, and actions and possible signals according to which they should call for help.
- Watch for signals of aggression. It holds true that aggression is first verbal, which is followed by damaging objects, and after that this can climax in an attack against health and life.
- Maintain a safe physical distance from a person whose conduct is assumed to be aggressive (keep a distance longer than the aggressor's fist or kick can reach).
- Maintain a "run-away" escape plan. Run away in time.
- Do not threaten an aggressor.
- Be aware of first aid rules.
- In the case of the danger, contact the police.

In case you are assaulted, threatened, or if there are signals that you're spied contact emergency POLICE line 158.

→3 Be prepared in advance, predict from where there is a danger, inform people around you.

- *Without information from the other party I do not want to do anything as it will always be only one-sided view and I wouldn't get down to it. A balanced view with a spell of danger is the equivalent of investigative journalism which is my cup of tea although I know that a lot of colleagues do not care for balance too much. However, now I'm talking about the scandal-oriented journalism... In 2002 I began to film a documentary cycle concerning the murders of entrepreneurs whose corpses were found in metal barrels on the bottom of the Orlik dam (generally called the Orlik murders) and the escape of Jiri Kajinek from prison. I reached such thin ice of the criminal underworld and interviewed those from the world unfamiliar to me. Meetings were held many times without any TV crew, in out-of-the-way corners of cafes and in the worst cases somewhere in the outskirts of Prague in cars with tinted windows*

or in dark lanes... Of course, you don't have to get down in it, nobody forces you, however, if you want to shoot a balanced documentary film you have no other choice than to sit in cars with guys with big muscles and be driven to unknown places. And of course, your closest family members should know where approximately you are and who you are with...

Oliver Malina, a film director and cameraman

→4 Be aware that you are at risk.

Documentary makers, film makers, journalists and their families can also become victims of crime.

- *I absolutely bow to the brains investigating crimes and many times I appreciated their advice or assistance. I certainly would like to thank them. Even now when I remember who I have met and who surreptitiously called me from an unknown number I said to myself that one must be a bit crazy when getting down to such business without admitting any danger. All people around you can see it but you, being in work up to your ears, forget that your family members and your life are part of the game. You're confronted with danger when you receive threatening SMS from unknown numbers or if a car puts on the brake when passing you and you're threatened by somebody from an open car window saying that if you do not stop working on the film they'll rape your partner and quarter you and feed you to the pigs. Then you can*

hear only the laugh of tattooed people and see clouds of exhaust fumes and they disappear. And you're standing there and have a night to think it over. Or at three o'clock in the morning when you return totally down from a cutting room three muscular fellows are standing in front of your house. The nearby non-stop bar proves to be your salvation...

Oliver Malina, a film director and cameraman

→5 **Bear in mind that human tragedy you meet at your work can affect your mental health and relations with other people.**

If people are willing to work on their mental health neither their body nor their soul should pay the price for these demanding professions.

- *Journalists do not often admit that a human tragedy to which they are witness should affect them in any way. Similarly to police officers, firefighters and health workers they often perceive it as being unprofessional if a tragedy they encounter has any impact on them. It's a deeply rooted prejudice. One is not made of stone and work in a traumatizing environment can have consequences for mental welfare, relations with other people and physical health.*

Štěpán Vymětal, a psychologist

The following ranks among risks of professions dealing with human tragedies:

- **burning out and cynicism;**
- **problems in the family and in relations with other people;**
- **increased consumption of alcohol and medication;**
- **post-traumatic and emotional difficulties**

What can help:

- **to talk to somebody whose experience is similar (with somebody who will understand us and who will not judge us);**
 - **to search for positive sides of life;**
 - **to relax, to develop our interests, to balance work with rest, sports, family, and friends;**
 - **to change the focus of our work;**
 - **to search for the sense of life; and**
 - **to discuss our experiences with a physician, psychiatrist, priest or to use a hot line**
- *Yes, you must envisage that if you shoot such serious documentary films it can be a dangerous game for you. It is true that after all my experiences with investigative journalism I turned the steering wheel and started to devote myself to music and travel documentaries. However, it is impossible to forget my year of intensive work on the cycle 'Shocking Crimes'.*

Oliver Malina, a film director and cameraman

Acknowledgements

Also with the contribution of:



Ing. Miroslav Jelínek

After studying at grammar school Mr. Miroslav Jelínek graduated from the Faculty of Journalism. Between 1960 and 1969 he worked for the newspaper Mlada fronta. From 1970 to 1989 he insulated buildings for v. d. Universa. In 1990 Miroslav became the chief-editor of MY 90, and for the next two years he worked as a chief-editor of Právo lidu. Since 1992 he has been working as an editor for Hospodářské noviny and he is the President of the Syndicate of Journalists of the Czech Republic.



Mgr. Pavel Macků

Mr. Pavel Macků studied philosophy at the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University and graduated also from the Faculty of Social Studies where he devoted himself to media studies and journalism. He worked as an editor of the newspaper MF DNES. Since 2005 he has been working as a chief-editor of the Rovnost daily paper – the oldest newspaper in Central Europe which has been continually published. As a reporter Pavel has been for example in Afghanistan and Namibia. He also lectures on ethics at the Faculty of Social Studies.



Oliver Malina

A documentarist, cameraman, screenwriter, and film director. A dissident musician, poet and journalist. In the 1990s Oliver worked on investigative reportage for Czech Television, LN papers, and other both electronic and printed media. Oliver is the author of a number of film documentaries such as 'Shocking Crimes' – a three piece cycle about Jiří Kájínek, Marie Černá, and the Orlik murders (2003). Within the series 'Nová cestománie' (i.e. New Travel-Mania) he has filmed in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, the Volga Basin in Russia, Egypt, and Israel.



Lieutenant, Ing. Ivana Svitáková

Ms. Ivana Svitáková is employed at the Police College and Secondary Police School of the Ministry of the Interior in Prague. She works for the Education and Training Department. She provides post-traumatic care to police officers and their close family members. In 2002 she became the victim of a car accident caused by an intoxicated driver, she suffered 14 injuries and had to undergo four surgeries. She is the mother of two children and an active sportswoman.



Mgr. Iva Šebková

Ms. Iva Šebková graduated from the Faculty of Arts of Jan Amos Komenský in Bratislava where she studied journalism for the press and press agencies. Between 1996 and 1999 and then from 2000 to 2006 she worked as an editor for MF DNES, at the editing office in Blansko and Vyškov. For two years (1999–2000) Iva worked as an editor for the Boskovicko – a regional paper. Since 2006 she has been working as a chief-editor for the Blanenský deník and the Týden u nás – a weekly paper.



JUDr. Jan Šusta

JUDr. Jan Šusta graduated from the Faculty of Law of Charles University in Prague and he has spent majority of his professional life as a lawyer. Since 1992 he has been a member of the Unie vydavatelů (the Union of Publishers) of which he became executive director in 1996. In addition, he is an executive for the Association of Communication and Media Organisations and a member of the committee working for the Council for Advertising.



PhDr. Jiří Závozda

PhDr. Jiří Závozda worked as a deputy chief-editor for the Lidové noviny, chief-reporter for the Mladá fronta Dnes and a chief-reporter for PRIMA TV. Currently he works as a chief-editor of political reportages at PRIMA TV and teaches at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University.

**Special acknowledgments to
the unnamed victims of crimes.**

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Head of the Psychological Unit of the Ministry of the Interior. PhDr. Štěpán Vymětal specialises in psychology of crises, disasters, traumas, psychological and social crisis assistance, and crises management. He cooperates with domestic and international expert working groups. He publishes, teaches at Charles University, and prepares Czech diplomats, police officers and Czech airlines staff for crisis work. He is experienced in the coordination and provision of psycho-social crisis assistance to people.



Mgr. Petra Vitoušová

Ms. Petra Vitoušová studied journalism and then worked in the media. In 1991 she co-established the civil association for helping children – Bílý kruh bezpečí. Currently she works there as President, the main coordinator and a voluntary advisor. In 2002 Petra founded the Alliance against Domestic Violence. From 2001 to 2003 she worked as a member of the Executive Committee of the European Forum for Victim Services. In 2002 she was awarded the title '2002 Social Innovator by the Schwab Foundation' at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Petra has participated in a number of short term study attachments and training courses abroad aimed at assistance to victims of crimes and domestic violence. She lectures and works as a teacher and also publishes – she is for example a co-author of the publication *Sociální práce v praxi*, (2005) (i.e. Social Work in Practice) and *Pomoc obětem (a svědkům) trestných činů* (2007) (i.e. Assistance to Victims (and Witnesses) of Crime). In addition she publishes in professional journals.



Doc. PhDr. Ludmila Čírtková, CSc.

Doc. Ludmila Čírtková works as a police psychologist at the Police Academy of the Czech Republic. She deals with issues of victims of crimes as regards both theory and practice. She is a member of the Board of the civil association Bílý kruh bezpečí and in its Prague office she works as a voluntary advisor – psychologist. She is the author of a range of publications.



JUDr. Martin Kloubek

JUDr. Martin Kloubek works as a Superintendent of the Criminal Police and Investigation Service and he is an external member of the Department of Criminal Sciences at the Police Academy of the Czech Republic. He also works as a member of the Board of the Civil Association Bílý kruh bezpečí, and in addition he is a lecturer and a professional consultant. Martin is the author of a number of articles and a co-author of a range of publications. Apart from other things he is involved in crime prevention and providing help to victims of crimes.



A. Recommendations of the UN Commission for Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

When reporting about a crime the news media should:

1. Present the details of the crime in a fair, objective and balanced manner, avoiding over-dramatized news.
2. Balance the need to inform the general public against the victim's right to privacy.
3. Respect the privacy of individuals who choose to refrain from dealing with the media or who choose to address the media through a spokesperson of their choice.
4. Provide a balanced perspective regarding the criminal act, i.e. one which reflects the concerns of the victim and the offender.
5. Never report rumours or innuendoes about the victim or the offender or the crime unless such information has been verified by reliable sources.
6. When identifying the victim in criminal cases, do so by reporting the victim's age and area where the crime occurred, omitting names, street addresses and numbers.
7. Refrain from using information gained from private conversations with victims or their relatives who may be in shock or distress.
8. Identify witnesses only when they volunteer to be named and when there is clearly no danger that may arise through their identification by the media.
9. Never publish the identity of a child victim.
10. Never identify alleged or convicted incest offenders where this could lead to the identification of the victim.
11. Never publish the identity of the victim of a sexual assault without his or her prior consent.

12. In cases of kidnapping where it is determined that the victim has been sexually assaulted, no longer identify the victim by name once a sexual assault has been alleged.
13. Never, without the victim's prior consent, identify the victim of fraud or any other crime that tends to humiliate or degrade the victim.
14. Refrain from photographing or broadcasting images that portray personal grief or shock resulting from a criminal act.
15. Never publish photographs or broadcast images that could place the subject in danger.
16. Refrain from showing photographs or broadcasting images of deceased victims, body bags or seriously wounded victims.
17. Never publish photographs or broadcast images of funerals without the prior consent of the surviving family members.
18. Refer to drunk driving incidents as "crashes" or "crimes", not as accidents.
19. Approach the coverage of all stories related to crime and victimization in a manner that is not lurid, sensational or intrusive to the victim or his or her family.

B. Current recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

From recommendation Rec(2006)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on assistance to crime victims

Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 14 June 2006 at the 967th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.

1. Protection

Protection against repeat victimisation

All personnel in contact with victims should receive adequate training on the risks of repeat victimisation and on ways to reduce such risks.

Protection of privacy

States should take appropriate steps to avoid as far as possible impinging on the private and family life of victims as well as to protect the personal data of victims, in particular during the investigation and prosecution of the crime.

States should encourage the media to adopt and respect self regulation measures in order to protect victims' privacy and personal data.

2. Confidentiality

States should require all agencies, whether statutory or non-governmental, in contact with victims, to adopt clear standards by which they may only disclose to a third party information received from or relating to a victim under the condition that:

- the victim has explicitly consented to such disclosure;
- there is a legal requirement or authorisation to do so.

In these two cases of exception, clear rules should govern the disclosure procedures. Complaints procedures should be published for dealing with alleged breaches to the rules.

3. Raising public awareness of the effects of crime

States should contribute to raising public awareness of the needs of victims, encouraging understanding and recognition of the effects of crime in order to prevent secondary victimisation and to facilitate the rehabilitation of victims.

This should be achieved through government funding and publicity campaigns, using all available media.

C. Code of Ethics for Journalists

Syndicate of Journalists of Czech Republic – provisions relevant to the topic:

3: Creditworthiness, equity and respectability increase media authority

As regards the above a journalist is obliged to satisfy, inter alia, the following requirements:

- nothing can excuse inaccuracy or lack of verification of information; all published information which proves to be inaccurate must be corrected forthwith;
- to respect privacy of persons, in particular children and persons who are not able to understand the consequences of their testimony;
- to strictly observe the principle of the presumption of innocence and not to identify family members of victims or offenders without their clear consent;
- to consider gossip, alleged accusations, distortion of documents and facts, and telling untruths to be the most serious professional mistakes;
- apart from obvious reasons of public interest a journalist must not through his/her activities to get any person to distress or personal straits...

D. Press Code of Practice (Publishing Principles) – Union of Publishers, 2000

On the basis of the analysis of the Codes of Councils of Publishers of EU Member States –
– provisions relevant to the topic:

Freedom of press and public interest

- The boundaries of the freedom of the press are the rights and freedom of citizens and third parties...
- The role of the press is to release not only positive, favourable or socially neutral information or ideas, but also such information resulting in anxiety, calling for discussion or evoking controversial opinions or shock. But even in such cases the used expressions must not be self-purposeful, offensive or vulgar...
- Public interest, in the meaning of the principles of the Press Code of Practice, is applied in events that call for explanation of a criminal act, the protection of public safety, morale or health, or to prevent the public being led in error...

Truthfulness and accuracy

- Seeking the truth, conscientious obtaining and processing of information, giving truthful and correct information to the public including writing commentaries and exact reproduction of other people's intimations and documents and the preservation of human dignity are the highest values respected by the press...
- When acquiring information unfair methods must not be used...
- The truthfulness of information must not be misrepresented by incompleteness, processing, mutilation, falsification, or by accompanying photographs or other pictures or by their description...

- If, exceptionally, for some serious reasons unconfirmed information or assumptions are disclosed they must be indicated as such and it must be apparent from them that they are such...
- If, in a matter previously discussed in the press, new significant information becomes known, it is a matter of ethics for reasonable information to be given of one's own accord...
- When releasing information about professional, especially medical matters, it is necessary to avoid inadequate interpretation that could lead readers to unreasonable anxiety or expectations...

Protection of personality

- Any kind of discrimination or offence due to sex, race, colour of skin, language, faith or religion, political or other views, national or social origin, pertinence to a national or ethnic minority, property, kith and kin or other position is not in accordance with ethics...

Protection of privacy

- The press respects privacy including the intimate life...
- If the privacy of a certain person touches public interest, and this person due to their social activity or position has become a person of public interest, the private life of such a person may be, in individual cases, discussed in the press. Nevertheless it is necessary to observe that the privacy rights of other people are not infringed...
- Special protection must be given to victims of criminal acts and accidents. Respect for the victims and their relatives has priority before the release of identifying information or photographs...

Presumption of innocence

- News about a hearing taking place in court or before another state authority or body of public administration must be related without any prejudice. Therefore the press, prior to the commencement of or during such proceedings, avoids releasing any prejudiced standpoints... Every person against whom criminal proceedings are held must be looked upon, even by the press, as innocent, until the court passes judgement or, by some other decision of a governmental body or body of public administration, such person has been found guilty...

Children

- Protection of the privacy of children has priority over the value of the information. When reporting, the press must always have consideration for the interests of children and juveniles...
- Reports on offences committed by teenagers must not make it more difficult for or prevent their possible return to society...

E. Sources

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Vymětal, Š., Šindelářová, B.: Novináři a neštěstí. (Journalists and Tragedies) Praha, Themis, MV ČR 2006

F. Useful contacts

Bílý kruh bezpečí – headquarters

Comprehensive advice provided to victims of crimes, witnesses and surviving family members
www.bkb.cz, 257 317 110 (nonstop)

Psychological Unit of the Ministry of the Interior

www.mvcr.cz, ops@mvcr.cz, 974 832 672

Syndicate of Journalists of the Czech Republic

www.syndikat-novinaru.cz, sncr@mbox.vol.cz, 224 142 455

Committee for Journalism and Trauma

www.cpj.org

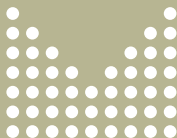
Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma

www.dartcenter.org

International Federation of Journalists

www.ifj.org





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