

# The Journalist's Scorecard: A tool to support usage of Aura Freedom's Guidelines on GBV in the Media



Like Aura Freedom's [Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence \(GBV\) in the Media](#), this Scorecard was created from the belief that the media professionals utilizing it are writing from a place of good intentions and a desire to contribute meaningfully to a better world.

**By using this Scorecard to assess how your work aligns with our [Guidelines](#), you have taken a step towards solidarity with countless survivors and advocates around the world who dedicate their lives to ending gender-based violence in their communities. For that, we thank you.**

**Please note:** The *Journalist's Scorecard* summarizes key recommendations from the various themes of our [Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence in the Media](#). It is not meant to *replace* the Guidelines, but *support* media professionals in using the Guidelines and determining both areas of strength and opportunities for growth when writing and reporting on gender-based violence in Canada.

## How to Use the Scorecard

After completing your media article, go through each item in the scorecard below. *If your article centres or refers to violence against Indigenous women, girls, or 2SLGBTQ+ peoples, complete the Indigenous component of the scorecard **in addition to** the component for the overarching themes.* For each item, you can refer to the associated footnote number below for more information. Proceed through each item, assessing the degree to which your media article incorporated the key guideline: *Not At All (0), Somewhat (1), or Completely (2).*

## Assessing Your Results

While you will be able to total your score, we encourage scorecard users to look beyond the score. *What areas are your strengths when reporting on gender-based violence? What areas might require further training, reflection, and attention?* We encourage media professionals, regardless of their score, to utilize the comprehensive [Guidelines](#) and identify nuances or additional elements that would further push their article towards transformative media.

## Score for Overarching Themes

Themes	Key Guidelines Assess the degree to which the article does the following	0	1	2
		Not at all	Somewhat	Completely
<b>Voices</b> <i>Voices</i> refers to how media portrayals of gender-based violence and sex trafficking determine whose voices, stories and perspectives are uplifted and highlighted, and whose are stifled and silenced.	1. Centres the voices of relevant experts (survivors, sector workers, etc.) to inform on GBV, its causes, nuances, and how it can be eradicated. <sup>1</sup>	0	1	2
	2. Allows GBV victims, survivors, their families, and their communities to guide the voice and narratives of their own stories. <sup>2</sup>	0	1	2
	3. De-centres my own voice or opinion as a storyteller. <sup>3</sup>	0	1	2
	4. De-centres law enforcement and/or the criminal justice system as the sole voice of authority on GBV. <sup>4</sup>	0	1	2





## Score for Overarching Themes (cont'd)

Themes	Key Guidelines Assess the degree to which the article does the following	0	1	2
		Not at all	Somewhat	Completely
<b>Language</b> <i>Language</i> addresses the importance of terminology, and the subjectivity of “neutral” language, and demonstrates how language can drive the conversation around gender-based violence and sex trafficking.	5. Maintains the words and context of a survivor, their family, and/or experts included in the article. <sup>5</sup>	0	1	2
	6. Includes an empowering, respectful narrative about survivors. <sup>6</sup>	0	1	2
	7. Avoids victim-blaming language (e.g. focusing on the behaviour of the survivors). <sup>7</sup>	0	1	2
	8. Avoids language that sanitizes or minimizes Gender-Based Violence. <sup>8</sup>	0	1	2
	9. Keeps perpetrators accountable and visible. <sup>9</sup>	0	1	2
	10. Headline goes beyond sensational clickbait and paints an accurate picture of GBV, those who experience it, and its perpetrators. <sup>10</sup>	0	1	2
<b>Frameworks</b> <i>Frameworks</i> questions whether media representations are placing GBV within a wider social context of patriarchy, sexism, gender inequality, racism, colonialism, ableism, homophobia, and other forces of oppression.	11. Contextualizes GBV within a wider social or systemic framework. <sup>11</sup>	0	1	2
	12. Avoids a “neutral” standpoint. <sup>12</sup>	0	1	2
	13. Conveys a responsibility to inform, rather than a desire to sell. <sup>13</sup>	0	1	2
	14. Contextualizes GBV in relation to intersecting identities (i.e. recognizing systemic oppressions make certain women especially at risk). <sup>14</sup>	0	1	2
	15. Avoids “explaining away” Gender-Based Violence. <sup>15</sup>	0	1	2
<b>Impacts</b> <i>Impacts</i> refers to how media portrayals contribute to public perception of GBV, and how they affect survivors and society as a whole, including the potential to prevent and eradicate GBV.	16. Draws attention to the impacts of GBV on survivors and their families. <sup>16</sup>	0	1	2
	17. Prioritizes the safety, wellbeing, and autonomy of survivors sharing their stories. <sup>17</sup>	0	1	2
	18. Offers resources to support readers impacted by GBV coverage. <sup>18</sup>	0	1	2
<b>Subtotal</b>				
Add up your score for each column				
<b>Score for Overarching Themes</b>		<b>/36</b>		
Sum the columns above				



## Score for Indigenous-Specific Themes

Indigenous Themes	Key Guidelines Assess the degree to which the article does the following	0	1	2
		Not at all	Somewhat	Completely
<b>Visibility</b> The media must make violence against Indigenous women <i>visible</i> as a social issue in order to end it. To do this successfully, accurate <i>Frameworks</i> (see page 2) are key.	19. Contextualizes GBV within MMIWG2S and the ongoing colonial genocide of Indigenous peoples. <sup>19</sup>	0	1	2
	20. Reflects my relevant trauma-informed, violence-informed, and intercultural competency training. <sup>20</sup>	0	1	2
<b>Trauma-Informed</b> <i>Trauma-informed</i> approaches to reporting on GBV work to reframe, restore & return power to Indigenous peoples and their stories—which can ultimately work to end GBV.	21. Honours the relationships with Indigenous survivors, peoples, communities, and organizations that I've built. <sup>21</sup>	0	1	2
	22. Contextualizes the cultural importance of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ peoples to their communities. <sup>22</sup>	0	1	2
<b>Desire-Based</b> <i>Desire-based</i> reporting calls for Indigenous GBV news stories to centre survivance, rather than solely focusing on community damage and victimization.	23. Humanizes victims, survivors, and their lives, rather than using them as a tool to make a point. <sup>23</sup>	0	1	2
<b>Subtotal</b>				
Add up your score for each column				
<b>Score for Indigenous-Specific Themes</b>		/10		
Sum the columns above				
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>		/46		
Sum your General Guidelines + Indigenous-Specific Themes Score				



**FOOTNOTES: The following are explanations and guidelines taken from Aura Freedom's [Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence \(GBV\) in the Media.](#)**

[1] GBV Experts include, but are not limited to:

1. People with lived experience
2. GBV frontline workers and organizations (shelters, sexual assault centres, helplines, etc.)
3. GBV sector organizations, both large and small (non-profits, research centres, grassroots advocacy groups, etc.)
4. Community activists
5. Academics and Policy workers
6. NOTE: Experts may change depending on context. For example, survivors may not always be experts on GBV/VAW statistics, and policy workers in the GBV sector may not be experts on the lived experiences of survivors.

[2] Additionally, be mindful of the community within which the survivor exists and their relationship with systems such as police/law enforcement. Ex: Avoid centering the voices of police for BIPOC survivors or victims and recognize the relationship between Black and Indigenous survivors and police in your reporting.

[3] "Transformative journalists are storytellers, not story takers." (Duncan McCue, Indigenous television and radio journalist, CBC, as quoted by Goldsbie, 2022). They recognize they are not the ones speaking—they are giving a platform to the victims, survivors, their families, communities, as well as community experts and GBV organizations to share their stories and knowledge from their perspectives.

[4] Be open to changing your views on who the real GBV experts are. Police and government agency sources have historically been seen as the experts on GBV, which could not be further from reality. Avoid using voices of law enforcement or the criminal justice system as the sole voices of authority on GBV, especially if they are not actively engaged with the survivor, their family and/or community. When necessary, hold these systems and your organization accountable by offering your readers full transparency on the source, status, and potential bias of the information you receive, as well as any efforts to follow up or contextualize this information.

[5] Be mindful of, and acknowledge, impacts to context when specific words or excerpts are used or omitted.

[6] Do not use trivializing, dismissive, or demeaning language or tones to describe victims, survivors, or their communities. Avoid using language that calls into question the integrity or honesty of the survivor (i.e. avoid using the term 'alleged' and 'claimed' when legally possible).

[7] Do not use language that is directly or indirectly victim-blaming. This includes language that focuses on the behaviour of survivors, describes environmental factors or locations in ways that may be interpreted as "reasons" for the violence, highlights whether a survivor/victim has used substances or has an addiction, or places blame on survivors for not leaving an abusive partner or for returning to one.

[8] Terms like 'domestic dispute', 'domestic incident' and 'spat' minimize the abuse suffered by victims of Intimate Partner Violence, and implies that the violence is a minor, private matter, rather than a larger societal issue with often deadly consequences. Avoid terms like 'random', 'odd', 'shocking', 'unpreventable', and 'unpredictable' when describing GBV. Instead, use words that highlight the social, preventable, and often very predictable nature of GBV. Avoid police quotes like "No further risk to public safety" that are made after arresting a GBV perpetrator. Women are always at risk of male violence, and statements like these only work to glorify police efforts and fail to recognize the systemic, ever-present risk of violence for women and gender-diverse people.

[9] Use words that hold known perpetrators accountable, and avoid using sympathetic language to describe GBV perpetrators or their actions. Remember, when writing about perpetrators, do not use sensational labels such as 'monster', 'madman' or 'maniac' to describe them and avoid nicknames for perpetrators that focus on graphic details.

[10] Many people only have time to read the headlines before making up their minds about a news story. Indeed, headlines hold a lot of power and are arguably the most important part of a media article. But of course, *with great power comes great responsibility*. An irresponsibly written headline can actually contribute to the environments that make violence against women and girls possible. We believe it is a journalist's responsibility to ensure that the headlines they write about GBV stories go beyond sensational clickbait, and instead paint accurate pictures of GBV and those who experience it. A responsibly written headline can change harmful perceptions of GBV and work toward a better understanding of it—and ultimately—toward its eradication in our communities.

[11] Avoid episodic framing of GBV news stories. Episodic frameworks reduce GBV to a series of disconnected episodes and erase its systemic and structural nature. Episodic frameworks lead to individualistic responses, while social frameworks lead to a sense of collective responsibility. Hint: If your story places blame on individuals, communities, environments, illnesses, or cultures rather than addressing systemic GBV, that is a sign that your story uses an episodic framework. Instead, place GBV within the framework of:

- A social, systemic problem
- A widespread human rights abuse rooted in gender inequity
- A national emergency
- A frequent and prevalent form of oppression found in all societies

[12] Recognize that the nature of GBV reporting is inherently *not neutral*. Every aspect of reporting can create bias, such as the writer's familiarity/comfort with the topic, educational background, intersectional location, lived experience or lack thereof, language choice, etc. Ask yourself: Why is it acceptable to be neutral in stories of Male Violence Against Women, but not in stories of other human rights abuses? Framing happens when telling a story, whether consciously or not. Writing with a "neutral" framework often favours those who have historically benefitted from the systems in place. Providing context does not mean biased or opinion-based writing—it means providing facts that help contextualize GBV stories, especially when little is known about a situation. Relying solely on police voices, police press releases, and police data is not neutral. Centering police sources presents a one-sided representation of any given issue.

[13] Write from an elevated ethical standard of writing that goes beyond sensationalism and 'tragedy porn.' The quick hook/quick response is not only simple and lazy, but misleading and damaging. Reframe your articles according to the responsibility to inform, not the desire to sell.

[14] Recognize how Gender-Based Violence is a result of extreme inequities that intersect with different identities and provide information on how these identities face differing forms, rates, etc. of violence. Find ways to inform your readers that while women from all walks of life can and do experience violence, systemic oppressions exist and make certain women especially at risk.

[15] Do not "explain away" Gender-Based Violence. Notably, this is often done with mental health, with alcohol and substance use, with culture, and with international framing.

[16] Draw attention to the impacts of GBV on survivors and their families. Use statistics, testimonials, and other research to support and demonstrate the magnitude of these impacts. Connect GBV to the impacts it has on families, such as the likelihood of children being placed in the child welfare system, especially in cases with marginalized and racialized mothers. Acknowledge how these impacts can influence further cycles of violence and trauma. Avoid the narrative that once someone has "survived" violence, their lives are suddenly better. Contextualize the long-term impacts of violence on one's mental, physical, spiritual, and financial health – along with the strength, resilience, and potential for thriving. The impact of Male Violence Against Women and girls is immense—not only on survivors and their families—but on *society as a whole*. This can be statistically proven through available Canadian data that demonstrate the connection between Male Violence Against Women and many of the issues our communities are currently facing (homelessness, food instability, poverty, mental health crises, addiction, economic hardship, and more).

[17] Be aware of, recognize, and consider the impacts of reporting, interviewing, and media on survivors and their families. Prepare for interviews and reporting on GBV with trauma-informed training and research. Educate yourself about trauma, trauma responses and how trauma can affect people's brains, judgement, and memory. Double-down on informed consent and provide ample opportunity to revisit consent and boundaries throughout the interview/reporting process. Prioritize the safety, wellbeing, and autonomy of survivors sharing their stories. Avoid questions that ask a survivor to relive their trauma or call into question their emotional/trauma responses to traumatic events. Remember that many of those working in the GBV sector are survivors themselves, and should be offered the same conditions when interviewed.

[18] Acknowledge potentially traumatizing/re-traumatizing content in your GBV media reporting. Best practice would be to include this at the beginning of an article or post. Offer resources to support readers impacted by GBV coverage.

[19] Journalists reporting on violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQ+ people must be informed on the ongoing genocide and how different Indigenous communities want to see justice. Journalists should also call attention to the wider issues of MMIWG2S and the ongoing colonial genocide of Indigenous peoples to advance public awareness and support efforts to end Indigenous experiences of GBV.

[20] Journalists reporting on GBV against Indigenous women, and violence against Indigenous communities in general, must undergo trauma-informed, violence-informed, and intercultural competency training in order to be educated on the contexts and experiences of the people they are writing about. If a journalist is not informed, they should not be writing about violence against Indigenous women—the risk of contributing to additional violence is too high.

[21] Journalists reporting on Indigenous stories must make a proactive effort to build a relationship with Indigenous survivors, peoples, communities, and organizations they want to work with. Reporters should be intentional about the way they honour the time and energy of Indigenous survivors and communities as collaborators and should be reciprocal in their relationship with Indigenous peoples and their communities.

[22] Prior to colonial contact, many Indigenous communities were matriarchal, meaning women were positioned as community and family leaders. Today, many Indigenous peoples consider women as sacred givers of life, and guardians of culture, knowledge, spirituality, and generational futurity and wellness. The ongoing colonial genocide against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ people's attempts to erase Indigenous peoples altogether by eliminating the source of culture and community: women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ people. Coverage of MMIWG2S should include this fact to address the framework upholding the ongoing genocide against Indigenous people.

[23] When engaging real life examples to highlight systemic injustices, ensure that attention is given to humanizing the people within the story in a respectful way rather than using the person or the situation as a tool to make your point. Include information about their personal interests, or contributions to their family/community to humanize them.



**IN THE MEDIA**  
A PROJECT BY AURA FREEDOM

[gbvinthedia.ca](http://gbvinthedia.ca)

