

**A MENTAL  
HEALTH GUIDE  
FOR *journalists*  
FACING ONLINE  
VIOLENCE**



INTERNATIONAL  
WOMEN'S MEDIA  
FOUNDATION



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide was created by Ana Maria Zellhuber Pérez and Juan Carlos Segarra Pérez of Vinland Solution, S.A de C.V on behalf of the International Women's Media Foundation, November, 2022.



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Founder of Vinland Solutions, founded in 2005, a company dedicated to providing psychological support to journalists, photojournalists, human rights defenders, and women politicians, who, due to their profession or gender, have been persecuted or targeted by violence.

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# FOREWORD



Online violence is often only considered a digital safety issue, but the impact of online abuse on journalists' mental health is significant and has serious consequences for them, their work, and for press freedom. This is particularly true for women and diverse journalists who are disproportionately targeted by online attacks. Time and time again women journalists told us that access to more mental health support was vital for combating the effects of online violence. The culture of silence around online violence and mental health has made it difficult for journalists to get long-term practical help. We hope that this guide will go some way to addressing this gap. The content of this guide was created with the needs of journalists in mind by mental-health professionals specialized in working in trauma and the media.

The International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) is dedicated to promoting a culture of change in newsrooms when it comes to tackling online violence. In 2020, the IWMF created the Coalition Against Online Violence (CAOV), a growing body of more than 60 organizations working to find better solutions for women journalists facing online abuse. In 2021 the CAOV launched the Online Violence Response Hub, housing comprehensive resources and guidance for journalists facing online abuse. The use of this guide in conjunction with the **IWMF's Guide** to Protecting Newsrooms and Journalists Against Online Violence contributes to the increasingly important conversation around online violence and its impact on journalists.

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to provide journalists with support for mental health conditions arising from online violence. The first part of the guide explains the psychological reasons why online abusers target media workers and lays out what happens to both the body and the mind when you are attacked online. Chapter two provides journalists with an easy-to-use assessment to gauge what psycho-emotional reactions they may be having as a result of online abuse. This is followed by a chapter dedicated to simple exercises and tasks that journalists can do to improve their mental wellbeing. Both the exercises as well as the assessment are available to download. At the end of the guide, media workers can find a more in-depth overview of different forms of abuse as well as a section dedicated to valuable resources and support.

### WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide is designed for journalists, both staff and freelancers, targeted by online abuse who are looking for practical mental health support that they can implement themselves. This guide will also be useful for newsrooms or those in journalist networks looking to support staff and members with issues around online abuse.

### **The guide will:**

- Help you understand the psychological reasons why abusers attack online and how you can take steps to better protect your mental health
- Provide you with a mental health self-evaluation chart so you can assess how online violence is affecting your wellbeing
- Provide you with easy-to-implement, downloadable exercises to help you manage the mental health toll of online abuse
- Suggest resources and organizations that can support you with issues related to online violence

### HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Journalists can go to chapters two and three to obtain downloadable assessments and exercises to improve wellbeing. It is recommended that you read chapter one to have a more in-depth understanding of online violence and its impact on both the mind and body. For those looking to learn more about abuse, chapter four and the suggested resources sections provide further context.

## HOW TO USE THE DOWNLOADABLE EXERCISES?

This guide includes a practical assessment and exercises that you can download and use on your computer and phone. To use the downloadable exercises follow the guide below.

Go to chapter two and three of this guide and choose the exercise you would like to download. Follow the instructions to access the document online.



Download a copy of the exercises, here is how:

1. On your computer or phone open up the exercise you want to download
2. At the top, click **File** › **Download**
3. Choose a file type. The file will download onto your computer.

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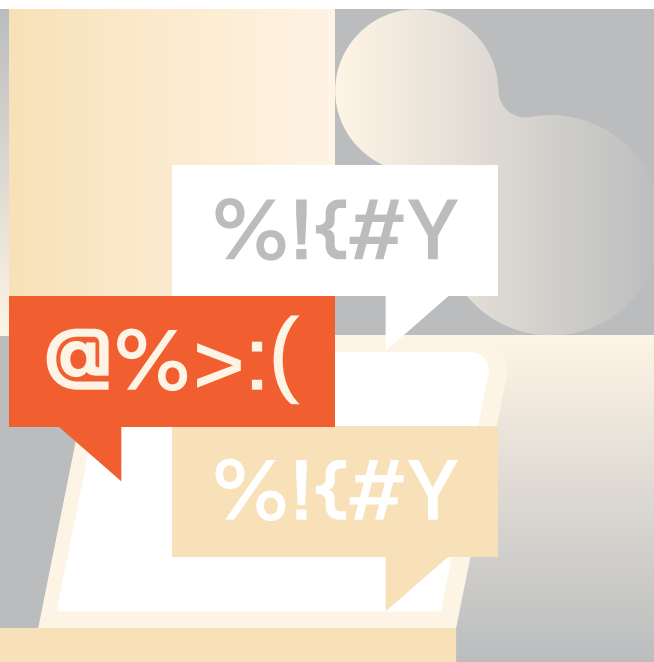
## CONCLUDING WORDS

While this guide provides practical support to journalists looking to address mental health issues around online abuse, it is no substitute for professional help. We strongly encourage journalists, where possible, to reach out to mental health experts for further support. The guide also contains physical and psychological exercises. These have been made as simple as possible; however, please consult with your doctor if you have any concerns.

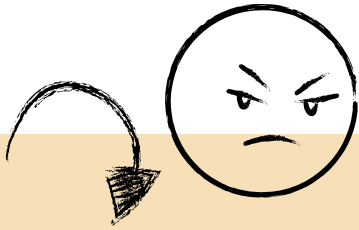
We would like to acknowledge organizations within the Coalition Against Online Violence that have led the way in terms of mental health support for journalists. Details about these organizations and the support they offer as well as other resources are featured at the end of this guide.

This guide could not have been created without the valuable input from the women and nonbinary journalists whom we have spoken to over the past several years. Their request for easy and accessible mental health support led us to create this guide in partnership with Vinland Solution, S.A de C.V. We hope that this manual will help you to continue the important and outstanding work you do everyday.

# UNDERSTANDING *online* VIOLENCE







# WHY DO PEOPLE ATTACK ONLINE?

## INTRODUCTION

**Abuse is violence: The goal is to control and subdue through damage and fear. Perpetrators attack because they feel threatened by their targets. Their motivation is fear.**

**Understanding this cause and effect is key to protecting yourself. It will empower you to take steps to manage the situation in order to minimize risk as well as the negative impact of the attack.**

**This understanding does not mean the situation will not be stressful. It will be, but if you have a security plan in place and are able to manage your emotions and symptoms, it shouldn't result in trauma.**

## ONLINE VIOLENCE AS A FORM OF ABUSE

Online violence is a form of abuse which can have long-lasting effects on the mental health of a journalist. Understanding who your abusers are and why they attack can help you put steps in place to better protect yourself mentally.

Online abusers, like other abusers, are fuelled by a sense of inferiority and envy. Melanie Klein, a psychoanalyst who carried out in-depth studies on envy, defines it as, "the angry feeling that another person possesses and enjoys something else desirable, accompanied by an impulse to take it away or spoil it."<sup>1</sup>

Envy doesn't just mean wanting what another person has, it also means trying to destroy what we think we can't have. This explains the violent behavior that aims to destroy someone's reputation or, in the case of journalists, to silence their voice.

### **Online violence occurs in two main forms:**

- 1) threatening a person's life and safety and/or,
- 2) threatening their reputation.

These attacks also have a strong gender bias. Women and nonbinary journalists are subjected to more violent attacks, especially if the attacker is someone who believes they are entitled to greater power purely because of their gender. Perpetrators resort to this form of violence because, most of the time, they can't approach you, either because they don't live close enough or because they're afraid. In this way, online violence involves the deployment of a wide range of strategies to erode the victim's self-confidence as well as undermine their work and personal relationships.

1 / Bott Spillius, E., Milton, J., Garvey, P., Couve, C. and Steiner, D, 2011, *The New Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*, Routledge, London.

# WHO IS ATTACKING ME ONLINE?

Online abusers come in all shapes and sizes and their social status and background spans a broad spectrum of profiles. They often have a low sense of self worth stemming from their own trauma which causes them to lash out in order to feel powerful. They may also have mental illnesses such as sociopathy and paranoia. With the former, the inability to feel empathy means they are unable to understand the damage they are inflicting. For the latter, people who are paranoid aim to control others and their surroundings in order to feel more secure. They project their own anger and desire onto their target as a way to hurt them.

The main categories of online abusers are:

**Low economic level and/or low IQ abusers:** they think others are denying them something they believe they're entitled to and refuse to face their lack of desired outcomes stem from a lack of discipline, effort, and drive.

**High IQ abusers:** they are often socially resistant, which means they are highly capable but are unable to get the desired outcome they want because they lack the social understanding necessary, and they resent that people who are less intelligent are able to achieve success.

**Very high-status abusers:** they perceive their victims as a threat to their status. This is because the abuser feels they need to defend their territory from rival groups or because they suffer from doubts about their own abilities.

## Trolls vs targeted online bullying

There is a difference between those who attack you online for their own fun, 'trolls,' and those who attack you with the intention of causing you significant harm. Online abusers who attack for their own entertainment limit their attacks to violent posts. Targeted attacks by online bullies are designed to damage your mental health, your reputation, and your way of life.

# AVOID RESPONDING OUT OF EMOTION

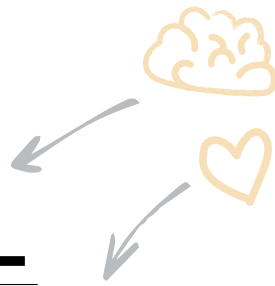
When someone is attacked online their body responds with a fight or flight reaction. This can lead people to react disproportionately, for example by posting a response to the attacker. This then fulfills the harasser's desire for greater visibility. In order to minimize this risk, it's important for us to understand our emotional response to the attack and learn how to manage it.

An online attack will cause an emotional response in the person being abused. These emotions are translated into feelings. This could include feelings of fear, anger, and disgust amongst others. This is an immediate response to an exposure to danger, be it danger to our life, our reputation, or our wellbeing. These feelings are neither right nor wrong. What matters is what you choose to

do with them. Acting out without logical reasoning and without assessing the situation first can make the problem worse. You can't control your emotions, but you can control how you act on them. One way to do this is to analyze why we are experiencing each of these feelings and try to figure out what we are afraid of. Is it our own vulnerability? Does our anger stem from the injustice of being slandered?

Tackling the situation this way will help us to better understand the emotion we're experiencing and take a different approach to the problem. It will allow us to find a more rational solution and we'll avoid entering into a back and forth exchange with our abuser. A healthy response to online abuse is to focus on staying safe.

# THE MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF ONLINE VIOLENCE



When you attack a journalist's reputation, you challenge their identity; you censor them from the online world. It's a symbolic way of erasing that person. When journalists suffer online abuse, they write less, they struggle to concentrate, they think a lot more before posting a comment, and they feel their reputation and their life are at stake. They live in fear and anxiety.

Online violence also has an impact on their daily routine. They feel their lives have been upended and have suddenly changed. Forcing victims to change their routines and behavior as a result of online violence is exactly what abusers want. However, journalists can regain control by taking the necessary steps to stay safe physically, emotionally, and online. This guide will show you how to do this.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU'RE SUBJECTED TO ONLINE ABUSE

Online attacks leave you in a state of shock and this causes a physical reaction in your body.

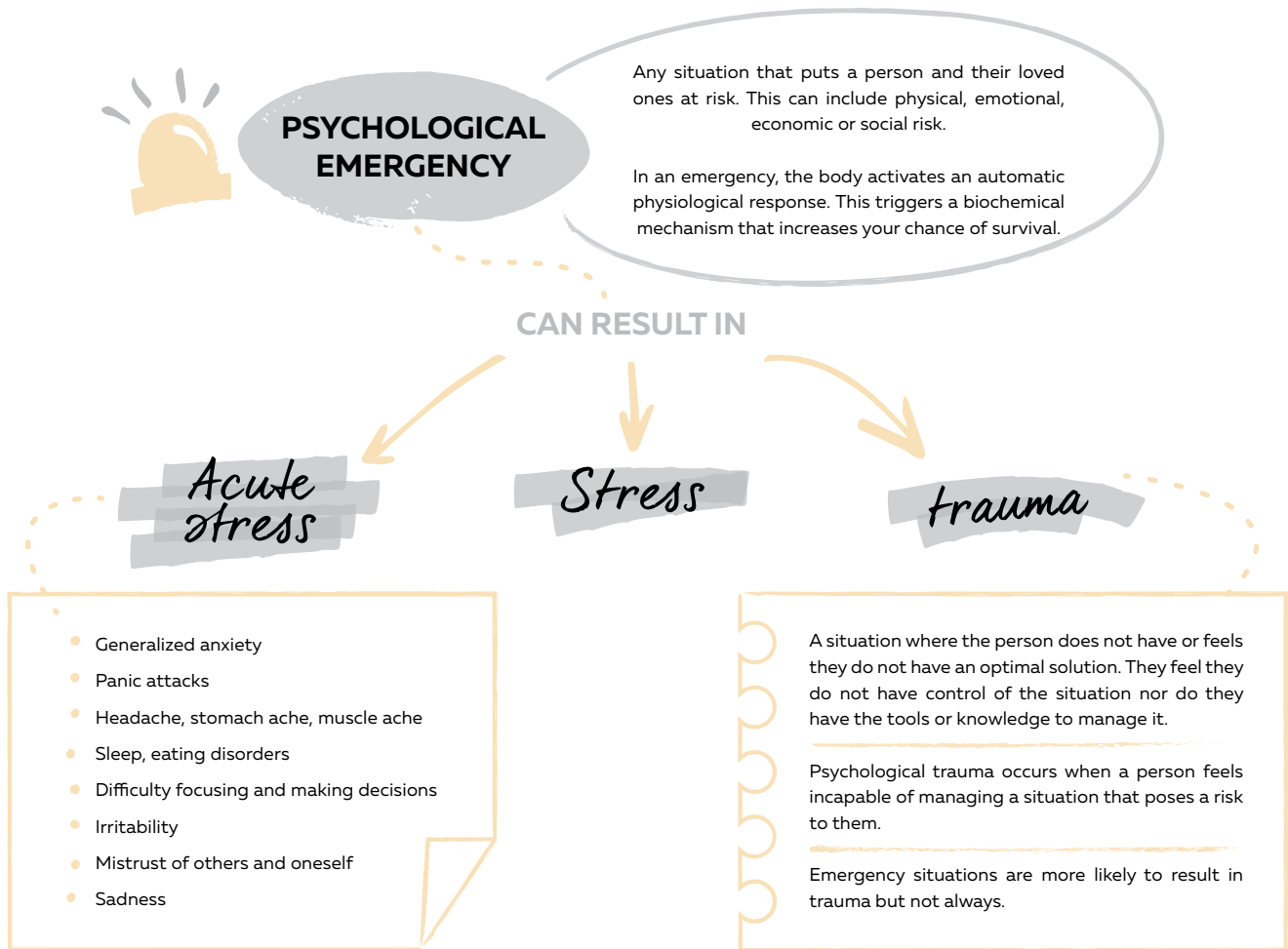
- Your heart rate increases and you'll find it hard to think and understand what's going on.
- Initially, your mind will focus on the attack. You'll weigh the pros and cons of reacting or doing nothing.
- As this sense of confusion begins to fade, you'll feel angry or scared, and your first impulse may be to respond to your online attacker. Don't. A knee-jerk reaction is likely to make things worse. Remember your attacker is seeking notoriety, among other things, and your response will only fulfill that desire.
- Instead, you need to stop, think, relax, and analyze the situation. Only then should you decide what to do.

- Over time, if the attacks continue, your stress levels will rise and you might experience severe stress.

### Symptoms may include:

- Headaches, gastritis, neck pain, insomnia, loss of appetite, or binge eating
- You could start to isolate yourself
- You may begin to feel depressed, too listless to work, or engage in any other activity
- You may also feel sad and lonely and might ask yourself, "Why me?"
- You're likely to experience feelings of rage, which could strain your personal and professional relationships if you start to lash out at others

If you continue to experience these feelings over a long period of time and you think you haven't been able to manage the situation properly, you might develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).



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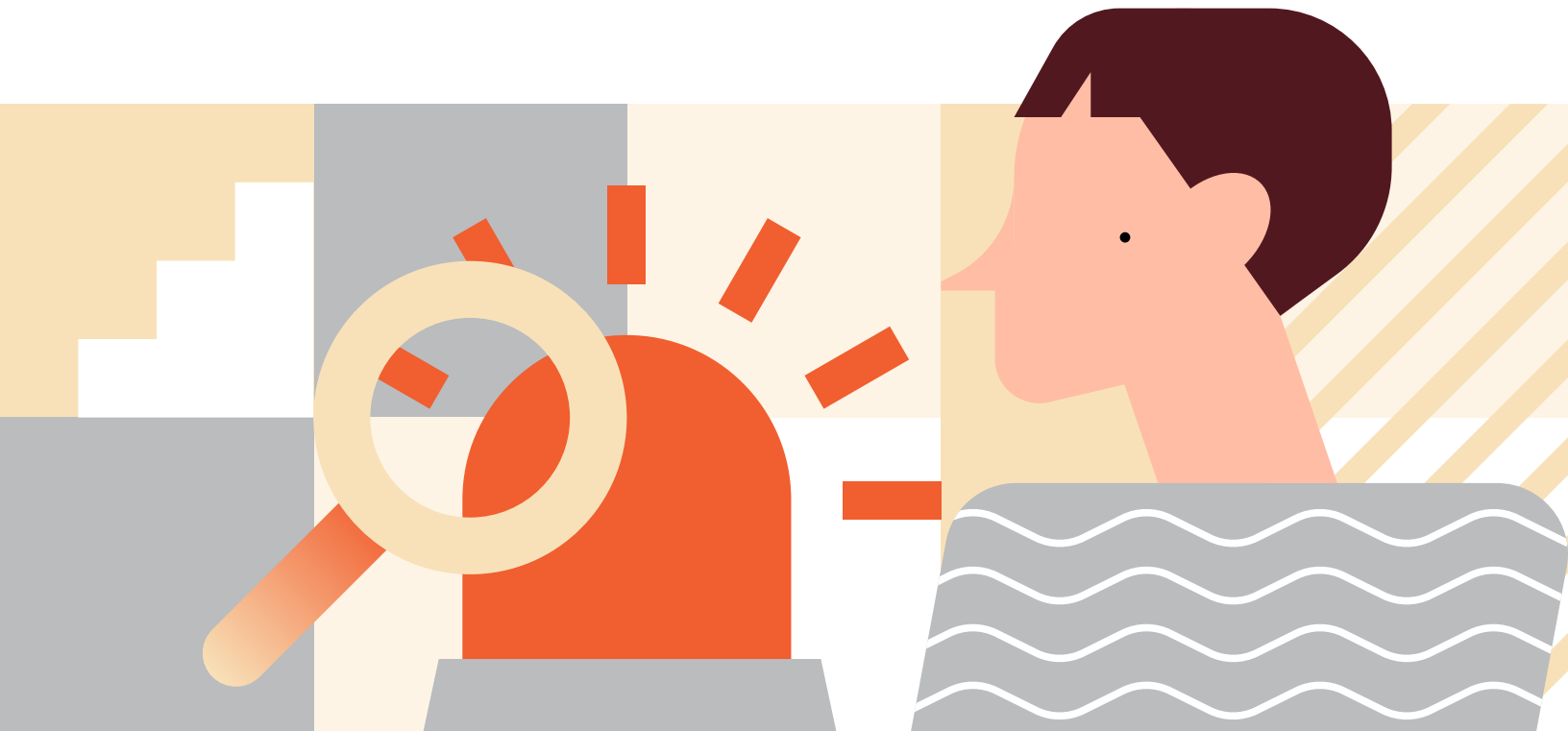
However, all of the above can be managed and you can prevent acute distress and PTSD by focusing on self-care. Don't let the abuser take over your life. Keep exercising, meet with friends, eat well, try the techniques we suggest in this guide, and find the ones that work best for you.

It's helpful to know that what you're experiencing is **perfectly normal**; it's simply your body, mind, and emotions dealing with an abnormal situation.

In order to manage the situation, first you need to assess the level of threat and its mental and emotional impact on you, and figure out whether it's making you relive previous trauma or worsening any work-related stress you may already be experiencing.

In the following chapter, we'll show you how to assess the level of risk you're facing.

# ASSESSING *the* RISK



If you are being targeted by online abuse then the following assessments will help you better understand the risks you face. The first section helps you assess the threat of your online abuser. The second section is a self-evaluation that can help you better understand what mental health issues you are facing. The assessment will also suggest practical exercises to help improve your wellbeing. The corresponding exercises can be found in the [next chapter](#).

# QUESTIONNAIRE EVALUATING THE THREAT FROM ONLINE ABUSERS

## HOW TO USE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Read through the questionnaire
2. Consult the infographic at the end of the assessment to calculate the number of points
3. The higher the number of points you have the greater the risk
4. Consult with experts in online abuse in order to better protect yourself and your data
5. Look at our [suggested resources](#) section at the end of this guide for more information

## QUESTIONNAIRE EVALUATING THE THREAT FROM ONLINE ABUSERS

### Part 1

Is the online abuser lashing out or trying to diminish the content of your posts?

Y  N

If so, they are not really attacking you, they are attacking your thoughts. This is likely because the content of your posts made them feel insecure.

In some cases, drug and alcohol abuse may be a factor in the online attacks. Check the time and day when the attack occurs. Is it happening late at night or on the weekend? If so, alcohol and other drugs are likely to be involved.

### Part 2

Are they attacking your gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, profession, or socio-economic level?

Y  N

If so, they are likely to be envious of your status or of how many followers you have.

Q1: Is this person part of an extremist group? (Y/N) Y  N

Q2: Does this person seem highly-educated? (Y/N) Y  N

Q3: Does the abuse contain sexual threats? (Y/N) Y  N

Q4: Does the abuse contain comments about your gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation? Y  N

### Part 3

Are they frequently sending violent messages?

Y  N

In general, the more messages someone sends the less likely they are to act on them. From a psychological standpoint the more someone talks about something the less inclined they are to carry out that action.

### Part 4

Is the online abuser threatening to do something, or are they a direct threat to your life?

Y  N

If so, how much does this person know about you?

Q1: Do they have specific information about your location, for example your home address?

Y  N

Q2: Does the abuser have information about your family; for example, photos or contact details?

Y  N

Q3: Do they have an idea of your daily routine; for example, where you work, or go shopping?

Y  N

In this case, it is a good idea to seek help from specialized organizations against online violence, such as the International Women's Media Foundation.

Remember that a threat to your life or to do you harm may not be real, but you should take the necessary steps to protect yourself. Consult the [resource section](#) at the end of this guide for further support.

#### TROLLING

1 POINT

Abuser is seeking attention, approval or notoriety

1 POINT

Attacker discloses personal information about you that is found in your publications

1 POINT

Non-specific threats

1 POINT

#### LASHING OUT

1 POINT

#### ATTACKS ON YOUR GENDER, RACE, ETHNICITY, SEXUAL IDENTITY, PROFESSION

2 POINTS

#### FREQUENCY OF THE MESSAGES

- +1 Frequent messages
- +2 Messages sent after a specific action, for example after publishing a story or interviewing someone

#### TARGETED ONLINE ABUSE

2 POINTS

Specific attacks against you

2 POINTS

Attacker discloses personal information about you that is not found in your publications

3 POINTS

Specific threats

3 POINTS

### The higher your total score, the greater the risk you are facing

This is a quick assessment that should help you establish whether you need professional help.

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You can download an online version of the questionnaire and its corresponding self-evaluation chart [here](#).

# MENTAL HEALTH SELF-EVALUATION CHART FOR JOURNALISTS TARGETED BY ONLINE VIOLENCE

## HOW TO USE THIS CHART

1. Read through the different mental health conditions on the chart
2. Give yourself one point for each statement you answer yes to
3. Calculate the number of points

## HOW TO INTERPRET YOUR SCORE

1. Scoring three or more points on one of the conditions means you are likely to be suffering from it
2. The higher the number of points the more certain it is that you are suffering and the more severe the condition is likely to be
3. It is common to suffer from more than one condition at a time depending on the circumstance you are facing

## NEXT STEPS

1. Make a note of the conditions that you have
2. Go to the corresponding exercises in the next chapter for support
3. The first exercise on diaphragmatic breathing is designed to be used for all conditions

Instructions: Go through the following list and add one point for each statement for which you answer "yes"

PSYCHOLOGICAL EMERGENCY	ANXIETY	ACUTE STRESS	POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)	DEPRESSION
<p>Shock</p> <p>You are unable to think about anything else</p> <p>Your sense of time differs from your peers</p> <p>You feel disconnected</p> <p>You struggle to make sense of what is happening</p> <p>You try to figure out how the situation is going to impact your life</p> <p>You keep thinking of ways to end this situation</p>	<p>You are unable to keep calm</p> <p>You constantly fidget</p> <p>You feel restless</p> <p>You feel dizzy</p> <p>You have an upset stomach</p> <p>You have acid reflux</p> <p>Your heart beats faster than normal</p> <p>Your neck and back hurt</p> <p>You can't focus</p>	<p>General anxiety</p> <p>Panic attacks</p> <p>You have head, stomach and muscle ache</p> <p>You can't sleep</p> <p>Eating disorders</p> <p>Difficulty focusing</p> <p>Difficulty making decisions</p> <p>Irritability</p> <p>Mistrust of others</p> <p>Mistrust of oneself</p> <p>Sadness</p> <p>Anger</p>	<p><b>You have three or more symptoms of acute stress</b></p> <p><b>Reliving trauma</b> You relive the moment when you first encountered your abuser or underwent the traumatic event</p> <p><b>Avoidance</b> You try to avoid anything that reminds you of the attack</p>	<p>Listlessness</p> <p>Indifference</p> <p>Anhedonia (Inability to feel pleasure)</p> <p>You wake up in the middle of the night</p> <p>You feel angry all the time</p> <p>You don't feel like doing anything</p> <p>You would rather sleep all day</p> <p>You stop paying attention to your hygiene</p> <p>You don't want to see other people</p> <p>You don't want to go out</p>
Calculate your total number of points	Calculate your total number of points	Calculate your total number of points	Calculate your total number of points	Calculate your total number of points

**Note:** Reliving trauma and avoidance are unequivocal symptoms of PTSD. If you are experiencing both you can be certain you are suffering from PTSD.

You can download an online version of this self-evaluation chart [here](#).



# MENTAL HEALTH EXERCISES *for* *dealing* WITH ONLINE VIOLENCE



## ABOUT THIS CHAPTER

This chapter provides journalists with user-friendly exercises they can do if and when they are subjected to online violence. These exercises have been used in therapy with patients suffering from acute stress, anxiety, depression, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as well as those who suffer from sleep deprivation. These techniques are effective and easy to replicate.

## WHAT HAPPENS TO OUR BODIES WHEN WE'RE THREATENED?

When we're threatened, our nervous system responds in order to prepare us for action and increase the chance of survival. Our brain goes into emergency mode, producing high levels of stress, blocking emotions, physical sensations, and needs. We develop a tunnel vision that focuses solely on survival.

When this happens, our system produces high levels of endorphins and adrenaline (cortisol and epinephrine).

Cortisol increases the sugar level in our bloodstream and epinephrine makes our heart beat faster in order to increase the oxygen flow to our muscles, enabling us to run.

If we're unable to return to relax again, our body keeps producing these substances and our body swells up, causing back pain, headaches, gastritis, and preventing us from sleeping and resting.

## HOW DO THESE EXERCISES HELP?

Anti-stress techniques help us regain control of our brain by halting the production of adrenaline and endorphins. This allows us to assess the situation calmly and make rational decisions.

The exercises also help us to generate emotions that produce well-being, such as happiness, peace, serenity, and enjoyment.

Relaxing also allows us to gain a better perspective on life, not letting stressful and painful experiences overrule all other feelings. It's a reminder that life also brings us beauty and joy.

The following techniques have an impact on our nervous system, thus allowing us to regain our balance.



Exercise:

# DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

## ABOUT THIS EXERCISE

This exercise is designed to help you relax during a stressful situation by helping you control your breathing. When a person is stressed they take shorter breaths which decreases the amount of oxygen entering the bloodstream. Taking deeper breaths helps increase oxygen and decreases stress.

This exercise is used throughout this guide as the first step before carrying out other exercises.

Diaphragmatic breathing involves taking slow deep breaths from the stomach. It can be done while standing, sitting, laying down, or while walking. This type of breathing is an effective way of managing stress, anxiety, acute stress, panic attacks, and insomnia.

## HOW TO DO THE EXERCISE

Prepare your body for the exercise:

1. Sit or lay down in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes and place one hand on your chest and another on your stomach. Notice how you're breathing. Is your stomach rising when you inhale and going down when you exhale, or just your chest?
3. Observe your body. Is it tense? Does any part of your body hurt? How hot or cold are your hands and feet?

Slowly repeat the following breathing cycles:

1. Breathe through your nose, stomach first, in a four-second count.
2. Hold your breath for four seconds.
3. Exhale through your nose, stomach first, in a four-second count.
4. Hold your breath for four seconds.
5. Repeat this exercise three times.

After completing this exercise for the first time, observe your body. Do you notice any changes? Do you feel more relaxed? Do your neck and shoulders feel less painful or has the pain disappeared? Are your hands and feet warmer?

Throughout this guide, you'll find several versions of this technique with different breathing counts. The exercise above is shown with a four-second count which includes four counts for breathing, four counts for holding your breath, four counts for exhaling, and four counts for holding your breath (4-4-4-4).

Other exercises will require holding your breath at the end or breathing in shorter counts. In the end, what matters is that you do these exercises at your own pace and according to your lung capacity. Don't overexert yourself; otherwise, you'll wind up feeling more stressed.

## FURTHER SUPPORT

- Watch this [video](#) to learn more about diaphragmatic breathing.

↓ You can download the exercise in PDF format [here](#).



*Exercise:*

# PSYCHOLOGICAL EMERGENCY TECHNIQUES

## ABOUT THIS EXERCISE

When you are in a state of psychological emergency it is likely you will have tunnel vision, which makes it hard for you to focus. It is important to first take steps to control your breathing before then assessing the risk. The guidance in this exercise includes a breathing technique to first help you relax followed by an assessment of the risk.

## ❓ HOW TO DO THE EXERCISE

To do this exercise you need to be familiar with the technique of diaphragmatic breathing. You can learn more about this by reading the following [exercise](#).

Prepare your body for the exercise:

1. Sit or lay down in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes and place one hand on your chest and another on your stomach. Notice how you're breathing.
3. Observe how your body feels.

Do three cycles of diaphragmatic breathing:

1. Breathe through your nose, stomach first, in a four-second count.
2. Hold your breath for four seconds.
3. Exhale through your nose, stomach first, in a four-second count.

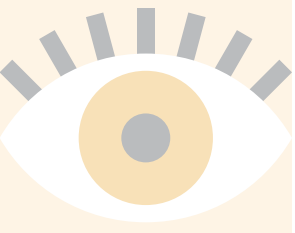


4. Hold your breath for four seconds.
5. Repeat this exercise three times.

## HOW TO ASSESS THE RISK

Once you have relaxed, it is then important to assess the risk. To do this, you will need to do the assessments in chapter two of the guide. Take as much time as you need. Before you act, remember your attacker is seeking notoriety, and they won't achieve that goal if you hold back from responding.

↓ You can download the exercise in PDF format [here](#).



*Exercise:*

# ANXIETY MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

## ABOUT THIS EXERCISE

This exercise is designed to help you control your anxiety. Anxiety stems from fear and can be rational, when the threat is real, or irrational, when there is no imminent threat. You may experience irrational anxiety when you have not or are unable to assess the seriousness of a situation. This can lead you to imagine the worst case scenario.

If the threat is real, and therefore rational, you should reach out for help. See the [resource section](#) of this guide. If your anxiety is caused by an irrational fear, you should try to stop thinking about what might happen in the future, and focus on the present, instead. The best way to focus on the present is to meditate.

## ❓ HOW TO DO THE EXERCISE

This exercise is based on mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) therapy.

1. Sit in a resting position. Breathe through your nose in three counts. Hold three counts and then release through your nose in three counts.



2. Visualize your environment. Pay attention to your surroundings, for example the walls surrounding you, and every detail such as their textures, colors, and tone.
3. Close your eyes and inhale again three times. This time, focus on sounds. Identify what type of sounds they are and try to locate where they're coming from. You'll notice you can hear twice as many sounds as before.
4. Open your eyes and merge the images with the sounds you're hearing. You'll notice that most of the time we take our surroundings and their related sounds for granted.

This exercise will help you realize that we often live in the past or in the future, rather than the present. Try to focus more on the present, since that's the only moment in time you can actually change.

↓ You can download the exercise in PDF format [here](#).



*Exercise:*

# ACUTE STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

## ABOUT THIS EXERCISE

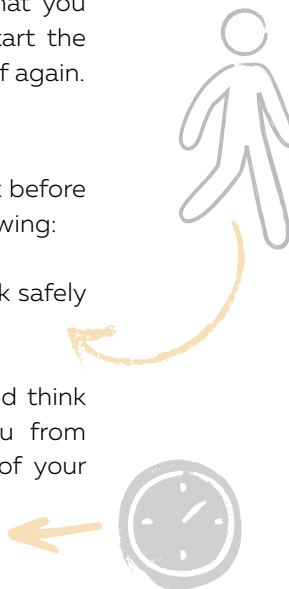
This exercise is designed to help you manage acute stress. Acute stress happens when you are unable to resolve the root cause of a stressor, therefore, stress levels increase, resulting in acute stress.

Unresolved stress causes anxiety and can cause you to neglect yourself, including failing to eat and sleep well. In order to manage acute stress it is important that you prioritize selfcare. This exercise will help you kickstart the process so that you can begin to take care of yourself again.

## ❖ HOW TO DO THE EXERCISE

One of the best ways to relieve stress is walking. But before you start walking, it's important to consider the following:

1. Walk in a safe place (for example, you can't walk safely in some countries at 3 am).
2. Walk 20% or 30% faster than usual.
3. While you walk, observe your surroundings and think about what you're seeing. This will stop you from overthinking and will help you to break out of your thought loop.
4. Walk for five to twenty minutes.



If you are unable to go out due to security reasons, the weather, or a health condition, you can walk inside. Dancing also works well as a substitute for walking.

↓ You can download the exercise in PDF format [here](#).



Exercise:

# PANIC ATTACK MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

## ABOUT THIS EXERCISE

Panic attacks occur when fear becomes unmanageable. At first, you may not understand what is happening. You will hyperventilate and your mind will be focused on the worst case scenario. It could feel as if you are going to faint or have a heart attack. Rest assured that will not happen. You are experiencing extreme anxiety, but your life is not in danger.

Panic attacks are less likely to occur if you:

- Have assessed the threat
- Are taking care of your health
- Are monitoring your stress and anxiety levels

The following technique, based on pranayama yoga, will help you to keep calm and breathe oxygen into your bloodstream, brain, and body. It will also help you to focus on the present instead of conjuring up worst-case scenarios.

## ❓ HOW TO DO THE EXERCISE

### Option 1:

- 1) Block one of your nostrils with one finger.
- 2) Breathe from your other nostril.
- 3) Switch sides, blocking the side you already breathed in from and exhaling from the other nostril.



Watch how the [Dalai Lama combines pranayama with acupressure](#) to stop panic attacks. You can do it whenever and wherever you feel the onset of a panic attack. If you're in a public place, you can go outside or find a bathroom to do this technique.

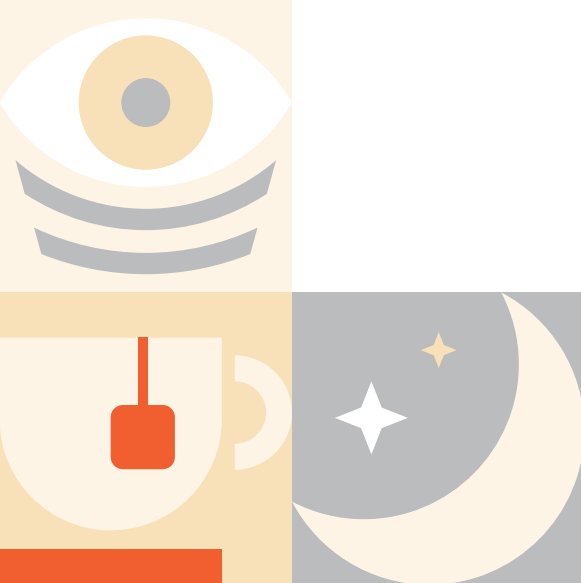
### Option 2:

Diaphragmatic breathing:

1. Breathe through your nose, stomach first, in a four-second count.
2. Hold your breath for four seconds.
3. Exhale through your nose, stomach first, in a four-second count.
4. Hold your breath for four seconds.
5. Repeat this exercise three times.

This technique forces your body to control pulsations and breathing, allowing you to stop a panic attack or at least keep it under control. If you're trying to help someone who's having a panic attack, sit with them, tell them how to breathe and help them to count their breath. For more information on diaphragmatic breathing, consult this exercise [here](#).

↓ You can download the exercise in PDF format [here](#).



*Exercise:*

# INSOMNIA MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

## ABOUT THIS EXERCISE

These exercises are designed to help you when you have problems sleeping. Before starting the exercises it is important to understand what happens when we sleep and why we get insomnia.

When we sleep, we're not just resting, we're processing and filing the experiences of the day in order to figure out what they mean and to store them in our memory. When we are stressed our brain tries to help us by recalling images and emotions of similar problems we faced in the past. The brain does this as a problem-solving mechanism, however, this often makes us anxious as we experience these memories as failures rather than successes.

This can cause two types of insomnia:

- 1) An inability to fall asleep as the brain will not switch off
- 2) Waking in the middle of the night and being unable to go back to sleep.

The exercises below are designed to aid sleep and help you rest.

## ❓ HOW TO DO THE EXERCISE

### Preparing to sleep: Establishing a routine

If you are having problems falling asleep it is important to calm your mind. The best way to do this is by establishing a routine that you follow every day.

- Take a hot bath or shower an hour before going to bed. Your body temperature will rise, then it will gradually decrease making you sleepy.
- Get into bed and drink a cup of tea.
- Read a book or watch a TV show. Avoid the news or anything violent. If possible, choose a program that will make you laugh.
- Do a breathing and/or a mindfulness meditation exercise.

### Preparing to sleep: Mindfulness exercise

#### 1. Breathing technique:

When you are about to fall asleep, lay on your back and start to breathe using the techniques described in the exercise diaphragmatic breathing.

- Breathe through your nose, stomach first, in a four-second count.
- Hold your breath for four seconds.
- Exhale through your nose, stomach first, in a four-second count.
- Hold your breath for four seconds.
- Repeat this exercise three times.

#### 2. Managing negative thoughts:

While you are breathing you may get negative thoughts. Acknowledge these thoughts and put them to one side. Trust that you will be able to resolve them and to do so you will need a rested body and mind.



### 3. Meditation

While you are laying down, visualize yourself walking in a place that you like. Try to imagine all the details of that place, including the sounds, colors, temperature, and sensations.

#### Dos and don'ts when dealing with insomnia

1. Don't grab your phone. Cell phones radiate a light that tricks the brain into thinking it's daytime and stops you from sleeping.
2. Get out of bed, drink water, walk, and stretch. While you walk, stretch your hands open and gently close them.
3. Watch something relaxing on TV, listen to music, or draw.
4. When you're ready to return to bed, don't cover up. Wait until you cool down a bit and then cover up; you'll feel more comfortable and it will be easier to get back to sleep.
5. Don't worry if you only have a few hours of sleep left; that will only make you feel more anxious.





Exercise:

# DEPRESSION MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES



## IMPORTANT



If you are suffering from depression it's important to seek professional help. Please see our [resource section](#) at the end of this guide for links to organizations that can support you.

## ABOUT THIS EXERCISE

These exercises are designed as a short-term aid for certain aspects of depression linked to online violence, but they are not a substitute for long-term psychological support. Journalists who are concerned about depression should contact a mental-health specialist.

Before starting the exercises it is important to understand that all psycho-emotional problems are caused by both a genetic predisposition to a chemical imbalance in our brain, meaning that our neurons are not communicating properly, which causes us to lose interest in the world. This genetic predisposition is then triggered by an unsolved grieving process.

Psychiatrist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross explains grief as a five-stage process: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance<sup>2</sup>. We can add a sixth stage, rebuilding your life in order to adapt to your new circumstances.

When a journalist is abused online, they often work through the five stages of grief, including anger. The following exercise is designed to help you understand this anger, remove it, and start the process of accepting that life is not as it was before.



## HOW TO DO THE EXERCISE

### Exercise: A grieving ritual

It's important to grieve in order to accept loss. A grieving ritual can remind you that life continues and that this is just a phase that will pass. We suggest that you make your own ritual about what has changed, what has gone, but also what is still there.

Your grieving ritual must be symbolic, meaningful to you, and provide you with comfort. Below are some examples:

### Grieving ritual one: Creating a place of sanctuary

Chose a place and create a sanctuary for yourself

- Put candles and/or incense
- Place objects that represent what you have lost
- Place objects that represent what you still have
- Write a piece of text in which you describe saying goodbye, acknowledging what still exists, what you are learning from this experience, and how you want to reconstruct your life



2 / Kübler-Ross E, 1969, On Death and Dying, Collier Books/Macmillan Publishing Co , New York

## Grieving ritual two: Sanctuary in nature



Go to an open outside space, such as a beach, a park, or a forest

- Look at the immensity of life
- Think about how this attack changed your life, including the good and bad
- Reflect on the ways you can manage the bad so that it becomes a way in which you can build a new life
- Realize that there is help around you
- Understand that you are strong and that you are not alone
- With help understand that you can become stronger and happier

### Exercise: Comforting yourself

Depression is extremely complex and affects us all differently. Each one will need different times to be able to process a loss. Many times it is very difficult for us to be able to admit or process depression, since the people around us do not have the tools to be able to comfort us, so it is important to learn how to soothe yourself. When we grieve we often think about what we have lost and not about what we have gained. However, with each loss comes a learning experience. This exercise will help you reflect on this and give you strategies for self-soothing.

The first step in the process is to breathe. This will help you to calm you and increase oxygen to your brain.

Then, answer the following questions:

1. What did I learn from this person or experience?
2. How can I show appreciation for what I've learned?
3. How will that reflection and gratitude make me a stronger person?
4. What tools did I learn as a result of this loss?
5. How can I rebuild my life based on this experience?



*Exercise:*

# POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER THERAPY



## IMPORTANT

If you are suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) then it is important to seek professional help. Please see our resource section at the end of this guide for links to organizations that can support you.

## ABOUT THIS EXERCISE

This exercise is designed to help journalists suffering from PTSD to establish a functional routine in their everyday life, which is often difficult for those suffering from PTSD. It is not a substitute for long-term psychological support.

PTSD occurs as the result of a life-altering event someone is unable to overcome, which subsequently results in trauma. If the impact of that trauma is not treated, the person will develop severe stress, and in three weeks to three months, they will develop PTSD. A trained psychotherapist will be able to provide you with the tools you need to work through the trauma.

If you are currently unable to access a psychotherapist and are looking for a short-term solution to treat the symptoms of PTSD you can use the exercise below as well as other exercises in this guide, including [acute stress management](#) and [insomnia management](#).

## ❓ HOW TO DO THE EXERCISE

The aim of this exercise is to help you sustain a functional everyday life. This requires a balance between the needs of your body, your mind, your emotions, and your social and financial needs. Routines are especially important in times of crisis.

## Establishing a routine



1. After you get up in the morning, allow yourself a quiet moment to relax while you're having breakfast. By getting up 20 minutes earlier than usual, you'll feel less stressed throughout the day because you started the day calmly. You can also start the day by listening to music that puts you in a good mood or by dancing.
2. Start working at the same time every day. If you work from home, set a work schedule.
3. Remember that your brain, especially when you're working on a computer, can focus for a maximum of two hours, so take a ten to 15 minute break every two hours. We often don't take breaks because we feel like we're wasting time and we're afraid we won't be able to finish pending tasks. However, taking breaks will actually make you more productive.
4. Respect mealtimes and drink enough water, as hunger and dehydration produces stress and anxiety.
5. After you finish work, spend at least 30 to 45 minutes doing something you enjoy, such as listening to music, watching TV (something that's not violent or connected to your work), or playing with your children or pets.
6. Get enough sleep.
7. Don't use cell phones or tablets at least one hour before going to bed. If you're expecting an important message from work, activate notification sounds for important messages only. That will stop you from constantly checking your phone.
8. If possible, try to include physical exercise in your routine.



You can download the exercise in PDF format [here](#).

*Learn more*

# ABOUT DIFFERENT KINDS OF ABUSE



Abuse, whether it is psychological, physical, sexual, economic, or digital, is violence. Those who attack feel threatened and they are motivated by fear. This chapter looks in greater depth at the different types of abuse.

## TYPES OF ABUSE

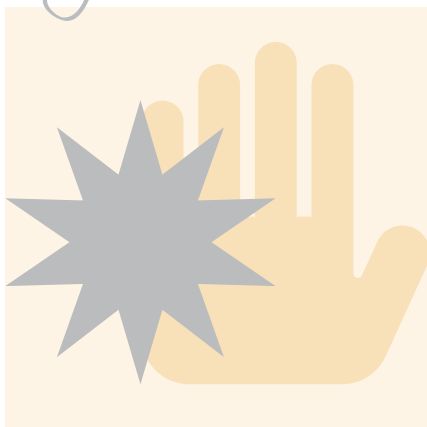
### → Psychological abuse



This is the most common form of abuse and the root cause of all other forms of abuse. It might start with throwaway comments or actions that make us feel small, which may become increasingly violent, frequent, and hurtful over time. The attacker's intention is to make the victim feel afraid, mirroring their own sense of fear and unworthiness, in order to regain a false sense of value and control.

There are many examples of psychological abuse. This is a category that may include governments that target specific groups or domestic abusers who are afraid of their partners. Abusers feel less worthy than their targets, so they seek to address the perceived power imbalance by pointing out their partner's alleged failings. Over time, the victim begins to lose self-confidence and the abuser achieves their goal by asserting superiority over their target.

### → Physical abuse



Physical abuse occurs when victims feel they cannot defend themselves, due to physical reasons or a fear of inflicting harm. If violence is preceded by psychological abuse, victims often believe they are to blame for provoking the abuser.

Governments and criminal organizations may inflict psychological abuse, such as threats, which may escalate to physical abuse, murder, or unlawful arrest. Unfortunately, journalists are all too familiar with this kind of abuse.

## *Sexual abuse*



Sexual abuse is always about perpetrators obtaining something they believe they cannot have or something they fear possessing. Abusers usually choose a victim that can be controlled both physically and psychologically, someone who may be or appear vulnerable, which allows them to revert their feelings of insecurity by asserting power over the victim.

## *Economic abuse*



Economic abuse implies total control over the victim. The ultimate goal is to prevent the victim from leaving by removing their security net and isolating them from family and friends, which leaves victims at the abuser's mercy.

# SUGGESTED RESOURCES

The following resources have been created by the Coalition Against Online Violence. They are reviewed regularly to ensure they are up to date.

## DIGITAL SAFETY SUPPORT

The Coalition Against Online Violence

[Secure your online data](#)

[Secure your accounts](#)

## EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

The Coalition Against Online Violence

[Emergency assistance](#)

## MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

The Coalition Against Online Violence

[Psychosocial support](#)

## NEWSROOM SUPPORT

The Coalition Against Online Violence

[Resources for newsrooms](#)

The International Women's Media Foundation

[A guide to protecting newsrooms and journalists](#)

[against online violence](#)

## PHYSICAL SAFETY GUIDANCE

The Coalition Against Online Violence

[Physical security support](#)



# A MENTAL HEALTH GUIDE FOR JOURNALISTS FACING ONLINE VIOLENCE

