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REWRITING MEDIA NARRATIVES ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Emotional Regulation and flexibility

Professional Learning Suite
For Journalists and Communication Professionals

Section: MENTAL HEALTH

Module No.8

by: INDEPCIE

INDEPCIE

Table of Contents

01 Why this subject matters

02 Learning Outcomes

03 Definitions

04 Psychological and Neurolinguistic Mechanisms

05 Typical Errors in Journalistic Practice

06 Impact on Media Narratives on Gender-Based Violence

07 Positive reframing

08 Case study

09 Practical exercises and Checklist

10 Resources



1. Why this subject matter

Emotional regulation and flexibility are critical competences for journalists and communication professionals when reporting on gender-based violence (GBV). Journalists often work in fast-changing environments characterised by time pressure, conflicting information, public scrutiny, and exposure to distressing events. In these situations, emotional reactions can influence judgement, decision-making, and communication.

Reporting on GBV may involve interviewing vulnerable individuals, covering breaking developments, responding to public criticism, or managing highly emotional content. Without effective emotional regulation, professionals may become overwhelmed, react impulsively, or struggle to maintain accuracy and perspective under pressure.

Psychological mechanisms such as stress responses, cognitive overload, emotional reactivity, and decision fatigue can affect how information is processed and how choices are made in fast-changing situations. Journalists who are aware of these processes are better equipped to remain focused, evaluate information critically, and adapt to unexpected developments.

Developing emotional regulation and flexibility allows professionals to:

- recognise and manage emotional responses during demanding reporting situations;
- maintain professional judgement under pressure;
- adapt effectively when circumstances, information, or priorities change;
- make balanced decisions despite uncertainty or emotional intensity.

In the context of journalism, these competences help professionals remain effective, accurate, and responsive while navigating the challenges of reporting on complex and sensitive issues.”

2. Learning Outcomes



01

Identify **emotional triggers**, stress responses, and regulation processes that influence journalistic decision-making in demanding reporting situations.

02

Apply **emotional regulation strategies** to maintain professional judgement, accuracy, and effectiveness under pressure.

03

Demonstrate **flexibility** and **adaptive thinking** when responding to rapidly changing, uncertain, or emotionally challenging reporting contexts.

3. Definitions

Emotional regulation refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotional responses in ways that support effective decision-making and professional performance. Rather than suppressing emotions, emotional regulation involves becoming aware of emotional reactions and responding to them constructively, particularly in situations characterised by pressure, uncertainty, or conflict.

Emotional flexibility complements this process by enabling individuals to adjust their thoughts, behaviours, and emotional responses according to changing circumstances. Flexible professionals are able to reassess situations, incorporate new information, and modify their approach when necessary, avoiding rigid thinking or impulsive reactions.

In journalism, these competences are especially important when covering sensitive or fast-moving stories. Reporters often work under tight deadlines, face public scrutiny, and encounter emotionally demanding situations that require both clear judgement and adaptability.

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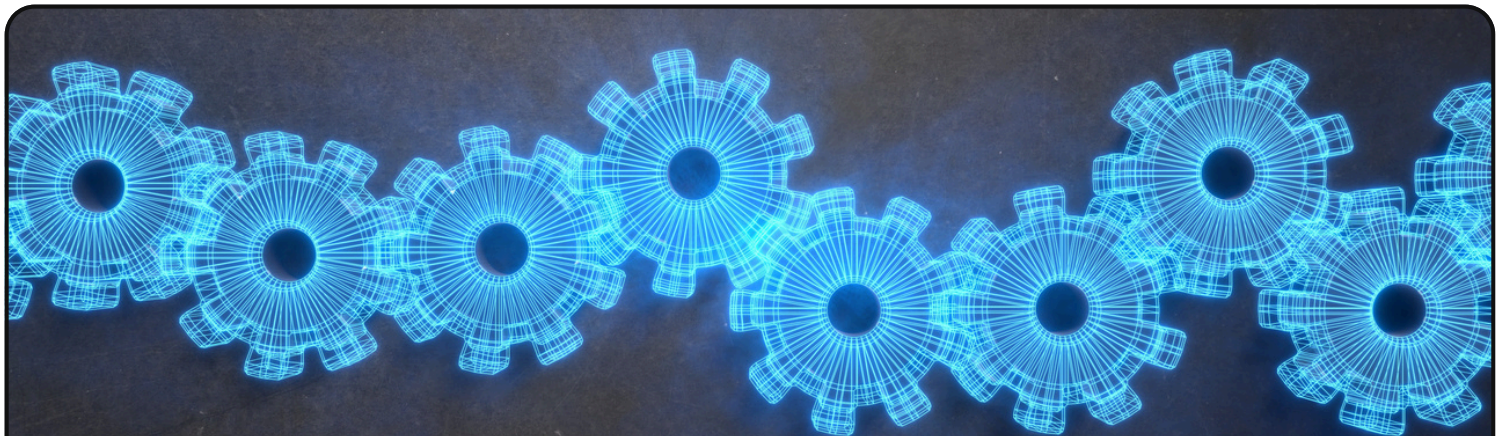
4. Psychological and Neurolinguistic Mechanisms

Journalists working under pressure are influenced by a range of psychological and cognitive processes that affect how information is interpreted and how decisions are made. Stressful situations activate physiological and emotional responses that can narrow attention, reduce cognitive flexibility, and increase the likelihood of reactive behaviour.

One common mechanism is cognitive narrowing, which occurs when individuals focus intensely on immediate concerns while overlooking alternative perspectives or relevant contextual information. Similarly, emotional hijacking can occur when emotions such as fear, frustration, anger, or anxiety temporarily dominate decision-making processes, making it more difficult to evaluate information objectively.

Another important factor is decision fatigue. Journalists covering breaking news or rapidly evolving events often make multiple decisions in a short period of time.



As mental resources become depleted, judgement may become less consistent and more vulnerable to impulsive choices.

At the same time, cognitive flexibility plays a protective role. The ability to reconsider assumptions, adapt to new evidence, and tolerate uncertainty helps professionals remain effective when circumstances change unexpectedly. Developing awareness of these mechanisms is an important step towards improving professional performance in demanding reporting environments.

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5.Typical Errors in Journalistic Practice



Difficult situations do not automatically lead to poor decisions, but unmanaged emotional responses can increase the risk of professional errors. Under pressure, journalists may react before fully verifying information, allow frustration to influence editorial choices, or become overly attached to an initial interpretation of events.

Another common challenge is resistance to change when new information emerges. In fast-moving situations, flexibility requires journalists to revise assumptions and adapt their reporting accordingly. However, emotional investment in a particular narrative may make this process more difficult.

Tension can also arise during interviews, editorial meetings, or interactions on social media. When emotional reactions are not properly managed, communication may become defensive, confrontational, or less effective. In all these situations, emotional regulation helps maintain professionalism, while flexibility supports adaptation and problem-solving.

6. Impact on Media Narratives on Gender-Based Violence

The way journalists manage emotions under pressure can significantly influence the quality of reporting on gender-based violence. When emotional reactions dominate decision-making, there is a greater risk of focusing on dramatic elements, overlooking relevant context, or prioritising speed over accuracy. These effects are often not the result of intentional misconduct, but of unmanaged stress and reduced cognitive flexibility during the reporting process.

Stress and uncertainty may also encourage reactive reporting practices, particularly when information is incomplete or rapidly changing. In such situations, journalists may unintentionally amplify conflict, reinforce confusion, or contribute to public misunderstanding.

By contrast, emotionally regulated and adaptable professionals are better equipped to maintain perspective, verify information carefully, and make balanced editorial decisions. This contributes to more accurate reporting and a more informed public discussion of gender-based violence.

7. Positive reframing

Emotionally regulated journalism is not about eliminating emotions from reporting; rather, it is about ensuring that emotions do not compromise professional judgement. Effective journalists recognise emotional pressure without allowing it to dictate their actions.

In practice, this involves pausing before reacting, maintaining focus during periods of uncertainty, and remaining open to new information even when it challenges previous assumptions. It also requires the ability to respond constructively to criticism, unexpected developments, and changing circumstances.

Professionals who cultivate emotional flexibility are better prepared to navigate complex reporting environments. They remain focused on accuracy, adapt when necessary, and continue to make thoughtful decisions even when working under significant pressure.

Emotional regulation and flexibility should be viewed as professional competences that enhance journalistic performance rather than as personal traits that individuals either possess or lack.





8. Case study

"A journalist covering a high-profile gender-based violence case receives conflicting information from social media, eyewitnesses, and official sources. Editors request immediate updates while public reactions online become increasingly hostile and emotional. As new information emerges throughout the day, some previously reported details are called into question."

Discussion

- What emotional pressures is the journalist experiencing in this situation?
- How might stress influence judgement and decision-making?
- What risks arise from reacting too quickly to new developments?
- Which emotional regulation strategies could help maintain professionalism and accuracy?
- How can flexibility improve reporting when circumstances change unexpectedly?



9. Practical Exercises

01

Breaking News Under Pressure

Objective:
To develop awareness of emotional reactions and decision-making challenges that arise when reporting on rapidly evolving and emotionally demanding situations.

Duration: 40 minutes

Materials:
- Breaking news scenario handout
- Decision Log Worksheet
- Pens or laptops



Instructions (step-by-step):

1. Participants receive a fictional breaking-news scenario involving a high-profile gender-based violence case. The scenario includes incomplete information, conflicting witness statements, and increasing public attention on social media.

2. Individually, participants review the information and identify the immediate decisions they would need to make as journalists. They record their responses in a Decision Log Worksheet.

3. After five minutes, the facilitator provides new information that changes some aspects of the story and introduces additional pressure, such as editorial deadlines, social media criticism, or contradictory official statements.

4. Participants review their initial decisions and discuss:
   - Which decisions they would keep.
   - Which decisions they would change.
   - What emotional reactions they experienced during the exercise.
   - How those reactions influenced their judgement.

5. In small groups, participants compare their approaches and identify strategies for remaining accurate, calm, and adaptable when circumstances change unexpectedly.

Expected Output:
A completed Decision Log Worksheet identifying emotional pressures, decision-making challenges, and adaptive responses.

Debriefing / Reflection Questions:

- Which aspects of the scenario generated the greatest pressure?
- How did new information affect your initial decisions?
- Which emotional reactions were most difficult to manage?
- What strategies helped maintain professional judgement?
- How can journalists remain flexible without sacrificing accuracy?

9. Practical Exercises

02
Managing Emotional Reactions in the Newsroom

Objective: To recognise emotional reactions that arise during journalistic work and practice strategies for maintaining professional judgement under pressure.

Duration: 45 minutes

Materials:

- Scenario cards describing challenging newsroom situations
- Reflection worksheet
- Flipchart or whiteboard

Instructions (step-by-step):

1. Participants are divided into small groups and receive a series of realistic newsroom scenarios involving uncertain reporting situations. Examples may include:
    - Receiving hostile comments after publishing a story.
    - Covering a high-profile gender-based violence case under tight deadlines.
    - Discovering that previously reported information is inaccurate.
    - Managing pressure from editors while information is still incomplete.
2.

2. For each scenario, participants identify:
    - The emotions that a journalist might experience.
    - The potential impact of those emotions on decision-making.
    - The risks of reacting impulsively.
    - Strategies for maintaining professionalism and accuracy.
    -
3. Groups discuss how emotional regulation and flexibility can help journalists adapt to each situation while continuing to perform effectively.

4. Participants compare different responses and identify which approaches are most likely to support balanced decision-making.

Expected Output:
A completed worksheet outlining emotional challenges, potential risks, and practical regulation strategies for each scenario.

Debriefing / Reflection Questions:

- Which situations generated the strongest emotional reactions?
- How can stress influence journalistic judgement?
- What is the difference between reacting and responding professionally?
- Which strategies help maintain flexibility when circumstances change?
- How can emotional regulation improve reporting quality in demanding situations?

9. Practical Exercises

03
Adapt and Respond

Objective:
To practice emotional regulation, flexibility, and decision-making skills in a realistic reporting scenario involving uncertainty, time pressure, and changing information.

Duration: 45–50 minutes

Materials:
- Scenario description
- Role cards (journalist, editor, communications officer, eyewitness, social media manager)
- Optional: recording device (phone)

Instructions (step-by-step):
1. Participants are assigned different professional roles involved in the coverage of a developing gender-based violence case.
2. The facilitator presents an initial scenario and asks participants to discuss how they would approach the story.
3. Throughout the exercise, the facilitator introduces unexpected developments, such as:

- New evidence contradicting previous information.
- Increased pressure from editors to publish quickly.
- Critical reactions on social media.
- A key source withdrawing from the story.
- Conflicting information from official sources.

4. Participants must continuously adapt their decisions while maintaining accuracy, professionalism, and emotional control.
5. At the end of the exercise, participants review the decisions they made and identify moments where emotional regulation and flexibility influenced the outcome.

Expected Output:
A short action plan describing how the team adapted to changing circumstances and managed pressure throughout the reporting process.

Debriefing / Reflection Questions:

1. Which developments created the greatest pressure?
2. How did participants adapt when circumstances changed?
3. Which emotional reactions were most difficult to manage?
4. What strategies helped maintain professional judgement?
5. How can journalists remain flexible without compromising accuracy or ethical standards?

Checklist time!

Before making an important reporting or editorial decision, ask:

- Am I reacting emotionally or responding professionally?
- Have I taken sufficient time to verify the information before acting?
- Is stress, frustration, or external pressure influencing my judgement?
- Have I considered alternative interpretations of the situation?
- Am I remaining open to new information that may change my understanding of the story?
- Have I adapted appropriately to changing circumstances or emerging evidence?
- Am I prioritising accuracy and professional standards despite time pressure?
- Could my current emotional state affect communication with sources, colleagues, or audiences?
- Have I paused to reflect before making a significant decision?
- Does my response contribute to effective, balanced, and responsible reporting?

Resources

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Authors

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