

## News Media Engagement: Victim Autonomy and Choice

It is always the victim's choice whether or not to participate in an interview, whether in the breaking news phase of a mass violence incident (MVI) or the long-term aftermath. In making this decision, it's important to be aware of potential consequences of your choice, both negative and positive:

- ⇒ **Your personal safety.** An environment for media interviews that is private and safe is very important, as well as the option to have a family member, or Victim Service Professional (VSP), accompany you to the interview. Caution should be taken in viewing social media hashtags as reliable sources of information about the MVI.
- ⇒ **Your privacy and confidentiality.** Once you are identified by name, often accompanied by photographic and broadcast images, it becomes part of the public record. This is an important choice that, once made, cannot be changed.
- ⇒ **Potential trauma and stress.** Media interviews can be stressful to victims. This is understandable because during the course of the interview you will likely be talking about what you might have seen, heard, or experienced during the mass violence incident. These images or thoughts may serve as reminders of the trauma, and you may even feel as though you are reliving the experience. However, you can limit the amount of potential stress by being prepared; being accompanied by a family member, friend or VSP; and establishing any boundaries you need for the interview. Talking to journalists can sometimes ease the trauma by validating your personal experiences; or it can add to problems by asking you to relive a traumatic experience. While careful preparation can ease some potential stress, you should be aware of how the trauma of victimization can be either increased or decreased by speaking to the media.
- ⇒ **Increasing awareness about the impact of MVIs.** Any time you speak publicly about your experiences as an MVI victim, it helps everyone understand the devastating impact of MVIs on victims, their families and friends, and the communities in which they occur. Such public awareness can increase support for you and other victims of the MVI, as well as increase efforts to prevent additional MVIs from occurring in the future.
- ⇒ **The impact on any criminal case(s) related to the MVI.** Anything you say in the media can be used in a criminal investigation. There may be times when it is not advisable to give interviews, such as during a trial, or when it is against court rules to give interviews, such as when a judge issues a "gag order" during a trial.

*The NMVC is grateful to victim advocate Anne Seymour and to both Bruce Shapiro and Elana Newman of the DART Center for Journalism & Trauma for their collaboration on this tip sheet.*



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