

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRINT & BROADCAST JOURNALISTS

1. Expand sources beyond police and courts.

Health departments and coroner's offices are good sources of homicide data. Hospital admission data, though not always available for a breaking story, can help reporters put crime and its consequences in perspective. Other social agency employees and community residents have information about neighborhood life pertinent to crime stories. Reporters need to cultivate these sources the same way they cultivate the local beat cops.

2. Provide context for crime in regular reporting.

In almost every area of news — sports, business, politics, entertainment — general information is integrated with spot reports and the news makes sense of events for audiences by placing them in a larger context, if not in the same article, then with additional graphics or sidebars or standing reports. Stories on crime and youth could be treated with equal depth and breadth.

3. Bolster enterprise and increase investigative journalism.

This recommendation requires adequate investment in the practice of journalism. Reporters need the time and resources to cultivate sources, investigate leads, and identify the connections between seemingly isolated events. They need support for understanding the patterns in a community so that they recognize when an event is important *and* interesting, not just interesting.

4. Balance stories about crime and youth with stories about youth in general.

News organizations must pull back their lens to get a broader picture of what else young people are doing. When it comes to youth, violence is as prominent in the news as education. This exaggerates the rate of violence, particularly since 52 million young people go to school but only 125,000 are arrested for violent crimes each year. What issues affect them? What other newsworthy activities are they engaged in?

5. Conduct periodic audits of news content and share the results with readers and viewers.

Newspapers and television newsrooms should periodically pause to examine their content. An audit would look beyond the evening ratings and sales numbers to ask the question: If the only information our readers and viewers got was from our news, what would they know about youth and violence? What wouldn't they know? Assess whether the news gives readers and viewers enough information to deliberate their community's problems.

6. Examine the story selection process, and use restraint when necessary.

Who qualifies as newsworthy in the newsroom? Who doesn't? Of course, news outlets cannot stop telling unusual stories, but they need not tell every one, thereby overwhelming readers and viewers with a cumulative misrepresentation, especially when it means there is not room for less sensational but more important news. Is perceived victim "worthiness" the unspoken criteria for whether a murder is selected for the news? Reporters should ask themselves: Who qualifies as a worthy victim in my newsroom? Who doesn't? If reporters limit themselves to reporting what just happened without considering how that crime fits into larger patterns, the news is doomed to be distorted.