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## UNIT 15 REPORTING HEALTH AND EDUCATION

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### 15.0 INTRODUCTION

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Health is a complex beat to cover. It requires a delicate balance of knowledge, research and sensitivity. In this unit we shall learn about the basics of health reporting and the state of health reporting in India. We shall also touch upon the

various aspects of reporting health, the many types of health reporting and the interlinking of various issues to health. We will also be discussing some basic medical terms that are commonly used and some common mistakes committed while reporting health.

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## 15.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

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At the end of this unit you will be able to:

- appreciate the basic aspects and the significance of health and education reporting. You will be able to understand
- identify the challenges faced by health and education reporters and also the opportunities at hand. Reporting and the things to keep in mind while covering the two beats
- differentiate between sensational reporting and that which focuses on quality and relevance of content. This unit will allow you to grasp the format and essentials of reporting a health and education story in a responsible, informed and balanced manner

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## 15.2 HEALTH REPORTING - THE BASICS

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Reporting health may at the first glance appear like a simple thing to do. But a closer look would reveal the vastness and depth of this subject. When you are covering health related news, you will be disseminating information that will not just affect the general public but also medical professionals and even the government. Health is a very significant part of government policy making and policy makers often depend on information they receive from professional media persons. So the information being given has to be precise, correct, sensitive and reliable. There is very little scope of carelessness while reporting health. There is a vast amount of health related information in public domain and not all of it is reliable. In fact a lot of this information could be speculative and incorrect. It is the duty of a health reporter to be both sensitive and objective in approach and to never give in to the temptation of sensationalism.

Health reporting can be of varied types with different aspects to be covered such as:

- Public and Community Health
- Disease Outbreaks
- Health Policy
- Business
- Health Infrastructure
- Corruption and Ethical matters
- Consumer health
- Drugs and Diseases
- Factors affecting health

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## 15.3 HEALTH REPORTING IN INDIA

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Health is a controversial issue in India. With a population of over 1 billion people, widespread poverty and lack of adequate infrastructure, health related issues/problems are common and widespread. While there are countless opportunities for journalists in the field of health, the standard of reporting is often poor. Faced with a time constraint, most journalists are in a hurry to file the story which gives them little time to do proper research. The lack of a comprehensive understanding of the issue prevents them from covering the news in a relevant manner. There are very few specialised courses in the field of medical journalism to educate and sensitise aspiring reporters. Poor research inevitably leads to transmission of wrong information to the public which in the case of health is extremely dangerous. The skill and knowledge gaps and lack of objectivity are plaguing medical journalism in India. Health in spite of its immense significance doesn't seem to be a priority beat for journalists in India. In fact, few journalists specialise in health reporting. Mostly it is taken up when a pressing public health issue like a disease outbreak comes to the fore. Health reporting in India hasn't really been able to develop as a full-fledged beat. The need of the hour is to understand the importance of health as a subject and to greatly expand the horizon of health reporting.

### Check Your Progress 1

**Note:** 1) Use the space given below for your answer  
2) Compare your answer with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. What are the issues plaguing health reporting in India?

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2. What is the need of the hour in context of health reporting in India?

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## 15.4 THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE STARTING HEALTH REPORTING

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Reporting health cannot be approached casually. Usually, for a novice treading in this field, things will seem very complex to understand. Without proper understanding of the issue, it is impossible for any reporter to convert the information into an understandable form for laymen audience. The reproduction of information has to be in palatable form which is easy to grasp for readers who have no or little understanding of health related issues and terms. Before you start reporting health, you must make sure that you develop a clear understanding of the functioning of the health set up. You must also acquaint yourself with the various terms and procedures that are mentioned or used commonly. Be careful not to take anything for granted and make sure you double check the information provided to you.

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## 15.5 SOME BASIC HEALTH RELATED TERMS

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1. **Acute-** In medical context, this means “of severe, sudden but short duration”
2. **AIDS-** Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
3. **Allergy-** Adverse reaction to a foreign substance in the form of sneezing, rash, bronchitis, fever etc
4. **Anaemia-** Decrease in concentration of red blood cells / haemoglobin. Causes weakness and paleness
5. **Antibiotic-** Drug group that kills bacteria
6. **Appendicitis-** Inflammation of the appendix
7. **Asthma-** Lung condition characterised by difficulty in breathing, coughing and wheezing
8. **BCG-** Bacillus Calmette Guerin- vaccination for Tuberculosis
9. **Bronchi/ Bronchial-** Connecting passageway to lungs
10. **Bronchitis-** Inflammation of bronchi
11. **Buccal cavity-** Mouth cavity
12. **Chronic-** Severe and of long duration. As opposed to acute
13. **Cirrhosis-** Liver condition, where it hardens and shrinks and stops functioning normally
14. **Cognition-** More complex mental functioning like insight, memory, intelligence, judgement
15. **Coma-** a persistent unconscious state
16. **CPR-** Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation – Combined resuscitation of the lungs and heart
17. **Dementia-** Total or partial loss of personality and other mental functions (no psychosis)
18. **Dermatitis-** Inflammation of skin (due to various reasons)
19. **Diabetes-** Condition of having persistent high blood sugar.
20. **ECG-** Electrocardiogram. Electronic recording of the activity of heart to detect abnormalities
21. **Epilepsy-** Convulsions due to abnormal electrical discharges in the brain
22. **Febrile-** Fever
23. **Fracture-** Breaking of bone
24. **Gallstones:** Accumulation of hardened deposits in the gall bladder
25. **Gastritis-** Inflammation of stomach lining
26. **Haematuria:** Blood in Urine
27. **Haemoglobin:** Iron containing protein found in red blood cells. Carries Oxygen to the cells
28. **Haemorrhage:** Loss of blood from body. Could be internal or external
29. **Heart Attack:** Acute onset of disturbance of heartbeat rhythm
30. **Hepatitis:** Liver inflammation due to alcohol consumption or viral infection

31. **HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)**- Virus which infect the immune system and impedes its functioning
32. **Hypertension**- Blood Pressure above normal
33. **Hypothermia**: Below normal body temperature which may be life threatening
34. **Inflammation**- Body's reaction to injury or infection. Sign include localised redness, heat, tenderness and swelling
35. **Insomnia**- Inability to Sleep
36. **Insulin**- Hormone produced by pancreas to convert sugar into energy. Lacking or low in diabetics
37. **Jaundice**- Yellow discolouration of skin and eyes due to liver disease
38. **Meningitis**- Inflammation of the three protective layers of the brain, the meninges
39. **Nausea**- Unpleasant feeling in the stomach region
40. **Oedema**- Fluid accumulation in the tissues
41. **Paralysis**: Lack of movement in any part of the body due to nerve damage
42. **Pneumonia**: Infection of the lung tissue
43. **Pulmonary**: Pertaining to the lung or bronchial system
44. **Sepsis**- Infection
45. **Spleen**- Organ in the upper left abdominal area. It is a part of the immune system and is prone to trauma
46. **Sputum**- Phlegm
47. **Tetanus**- Bacterial infection beginning from wound which have not been cleaned properly. Can cause paralysis
48. **Tuberculosis (TB)**- Bacterial infection of the lungs or kidneys.
49. **Urological**- Pertaining to the bladder, kidney or urinary system
50. **Virus**- An infective particle which requires host cells to reproduce. Cannot be destroyed by anti-biotics

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## 15.6 DIFFERENT TYPES OF HEALTH REPORTING

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### 15.6.1 Reporting on Disease Outbreaks

Disease outbreaks are the most common form of health reporting in the Indian scenario. Since during an outbreak, the general atmosphere is of anxiety and panic, the reporter must take care not to have any element of sensationalism or drama in the report. Disease outbreaks especially during the initial period make important news because there is a general sense of eagerness among the public to gather maximum information. In case the disease is new or lesser known, the research aspect also comes into play and gives the journalists a good opportunity to make the coverage comprehensive and informative. News related to disease outbreaks must be reported in a very responsible manner that the facts provided are not ambiguous or incorrect. Scientific and social perspective has to be combined to make the news relevant in a broader sense.

Things to keep in mind while reporting disease outbreaks:

- Information provided needs to be precise with no ambiguity
- Important questions to ask during the initial stages of disease include
  - What are the major symptoms of the disease?
  - When is it important to see a doctor?
  - What is the nature of the disease causing pathogen?
  - How is the pathogen being transmitted?
  - Who is at risk?
  - What are the precautions to be taken?
  - What are the short term and long term effects of the disease?
  - What are the important precautions to be taken?
  - What environmental factors are affecting the outbreak?
  - Dispelling of myths.
  - Line of treatment.
- The answers to these questions must be sought through relevant and reliable sources. Medical experts from recognised institutions, renowned medical practitioners, drug and vaccine companies, scientists, health workers will provide genuine and precise information.
- Different environmental factors can affect the rate or extent of outbreak. This gives the journalist an opportunity to provide a wider focus to the story.
- If the disease is new or there is little information about the outbreak, it is best not to give predictions based on assumptions and wait for researchers and scientists to provide definite information and details.
- The course of the outbreak should also be noted. Precautionary measures should be repeatedly stressed.
- Post the outbreak, there should be the time for retrospection and lessons learnt.

### 15.6.2 Reporting on Lifestyle Diseases

Lifestyle diseases are diseases related with the way people live their lives. The way of life has changed considerably and the effect on health has begun to show. Smoking, drinking, drug abuse, sedentary lifestyle, unhealthy eating are some of the major causes of lifestyle diseases. The most common lifestyle diseases are heart related, along with obesity, diabetes and liver issues. Asthma, stroke, depression, osteoporosis are other diseases can be categorised as lifestyle diseases. Diseases due to air pollution have also become important lately. Lifestyle diseases hold relevance in the modern day for the enormous implications they have. Different categories of lifestyle diseases are affecting different economic and social strata of the society. Reporting lifestyle diseases will require the journalist to broaden

his/her horizon and look at the interlinked multidimensional aspects. These diseases are huge burden on economy and also drain the demographic dividend. When reporting lifestyle disease, there must be a clear stress on the causative factors, so as to raise awareness among people and to help them make better and healthier life choices.

### 15.6.3 Reporting on Sexual Assault

Reporting on sexual assault demands special consideration and sensitivity. The criminal aspect of it will be left to crime reporters but sexual assault can have a number of health implications including psychological scarring. Reporting the health aspect of sexual violence will require the reporter to work closely with the medical team taking care of the victim. No other branch of health reporting will require the journalist to be this careful and sensitive in reporting. The victim needs to be given a lot of space and time and be allowed to tell the story their way. A lot of ethical considerations have to be kept in mind while reporting sexual violence. Care must be taken to give out no personal and private details of the victim and her family until the victim wants to be publicly named. No comment must be made about the character, habits, clothing or nature of the victim which might lead to victim blaming in any sense. It is of paramount importance to keep the welfare of the victim above everything else. The story must never compromise on the safety of the survivor. The health report related to sexual violence should be so framed that it raises the awareness level of the people while realising the ethical implication. In case of assault on minors, the story should stress on ways to prevent such incidences from happening, asking parents and guardians to make sure that children realise the difference between ‘good touch’ and ‘bad touch’. The story should never carry a judgemental tone and be objective, yet sensitive.

### 15.6.4 Reporting on Mental Health

Mental health is a subject that has only recently started gathering prominence in the field of health reporting and otherwise. People are becoming increasingly aware and sensitive about the broad spectrum of mental illness and their effects on the suffering individual. Gradually the stigma has also begun to recede. A lot of it can be attributed to positive handling of the issue by the media as the media has a very significant role in shaping public opinion. Even the most conservative estimates suggest that at least 5 percent of the populations suffers from some form of mental illness and this would roughly translate into 50 million people. And yet the focus on mental health is almost negligible and is limited to sensational cases being linked to violence or death. Mental health can range from mild depression to psychosis. One must take care to report mental health issues with consideration and sensitivity. In case the mental illness is not relevant to the story being reported, it should not be mentioned. When reporting on a mental health condition, make sure to get your facts verified. It is best to seek the help of a qualified medical professional rather than relying on hearsay. One must also take great care in using the right language. The focus should be on the person and the story must be framed in such a way as to remove the stigma around the mental illness. When reporting the story of a person with mental illness, the reporter must keep in mind that the illness is a part of the person’s life and not their defining character. Be specific in stating the type of mental illness rather than just pushing all kinds of mental issues under a broad category. Words like ‘mentally ill’, ‘abuse’, and ‘suffering’ should be avoided.

**Some common Mental Health Related terms:**

1. **Addiction** is a condition that causes the person to use a substance compulsively despite harmful consequences.
2. **Alcohol and substance use disorders** refer to the overuse of alcohol or drugs leading to effects that are detrimental to the individual's physical and mental health, or the welfare of others
3. **Asperger's syndrome** is one of a range of neurological disorders within the autism spectrum
4. **Autism** spectrum disorders are a range of complex developmental disorders that can cause problems with thinking, feeling, language and the ability to relate to others
5. **Bipolar disorder**, also commonly known as manic depression, is a brain disorder that causes shifts in a person's mood, energy and ability to function
6. **Depression** is a common and serious medical illness that causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed; it can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems
7. **Eating disorders** are illnesses in which people experience severe disturbances in their eating behaviours and related thoughts and emotions; anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder are the three main types
8. **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)** is an anxiety disorder in which people have recurring, unwanted thoughts, ideas or sensations (obsessions) that make them feel driven to do something repetitively (compulsions)
9. **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** is a psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, rape or other violent personal assault
10. **Schizophrenia** is a chronic brain disorder with symptoms that can include delusions, hallucinations, trouble with thinking and concentration, and lack of motivation.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- Note:** 1) Use the space given below for your answer  
2) Compare your answer with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. What are the important things to keep in mind while reporting disease outbreaks?

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2. What should a reporter be sensitive to while reporting sexual assault and mental health?

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## 15.7 CHALLENGES FOR HEALTH REPORTERS

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1. **Lack of in-depth understanding of issue** - Journalist learn on the job and the time constraint prevents them from doing proper in depth research in the subject. The pressure to file the story in a hurry may prevent the reporter from understanding all its aspects completely. Too many medical terms also make the story difficult to understand. Since the reporter has to act as a mediator between the medical professional and layman, his understanding of the issue is of prime importance. Until he understands the subject completely, he will not be able to simplify it to a palatable form for the reader.
2. **Lack of Data-** There is a dearth of adequate research and health related data in India for journalists to refer to. As mentioned above, the time constraint and pressure to file the story does not give the reporter enough time to do the research himself, and nor does he have the expertise. Paucity of correct data greatly impedes the work of a reporter. He has to rely on the data provided by the government, which might be incorrect or out dated. Without reliable data, it is difficult to lend credibility to the story.
3. **Uncooperative officials-** Officials in the government or hospitals are sometimes apprehensive of sharing facts with reporters or allowing them access to data. Inefficient officials may also prove to be a hindrance in reporting.
4. **Reluctance of patients to talk about the diseases that affects them, often fearing stigma-** There might be a general perception that reporters disregard the privacy of the patients and may divulge details which may jeopardise the image of the individual in public. Journalist need to be sensitive in such cases and gradually develop a rapport with the patients and their families. It would be easier for the patients to talk if they trust the reporter.
5. **Limited news sources-** News sources for health reporters are limited to hospitals, medical professionals, Government agencies and health related organisations.

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## 15.8 THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND FOR BETTER HEALTH REPORTING

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1. The stories should be information based which would help people and health care providers in making sensible and optimal treatment choices. They should be able to bridge the communication gap between the doctor and patient.
2. Maintain connect and relevance.
3. Stories should have an element of resonance. Stories which focus on people help establish connect with the audience rather than mere narration of facts. The reporter must try and make the story compelling to establish a strong human connect. To maintain the credibility of the report it should not stick to just one's person's opinion but the perspective of different people related to the case.
4. Focus on the human angle of the questions asked. Don't ask just facts.
5. Constructive use of social media can help in building a story well.

- 6. It is important to empathise be professional but sensitive.
- 7. Double check the facts. Government data alone cannot be trusted. Ground reality can be very different and must be verified before publishing the story.
- 8. Corruption and discrepancies may also become stories.
- 9. Evidence based coverage adds credibility to the story.

**Check Your Progress 3**

**Note:** 1) Use the space given below for your answer  
2) Compare your answer with those given at the end of this Unit.

- 1. What are the major challenges faced by health reporters?

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**15.9 EDUCATION REPORTING**

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Education beat encompasses within it a wide spectrum of subjects. Primary education, secondary education, college education, vocational education, minority education, special education, government policies on education, all of these would fall under the wide umbrella of education. With the passage of time, with the inclusion of areas such as home schooling, non-profit organisations working for education, education reform and education technology has led to the broadening of this field. Education has social and economic and even political implications and hence requires due attention from reporters and journalists. Education reporters have to inform the public about all aspects of education and at all levels, local, state and national. Education reporting needs to be done in a responsible, informed and balanced manner with adequate facts and statistics to back up the arguments that the reporter provides.

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**15.10 IDENTIFYING THE NEWS SOURCES**

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For education reporters, teachers or education professionals are usually the most reliable source of information. News releases, conferences on education and public relation professionals are also tapped as news sources. For political and policy aspects, usually the government agency at state or central level is contacted. For social aspects, non-profit organisations and institutions particularly dedicated to education may prove to be worthy news sources. Reporters today, also keep a tab on social media to get new ideas and feel the pulse of the public about a certain issue. They can also get in touch with students or parents to get feedback, opinions and suggestions. Academic researchers and think tanks can also provide very valuable insight into education and related issues. Apart from being sources of news, they can also lead to new story ideas.

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## 15.11 REQUISITES OF REPORTING EDUCATION

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To be able to be a good education reporter one must cultivate patience and discipline. You must be able to perceive an issue from different points of view to be able to write a balanced story. Education reporting would require a lot of research to be done before the actual story can be written. Statistics also play a crucial part in education reporting. Often, to present a compelling story, you will have to back up your argument with convincing data and statistics like literacy rates, graduation rates, dropout rates, teacher retention and vacancy rates. Sometimes comparison between these rates can bring forth significant trends and present a clear picture of the scenario. It is also necessary to pay attention to the details behind the data. For example, one cannot simply compare dropout or attendance rates between all schools without taking into account aspects like social background, economic status and demographics. However, too many facts will cause the reader to lose interest; hence a balance between facts and opinion is instrumental in a story covering education.

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## 15.12 WRITING A STORY ON EDUCATION

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Like all other stories, writing a story on education will also require you to pay attention to the basics. Irrespective of the beat, the five Ws- Who, What, Where, When, Why, must always be answered where possible. The news value and the inverted pyramid model must be kept in mind. The story should always be fair, balanced, concise and correct without elements of sensationalism. A story should not leave too many open ended questions for the reader. Vague terms, statements and phrases must be avoided. Care must be taken to not make the story one sided. Opinions of all concerned parties must be duly included in the story. Any claim must always be supported by evidence and figures.

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## 15.13 USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

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Social media is an avenue of unlimited possibilities if used wisely. Here is how you can use social media in Education Journalism:

- Use Google Alert to keep track of issues you are interested in.
- Expand your sources by searching for respected education professionals, publications, websites, organisations etc and follow them on social media to keep a track of important developments and get story ideas
- Follow online trends and campaigns closely
- Use websites like LinkedIn to widen professional horizon and make contacts
- Use apps like Banjo to get access to news around the world in real time

### Check Your Progress 4

**Note:** 1) Use the space given below for your answer

2) Compare your answer with those given at the end of this Unit.

1. What are the important things to keep in mind while writing a story on education?

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## 15.14 TRENDS IN EDUCATION

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The following are the major trends in education, each of which can lead to stories to be covered from different angles. Each of these heads is an issue that has challenges that are continually faced by the education system of the country. You may use these as the subjects of your education stories.

1. The Performance Gap
2. The School Choice
3. Early Childhood Education
4. Standards and Testing
5. Teacher Evaluation and Training
6. Reservation in Education
7. Educational Infrastructure
8. Role of Non-profit organizations
9. Digital Learning
10. Higher Education

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## 15.15 THE UNDER COVERED ISSUES

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While certain issue receive a lot of attention in news media, certain other may not be given due importance or remain under covered, in education the major under covered issues are

- Inequality
- Budgets and Funding
- Student and Teacher experiences
- Special Education
- College affordability and access
- Early Education

These are significant issues and should be given more coverage. Covering these issues will give a clearer picture of the state of education in the country and the various aspects it affects. Care should be taken not to compromise on quality in favour of popularity and maintain a balance.

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## 15.16 CHALLENGES TO EDUCATION REPORTERS

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Reporting education can be a challenging job. The major reason for this is lack of access to schools and colleges. Privacy concerns are often cited in order to bar entry of journalists inside the colleges and schools. This prevents the reporters from being able to put a human face to the story. Interaction with the students and teachers and being able to shoot inside classroom would help the story reach the

reader more deeply and effectively. Journalists reporting education must invest in building a personal rapport with teachers, individual students and people from the management to earn their trust and confidence and gain access to the institutions to be able to construct their story better.

The second challenge is pursuing in depth coverage. The time constraint and constant pressure makes the reporter unable to give ample time for research. This can compromise on the quality of story as certain angles may not be fully researched.

Expertise is the third challenge. Though the reporters in their course of experience may gain enough knowledge, subject matter expertise may often be lacking. This will prevent the reporter from gaining a comprehensive understanding of the issue herself, which will be reflected in the story.

Another concern relates to the increasing availability of a sophisticated array of audience analytics, which can sometimes create pressures to prioritise popularity over substance.

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## 15.17 FUTURE OF EDUCATION REPORTING

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The education beat presently is facing a challenging time and yet offers a great opportunity if one can overcome the challenge. The challenge is to survive the squeeze it is undergoing due to extraordinary weight age given by media to political news, especially in the Indian context. The education beat needs to firmly stand its ground to survive and subsequently has to reinvent itself to maintain connect with the news consumer. Education is a very important part of nation building and needs to be given the importance it deserves by the fourth estate. Journalists must take pride in the work that they are doing for it hold enormous significance for the future. As the news sources are proliferating for the public with the advent of the internet, the education beat must strive to carve a niche in all possible avenues. The journalists must also keep up with the change in education policy which is now in a state of dynamism. What happens at policy level will eventually trickle down to local level, so even when a reporter is covering local news on education, he is really covering national news. Resource and training problems have to be addressed as to make sure that these issues do not become impediments for the reporters in their work and high quality of the stories is always ensured. In favour of sensationalism and popularity, journalists or reporters should not be made less out of more and be given adequate time to gain expertise in the subject they feel interested in. There is also an urgent need for innovation in the way education news reaches people above and beyond the traditional sources for e.g. through content production business which can cover the key educational trends.

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## 15.18 LET US SUM UP

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This unit focused on two important beats that media covers. Both of them relate to the society at large and have a direct bearing on the community. Health reporting stressed on the nature, need and various aspects of health reporting to be focused on, the unit also emphasised the areas of health that are reported. You were also acquainted with the basic health terminology. Education reporting was the second part of the unit which highlighted the need and importance of this beat, identification of news sources, requisites and challenges of education reporting and how social

media can be used to make the stories better. Trends and future of education reporting were also discussed.

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## 15.19 FURTHER READINGS

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<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/unicef-bats-for-better-health-reporting-in-india-2771251/>

1. Basic Medical Terms guidelines- UTAS
2. <https://www.psychiatry.org/newsroom/reporting-on-mental-health-conditions>
3. <http://www.sciencemediacentre.co.nz/guidelines-for-science-health-reporting/>
4. <http://www.ewa.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/2016-05-10-state-of-beat-report.pdf>
5. <http://educationnext.org/the-future-of-education-journalism/>

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## 15.20 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

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Check Your Progress 1 : refer to 15.3

Check Your Progress 2 : refer to 15.6.1

Check Your Progress 2 : refer to 15.6.3

Check Your Progress 3 : refer to 15.7

Check Your Progress 4 : refer to 15.12 and 15.13