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Module – Psychological Resilience and Coping Strategies

1. Basic information

Module title: Psychological Resilience and Coping Strategies

Target group: Women who have survived or are currently experiencing gender-based violence, including women at different stages of recovery, as well as women seeking a better understanding of their reactions to stress and ways of coping with challenging life circumstances.

Duration: Approximately 60 minutes (self-paced completion of the content, including reflective tasks).

Format: Online (self-guided digital module)



2. Learning objectives

After completing this module, participants will be able to:

1. Recognise common signs of stress and psychological strain in everyday situations, as well as in situations related to gender-based violence.
2. Understand what psychological resilience is and how it relates to everyday stress and recovery.
3. Distinguish between strategies that provide short-term calming and those that support long-term recovery.
4. Reflect on personal boundaries and recognise when seeking support may be helpful.



3. Safety note

This module is educational in nature and is not a substitute for psychological support, counselling, or therapy. The content is designed to offer information and encourage reflection, in a way that respects your experiences and needs.

Participation in this module is entirely voluntary. You may go through the content at your own pace, skip any parts that do not feel right for you at this moment, or stop at any time.

If, during or after completing the module, you feel discomfort or distress, it is important to give yourself permission to pause and seek support in a way that feels safe and accessible to you.



4. Trainer / facilitator notes

This module is primarily designed as a self-guided online resource. If used in a facilitated or group setting, it is important to maintain an educational focus and clearly distinguish the module content from therapeutic work.

Facilitators should be mindful of participants' emotional safety, respect personal boundaries, and uphold each person's right to participate according to their own capacities. Sharing of personal traumatic experiences is not encouraged, and participants are not expected to disclose their experiences of violence.

If strong emotional reactions arise during group use, it is recommended to slow the pace, offer a pause, and, where appropriate, refer participants to available support options outside of the module.



5. Introduction

Experiences of violence often leave an impact on the body, thoughts, and emotions. After such experiences, many women notice that it is harder to relax, that they remain constantly on alert, or that they find it difficult to set boundaries and seek support.

This module explores psychological resilience as a way of better understanding these reactions and identifying approaches that may help in everyday functioning. It is not about having to manage everything alone, but about understanding what is happening and what may be helpful.



6. Key messages (4 short messages)

1. Resilience does not mean enduring everything – it means knowing when you need support.

2. Calming helps in the moment; recovery builds long-term strength.
3. Setting boundaries is part of self-care, not selfishness.
4. Resilience is not something we are born with – it is something we build.



7. Educational content

See Annex 1.



8. Practical tools

See Annex 2.



9. Rights awareness & support

Experiences of violence and prolonged stress are closely connected to fundamental human rights, including the right to safety, dignity, support, and recovery. Psychological resilience and coping strategies can help women recognise when their wellbeing or boundaries are being affected and when additional support may be needed.

Information on rights and available forms of support is addressed at the level of the overall platform and is not part of this module. Local and EU-relevant information will be available in a separate section of the platform.

Users can also access additional guidance through the HERizon chatbot and rights guide available on the platform.

If you feel overwhelmed during or after completing the module, seek support. Information on available support options can be found in a separate section of the platform.

10. Reflection prompts (for facilitators)

This module is primarily designed for self-guided online use. If used in a facilitated setting, the following questions may support professional reflection:

- How might this content be relevant to the specific group or context I am working with?
- Which aspects of psychological resilience and coping might require additional sensitivity or clarification?
- How can I ensure emotional safety and respect for boundaries when discussing this topic?

11. Evaluation

Below are several questions related to the content of this module. Their purpose is to support understanding of key concepts and distinctions covered in the module, such as psychological resilience, coping with stress, calming, and recovery.

The questions are not intended to assess you personally, but serve as a short conclusion to the module and an opportunity to reflect once more on the main messages you have explored.

See Annex 3.



12. Ethical & safety checklist

Ethical & Safety Checklist

- ✓ The module follows a trauma-informed approach.
- ✓ The content is designed to be safe, respectful, and non-intrusive.
- ✓ The module does not require participants to share personal traumatic experiences.
- ✓ Educational content is clearly distinguished from psychological counselling or therapy.
- ✓ Participants are reminded that they can pause, skip sections, or seek support if they feel overwhelmed.

13. Three real-life micro-scenarios

The module includes three real-life micro-scenarios designed to encourage reflection on psychological resilience through different ways of coping with stress, without imposing fixed or “correct” solutions.

While the WP2 template describes role-play-based scenarios for facilitated training contexts, the scenarios in this module have been adapted for self-guided online use. They retain the core purpose of strengthening practical judgement, self-protective thinking and awareness of available options, without requiring role-play or facilitator-led activities.

See Annex 4.



14. Instructional video

When we are under stress or pressure for a longer period of time, we often feel that something within us has changed. It may become harder to relax, we may feel tired more quickly, or we may notice that even small things take a lot of energy. During such periods, many women wonder whether something is “wrong” with them and why they feel different than before.

It is important to know that these reactions are common and understandable, especially after demanding or difficult experiences. They are not a sign of weakness, but an indication that the body and mind have been exposed to prolonged strain.

In this context, we talk about psychological resilience—not as a trait that we either have or do not have, but as a way of gradually adapting, recovering, and finding balance. Resilience is not about enduring everything, but about small shifts that help us feel more stable and safer in everyday life.

In this module, we explore the difference between calming and recovery, and how these two processes complement each other in coping with stress. It is important to remember that there is no single “right” way to cope with stress, nor one fixed path to recovery. What helps us can change over time, depending on our circumstances and on what is available to us in that moment.

This module and this video offer a framework for reflection, not ready-made answers. Take from them what feels meaningful to you at this time, and leave aside what does not. Moving at your own pace and respecting your own boundaries are part of self-care and part of resilience.

If, while reflecting on these topics, you feel overwhelmed, it is important to give yourself permission to pause and to seek support in a way that feels safe and accessible to you.



Annex 1

1. Psychological resilience

In everyday life, we often talk about resilience, especially when going through difficult or demanding periods. However, resilience is sometimes misunderstood as constant strength or endurance. Psychological resilience does not mean that we always have to be strong, but that we are able to cope with what is happening to us.

Psychological resilience can be compared to the immune system in physical health. Just as having a strong immune system does not mean that we will never get ill, psychological resilience does not mean that we will never experience stress or feel unwell. Rather, it means that after difficult or demanding situations, we are able to recover more easily and continue forward.

Psychological resilience can be seen in everyday situations – in how we deal with change, how we respond when things are difficult, and how we regain balance. In such moments, some people may pause, seek help, or adjust the way they take care of themselves, while others may remain stuck in a sense of overwhelm. Resilience does not mean that someone is stronger or better, but that they are quicker or more effective in using strategies that help them in that moment.

It is important to emphasise that resilience does not mean suppressing emotions or maintaining constant “strength.” Resilient people also experience sadness, fear, or fatigue, but they tend to find ways of coping with these feelings more quickly. The good news is that psychological resilience can be developed and strengthened through small, everyday changes and skills, which is the focus of this module.

How to develop psychological resilience

Psychological resilience is not a trait that we either have or do not have. It is built through the ways we think, act, and connect with others in everyday life. It does not develop through major changes, but through small, everyday actions that help us cope with stress and demands. The following areas do not describe how we should be but offer examples of what may help us regain a sense of balance.

Some approaches that may be helpful include:

1. Relying on other people

Psychological resilience is sometimes mistakenly understood as having to manage everything on our own. In fact, one characteristic of more resilient people is that they recognise earlier when they are struggling and are more willing to seek help. Talking to people we trust and seeking support can ease the burden of challenges and reduce the feeling that we have to endure everything alone.

2. Taking care of basic needs

During periods of stress, we often neglect basic needs such as sleep, rest, and movement, even though they are the foundation of psychological balance. When we give our bodies what they need, it becomes easier to cope with challenges and we feel less overwhelmed. Caring for basic needs is not a luxury, but an important part of resilience.

3. Finding activities that bring relief or enjoyment

Small activities that we enjoy can help us step away from worries for a moment and reduce tension. These moments of respite can help us feel calmer and return more easily to daily responsibilities. It is important to find activities that personally bring us a sense of relief.

4. Expressing personal needs and boundaries

When we do not express our needs, feelings of frustration or exhaustion often build over time. Clearly communicating what is important to us helps others understand us better and contributes to healthier relationships. Setting boundaries is not selfishness, but a form of self-care.

5. Focusing on what we can control

In difficult situations, it is easy to direct all our energy toward things we cannot change. Psychological resilience includes the ability to recognise what is within our control and what is not. Focusing on what we can influence can help reduce feelings of helplessness and bring greater clarity.

Tasks and reflection

These tasks are intended for personal reflection and learning. Participation is voluntary, and you may skip any part.

Think about a recent period when you felt under increased stress or pressure.

- Which of the areas described above was most helpful to you at that time?
- Is there an area that you currently pay the least attention to, but that might be helpful for you?

Choose one area from this section and think of one small step you could take over the next few days. This can be something very simple, such as a short conversation, taking a break to rest, or expressing a need more clearly. There is no right or wrong choice. The aim is simply to become more aware of what may help you.



2. Stress and everyday challenges

Stress is a natural response to situations that we experience as demanding or overwhelming. In everyday life, stress is common and sometimes difficult to avoid, especially when we have many responsibilities and little time to rest. A moderate level of stress can motivate us to act, but when stress lasts for a longer period of time, it can negatively affect our mood, body, and daily functioning.

How to recognise signs of stress

Signs of stress often appear gradually, which means they are not always easy to notice right away. Paying attention to these signs is the first step toward coping with stress more effectively.

Stress can show itself through:

- physical signs, such as fatigue, tension, headaches, or sleep problems
- emotional signs, such as irritability, nervousness, anxiety, or a loss of motivation
- cognitive signs, such as difficulties with concentration, memory, or decision-making

When these signs occur frequently or persist over a longer period of time, they may indicate a state of psychological overload. In such a state, the body and mind signal a need for a pause through increased fatigue, constant tension, concentration difficulties, or a sense of exhaustion. Recognising these signs is important so that we can respond in time and protect our wellbeing.

Important to remember

No one is immune to stress, and everyone can feel overwhelmed at times. Stress cannot be completely avoided, but we can learn to recognise it earlier and to cope with it in ways that are more supportive and helpful for us.

In situations of gender-based violence, resilience refers to the capacity to endure, adapt, and recover despite exposure to fear, control, and prolonged stress. It includes both the inner strengths women develop to survive harmful situations and the ability to rebuild wellbeing once safety and support are in place. Resilience does not mean the absence of stress, but the ability to recognise its effects and respond in ways that protect health, dignity, and autonomy.



Coping with stress – calming and recovery

When we are under stress, it is natural to look for ways to reduce tension and continue functioning. In such situations, it is important to distinguish between **calming** and **recovery**, as these two processes play different but equally important roles in coping with stress.

Calming helps the body and mind feel less overwhelmed in the moment. It allows us to slow down, regain a sense of steadiness, and create space for thinking. Calming strategies—such as mindful breathing, taking a short break, grounding, or focusing attention on the present moment—can be very helpful, especially when stress is intense or sudden. They do not solve the problem, but they help us become able to look at it.

However, there are also reactions that can bring quick relief primarily through avoidance or suppression. These may include constantly postponing dealing with a problem, excessive distraction, or withdrawing from others. While such reactions are understandable, especially when we are struggling, they often do not support recovery if they become the only way of coping with stress.

Recovery goes a step further than calming. It involves changes that reduce strain in the long term and help the body and mind restore energy. Recovery includes strategies mentioned earlier in relation to building psychological resilience—such as relying on the support of others, taking care of basic needs, setting boundaries, and focusing on what we can control. These steps may not bring immediate relief, but over time they reduce the accumulation of stress and help prevent challenging situations from recurring with the same intensity.

It is important to emphasise that calming and recovery are not opposites, but complementary processes. Calming is often the first and necessary step, while recovery helps ensure that stress does not continue at the same level. Understanding the difference between these two processes supports better decisions about what we need at a given moment.

Tasks and reflection

Think about a recent stressful situation (you do not need to go into details).

- What helped you calm down in that moment?
- Is there something that usually helps you feel less burdened when stress lasts longer?

Consider the difference between calming and recovery.

- Do you notice that during stressful periods you tend to rely more on quick calming, or do you also have space for recovery?

Think of one small thing you might do differently in a future stressful situation.



3. How to set personal boundaries

Personal boundaries help protect what is important to us—our time, energy, needs, and values. They are the foundation of healthy relationships, both with others and with ourselves. Boundaries are not meant to push people away, but to clearly communicate what is acceptable to us and what is not.

We can think of boundaries as the front door of a house: we decide who and what we allow inside, and what stays outside. When boundaries are unclear or not set, feelings of fatigue, frustration, and a sense of being disrespected often develop over time.

When boundaries are not set

Unclear or unexpressed boundaries often look like this:

- agreeing to obligations even when we are already exhausted
(e.g. taking on additional tasks at work or meeting friends when we actually need rest)
- doing things in order to avoid conflict or disappointing others
(e.g. agreeing to something that does not feel right because we do not want to hurt someone or “cause a problem”)
- allowing others to interfere in decisions that are important to us
(e.g. letting family members or a partner decide for us in personal or professional matters)

Such behaviour is understandable, especially when we fear others’ reactions or feel guilty about our own needs. However, in the long term it can lead to accumulated frustration, a sense of unfairness, and tension in relationships.

Why it can be difficult to stand up for ourselves

Many people worry that setting boundaries will hurt others, damage relationships, or make them appear selfish. As a result, they often choose a passive approach—keeping their needs to themselves and adapting to others. However, when we do not communicate our needs, we do not give others the opportunity to understand or respect them.

On the other hand, unexpressed dissatisfaction can sometimes build up and lead to sudden, aggressive reactions. This is why it is important to find a way of expressing ourselves that is neither passive nor aggressive.

Assertive boundary setting

Assertiveness means expressing our own needs clearly and calmly, while respecting the needs of the other person. It does not involve arguing, over-justifying, or withdrawing, but rather open and honest communication.

Examples of ways to set boundaries

Passive	<i>It's fine, I can do it.</i> (even though we are already exhausted or it does not suit us)	<i>It doesn't matter, whatever you want.</i>
Aggressive	<i>You always push everything onto me! You never think about me!</i>	<i>You never listen to me and you always decide on your own!</i>
Assertive	<i>I am currently overwhelmed and cannot take on an additional responsibility.</i>	<i>It is important to me that my opinion is also taken into account.</i>

When setting boundaries, it is important to:

- be aware of your own needs and feelings
- express them clearly, without blaming
- not expect others to “read our minds”
- accept that we cannot control others’ reactions

Setting boundaries is not a sign of selfishness, but a part of self-care and maintaining healthy relationships.



Tasks and reflection

Think of a situation in which it was difficult for you to stand up for yourself.

- Which way of responding felt closest to you at the time: passive, aggressive, or assertive?

Reflect on the areas of your life where personal boundaries are most often unclear (e.g. work, family, intimate relationships, time for yourself).

Think of one sentence that you could use in a real situation to clearly express your boundary.

Annex 2

8. Practical tools

This diagram provides a simple illustration of the difference between short-term calming and long-term recovery, and shows how, depending on the situation, we may move between different ways of coping with stress.

Decision tree – Psychological resilience: calming and recovery

START

I feel stressed or overwhelmed.

1. Recognition

I recognise that I am experiencing stress (in my body, emotions, or thoughts).

Question:

Do I first need calming in this moment?

- YES → I move to calming
- NO / I already feel calm → I move to recovery

2. Calming (short-term)

I use strategies that help me feel calmer right now

(e.g. breathing, taking a short break, withdrawing, distraction).

Outcome:

I feel calmer.

Question:

Has the situation that caused my stress begun to change?

- YES → I can continue with recovery
- NO → calming helps in the moment, but is not sufficient for recovery

→ Move to recovery

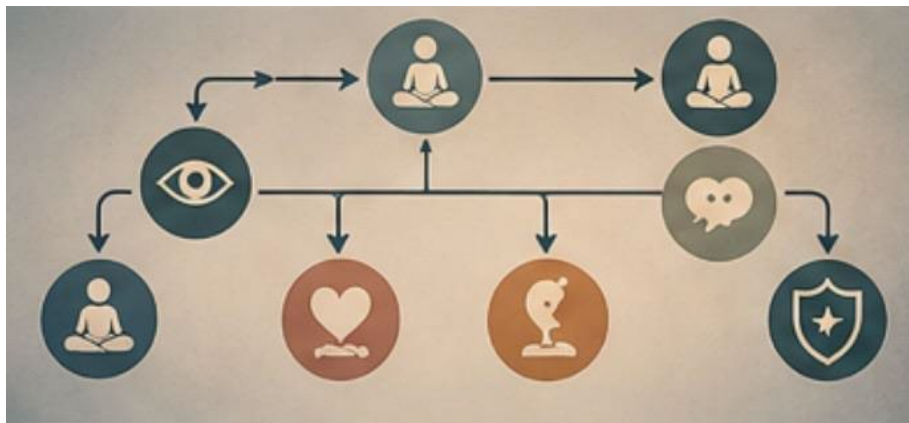
3. Recovery (long-term)

This may include:

- Outcome:**

4. If there is no change

Additional support may be needed



Please indicate how much you agree with the statements below using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

Respond to each statement below by circling - one answer per row.		Assessment				
1.	I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I have a hard time making it through stressful events.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event	1	2	3	4	5

4.	It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in my life.	1	2	3	4	5

To calculate your total score:

1. Reverse the scores for statements 2, 5, and 6.

This means:

- a response of 1 becomes 5
- a response of 2 becomes 4
- a response of 3 remains 3
- a response of 4 becomes 2
- a response of 5 becomes 1

2. Add up the scores for all six statements.

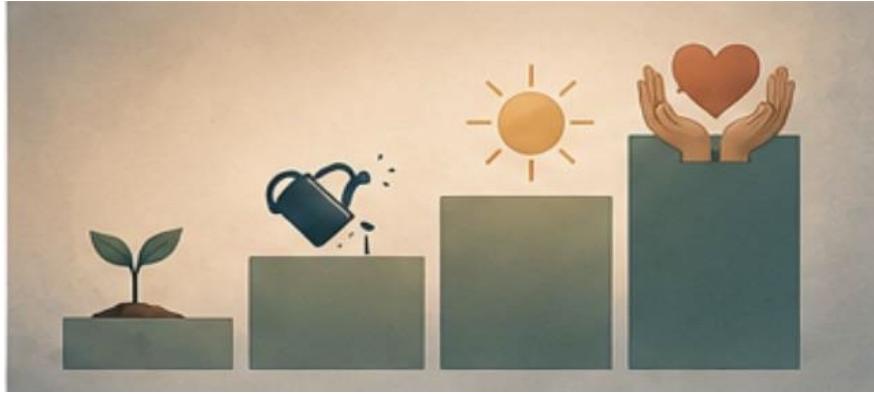
The total score can range from 6 to 30.



How to understand your result

A higher total score may indicate a greater ability to recover after stressful situations, while a lower score may suggest that it is currently more difficult for you to regain balance after stress.

It is important to note that this result does not define who you are. It can be used as a point of reference for reflecting on how you are currently coping with stress, what helps you, and where additional support might be useful.



Quick reflection checklist

When you notice that stress is increasing, it may be helpful to pause and briefly ask yourself:

- Have I recognised that I am under stress?
- Do I need a moment of calming right now?
- Is there something small that could support recovery in the longer term?
- Could talking to someone I trust help in this situation?
- Do I need additional support at this moment?

This checklist is not meant to provide correct answers, but to support reflection and awareness of possible next steps.



Annex 3

Evaluation questions

Below are several questions related to the content of this module. Their purpose is to support understanding of key concepts and distinctions covered in the module, such as psychological resilience, coping with stress, calming, and recovery.

The questions are not intended to assess you personally. They serve as a short conclusion to the module and an opportunity to reflect once more on the main messages you have explored.

1. What best describes psychological resilience, as explained in this module?

- a) The ability to always remain calm and not experience stress
- b) A trait we are born with that cannot be changed
- c) The ability to recover more easily after difficult or stressful situations**
- d) Endurance without showing emotions

2. What is the main difference between calming and recovery?

- a) Calming is useful, while recovery is not necessary
- b) Calming solves the problem, while recovery only helps us feel better
- c) Calming and recovery are the same
- d) Calming helps in the moment, while recovery leads to long-term change**

3. Which example best contributes to long-term recovery?

- a) Distracting oneself in order to forget the problem
- b) Suppressing unpleasant emotions
- c) Setting boundaries and seeking support when needed**
- d) Ignoring the stressful situation until it passes

4. According to the module, what is important when setting personal boundaries?

- a) Avoiding conflict at all costs
- b) Adapting to others in order to preserve the relationship
- c) Clearly expressing needs while trying to control others' reactions**

d) Clearly expressing one's own needs while accepting that we cannot control others' reactions

5. Which statement about psychological resilience is accurate?

a) Resilient people do not feel fear, sadness, or fatigue

b) Resilience can be developed through small, everyday changes and support

c) Resilience means enduring everything without help from others

d) If we are stressed, it means we are not resilient

Annex 4

12. Three real-life micro-scenarios

Scenario 1: Short-term calming without recovery

Situation

Marija (42) lives in a relationship in which she is exposed to psychological violence by her partner. Due to constant tension, fear, and the unpredictability of the situation, she finds it difficult to relax and sleeps poorly. During the day she manages to function, but in the evenings she feels intense fatigue and exhaustion.

Marija has two close friends. One suggests activities that help her calm down, such as going for a walk or taking a warm bath before bedtime. The other offers to talk and tells her she can call at any time if she feels the need. Although these options are available, Marija feels too exhausted and withdrawn during this period to make use of them. She does not want to burden others with her problems, and she lacks the energy for activities that require additional effort.

In an attempt to ease herself in the evening and fall asleep, Marija begins to consume alcohol. At first, she notices that after one glass she feels more relaxed and falls asleep more easily. Because of this effect, she starts using this strategy regularly as a way of calming herself before sleep.



Possible next steps

(None of these steps is “correct” or required.)

- Continuing to use a strategy that provides immediate relief
- Considering other forms of calming that do not require additional energy
- Exploring the possibility of talking to a trusted person when feeling more ready
- Recognising that short-term relief does not necessarily lead to long-term change
- Exploring support outside her immediate circle, such as confidential counselling, helplines, or specialised NGOs that work with women exposed to violence

Reflection questions

- What provides short-term relief for Marija in this example?

- How does this strategy affect long-term recovery?
- What different types of support appear in this example?
- How could professional or specialised support contribute to her resilience over time?

Scenario 2: Strategies that support long-term recovery

Situation

Tamara (34) was in a relationship for several years in which she experienced psychological and physical violence from her partner. After leaving the relationship, she feels exhausted and as if she has lost touch with herself. During that period, she devoted most of her time and energy to adapting to her partner's demands and to caring for the household and her child.

Her friends suggest that she go out with them on weekends to relax and “take her mind off things.” Although she appreciates their support, Tamara feels that this type of socialising does not suit her at this moment. Instead, she suggests meeting in ways that feel closer to her needs, such as going for a coffee.

Tamara recalls activities that were important to her before the abusive relationship—reading, writing, and spending time in nature. She decides to gradually reintroduce these activities into her life, in line with her own pace and needs.



Possible next steps

(None of these steps is “correct” or required.)

- Continuing to choose forms of socialising that align with her current needs
- Gradually returning to activities that previously gave her a sense of meaning and enjoyment
- Considering how her own pace can be part of the recovery process
- Recognising the difference between adapting to others and caring for herself
- Exploring specialised support, such as counselling services, women's NGOs, or survivor support groups that can accompany her recovery process

Reflection questions

- Which strategies does Tamara use to support long-term recovery?
- How do these strategies differ from those that provide only short-term relief?
- What role could professional or NGO support play alongside personal coping strategies?

Scenario 3: The role of social support in recovery

Situation

Helena (30) lives in a relationship in which she is exposed to physical violence and controlling behaviour by her partner. Over a long period of time, she does not tell anyone about what is happening. She feels shame, fear, and a belief that she should endure the situation on her own.

Although she is isolated, Helena has access to support from her family and one close friend. When her friend notices that Helena is withdrawing and expresses concern, Helena decides for the first time to speak openly about what she is experiencing. Through this conversation, she receives emotional support as well as information about available forms of help.



Possible next steps

(None of these steps is “correct” or required.)

- Continuing to talk with trusted people
- Considering which types of support, she needs most at this moment
- Recognising that seeking help can be part of recovery
- Reflecting on possible next steps with the support of others, rather than in isolation
- Exploring specialised support, such as women’s NGOs, counselling centres, or helplines, as a confidential and informed source of assistance

Reflection questions

- What role does social support play in this example?
- How can talking with others be part of recovery, rather than a sign of weakness?
- How might institutional or NGO support strengthen her sense of safety and resilience?