

# Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

Broadcast Edition

Z

ZERO

TOLERANCE

# Contents

**About Zero Tolerance**

**About these guidelines**

**Why read these guidelines?**

**Facts about violence against women**

**10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately**

**Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women**

Rape and sexual assault

Domestic abuse and domestic homicide

Harmful traditional practices

Commercial sexual exploitation

Online abuse

Child sexual abuse

**Language guide**

**Headlines matter**

**Things to avoid**

Sympathy for the perpetrator

Sensationalising victim's gender identity

Stigmatising ethnic groups or religions

Glamourising commercial sexual exploitation

When court reporting

**Excusing violence against women**

**Visual representation of women**

**Online comments and images**

**Know when to use 'victim' or 'survivor'**

**Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women**

**What about violence against men?**

**Appendix 1: Helplines**

England

Northern Ireland

Scotland

Wales

**Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics**

**Appendix 3: Definitions**

**Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence**

**Appendix 5: Language checker**

**Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting Code - Extracts**

**Acknowledgements**

**References**

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## About Zero Tolerance

Zero Tolerance is a Scottish charity working to end men's violence against women and girls (VAWG) by promoting gender equality and challenging attitudes that normalise violence and abuse.

Our work with the media supports  
journalists and content creators to  
contribute to the prevention of  
violence against women.



We offer a **free selection of ethical and diverse stock images to illustrate VAWG.**

To make this document as reader-friendly as possible, we use the term 'violence against women and girls', but with the understanding that it is men's violence against women and girls.

## About these guidelines

Zero Tolerance developed these guidelines in consultation with media representatives and organisations working to tackle VAWG. They are intended to support you to report on VAWG accurately and sensitively by providing information about violence against women and its root cause – gender inequality – and best practice tips, latest statistics, and a current list of helplines.

You can find more resources and information about our work with the media on [our website](#).



## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## Why read these guidelines?

VAWG continues to be a hugely prevalent and complex social problem in Scotland and the UK, and the media has a direct responsibility for shaping public attitudes towards it.

Two women a week are killed by a  
current or former partner  
in England and Wales<sup>1</sup>.

VAWG has long-term effects on  
women's physical and mental health  
and affects children, families, and  
communities.

“Responsible media reporting is vital in shaping people’s understanding of violence against women and challenging its place in our society.”

**Jude Henderson, Zero Tolerance,  
Chair of the Board**

“Journalists play a crucial role in society – and never more so than when reporting on violence against women. What our members write matters. It has the ability to shape the narratives around violence against women. It helps those experiencing this violence realise what is happening to them – and where they can seek help. And it helps remind society in general that the blame for violence only ever lies with those who perpetrate it.”

**John Toner, National Organiser for Scotland,  
National Union of Journalists**

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

### How you report on violence against women and girls can help:

1.

People understand how pervasive VAWG is, its causes, who is affected, and how it can be prevented.

2.

Victim-survivors recognise their own experiences of violence and encourage them to speak out and seek support.

3.

Shift social attitudes and make VAWG unacceptable in our society.

4.

Influence progress in public policy and legislation on matters relating to gender inequality and VAWG.

Media reporting on VAWG has significantly improved since the publication of the first version of our Media Guidelines over a decade ago. However, our [media monitoring data](#) shows that we still have a long way to go. Many media outlets and those working within them continue to perpetuate myths and misconceptions when reporting on incidents of violence. Using problematic framing and inconsiderate language contributes to a culture that continues to normalise and accept VAWG. You can change this.

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

# Facts about violence against women

## What is violence against women and girls?

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is violence or abuse where the victim-survivors are women and the perpetrators are men. It includes (but is not limited to):

Rape and sexual assault

Domestic abuse

Harmful traditional practices (including forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM))

Commercial sexual exploitation (including pornography and prostitution)

Harassment and online abuse

Experiences of VAWG are informed not just by gender, but also by race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, age, gender identity, and migrant status<sup>2</sup>.

VAWG can affect any woman anywhere, regardless of their age, sexual orientation, racial, religious, cultural, and economic background.

# 10 steps to reporting violence against women and girls responsibly and accurately

## 1. Respect women

Report VAWG in a way that upholds the victim-survivor's dignity, safety, and anonymity.

Don't sensationalise or trivialise violence with the use of clickbait headlines, overly dramatic language, excessive details about the abuse, or personal details such as their transgender identity or their involvement in selling sex.

## 2. Include diverse voices

Represent diverse stories by including the voices of women not often seen, heard or read about in news and current affairs. For example, older women, minority ethnic women, disabled women, etc.

## 3. Name the cause: gender inequality

Be clear about the cause of VAWG: gender inequality. VAWG stems from men having access to power in our society, over and above women. This power imbalance leads to sexist beliefs, misogyny, and ultimately VAWG.

When covering any form of violence – including harmful traditional practices, like forced marriage or female genital mutilation – be clear this violence is rooted in misogyny. Don't stigmatise any ethnic group or religion. To learn more about [harmful traditional practices see page 12](#).

## 4. Name the crime

Use words that accurately describe the crime: violence against women, domestic abuse, rape, murder, child sexual abuse, emotional abuse, coercive control; instead of sex, sex case, domestic dispute, sex scandal, sex affair etc. For more examples see our [language guide on page 15](#).

## 5. Consider how you present the perpetrator

Highlight the actions of the perpetrator in the description of violence. Use active voice when describing perpetrator's actions, i.e. 'The perpetrator forced the victim-survivor to...', 'The partner killed the woman'.

Avoid quoting the perpetrator. It can normalise their attitudes and behaviour and traumatise victim-survivors. Don't focus on the impact of the crime on the perpetrator, instead focus on the harm of the crime on the victim-survivor.

Don't excuse men's violence by suggesting that the perpetrator's actions were due to alcohol, mental health, financial pressures, or stress. These issues may exacerbate violence, but they are never the cause of it. Learn more about [what to avoid on page 22](#).

## Media Guidelines on

## Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against women

10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately

Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

Don't report on what a woman was wearing, what they had to drink, if they had an affair, or give any other 'explanation' for the violence. This is irrelevant. Perpetrators are responsible for their actions, not the victim-survivor.

### 6. Preserve victim-survivor's anonymity

In ongoing cases don't name victims of violence against women, even when it is legal to do so.

Use a woman's name only if you have her explicit permission. Use 'victim' or the woman's name when an attack has resulted in death.

If the attack resulted in death remember to name the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Otherwise, to avoid unintentionally revealing the victim-survivor's identity, use 'the perpetrator was known to the victim-survivor'. Most violence is perpetrated by someone the victim-survivor knows.

### 7. Place voices of experts and victim-survivors at the centre of the story

Put the victim-survivor at the centre of the story by focusing on how the violence has affected them. Don't give the perpetrator's excuses a platform.

Carefully consider the value of doing vox pops, views of the public often provide little information and repeat unhelpful narratives ('he was just an ordinary guy', 'we would never have thought that...' etc).

While understandably journalists may seek opposing viewpoint to avoid bias, this is not an excuse for not fact-checking. Not all opinions are founded in fact and shouldn't be given the same platform as those that are. Specialist organisations and experts on VAW can provide evidence-based analysis. Ask expert women's organisations for comment, and source case studies through them.

### 8. Use statistics to show the prevalence of VAWG

Individual stories of VAWG are not one-off events. Use statistics to show that VAWG happens frequently, and that individual incidents are part of a much larger problem.

### 9. Select audio/visual broadcast material thoughtfully

Don't use footage or images that contribute to harmful stereotypes or objectify women. We have diverse and ethical free-to-use stock images available. Learn more about appropriate [visual representation on page 26](#).

### 10. Always include helplines: it can save lives

Your story might affect women who have experienced or are experiencing the same violence that you are reporting on. Providing sources of support can encourage women to seek help, we strongly advocate for a helpline number to be included at the end of a broadcast. Create a page on your website with all the helplines and encourage viewers/listeners to seek help. A list of helplines is available in [Appendix 1](#).



# Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women and girls

## Rape and sexual assault

- Don't report rape or sexual assault as a crime of sexual desire or passion, e.g. 'he couldn't resist her'. This narrative is insulting to men, as it suggests they can't control themselves, and absolves them of blame. Men have control over their own actions, and violence is always a choice. Rape is a crime of power and control that can be violent, abusive, and degrading. It involves sexual behaviours but is motivated by power and control rather than desire.
- Use appropriate vocabulary: sexual harassment is not synonymous with sexual assault or rape. To make it clear that violence has occurred, do not use the term 'sex' or 'non-consensual sex'. Instead, use the terms 'rape' or 'sexual assault', as appropriate. See our [language guide on page 15](#).
- Avoid presenting the alleged perpetrator as a victim of the complainer.
- Don't blame a woman for 'leading a man on' by what they were wearing, by kissing him, or by going home with him.
- Sexual contact without consent is sexual assault or rape and is a choice by the perpetrator and reporting should be clear about that.
- Emphasize the impact that sexual violence has on the victim-survivor, both in the short and long term, in terms of physical, psychological, social, and economic issues and the impact of this crime on society as a whole.
- Encourage women to seek support and provide helpline information.

### TIP:

Check [Rape Crisis Scotland's Guide](#) on how to report sexual assault trials responsibly.

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against women

10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately

Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

### Stranger rape

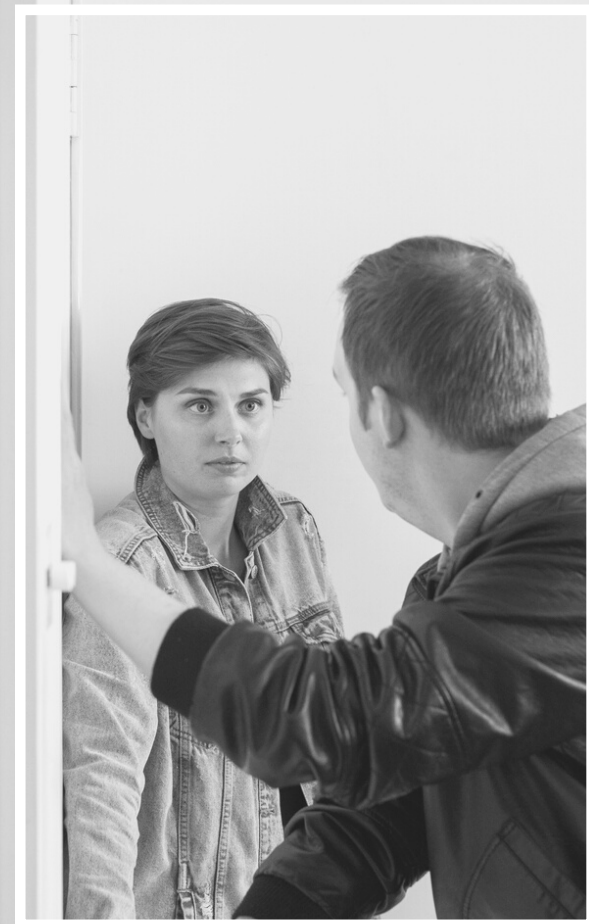
When covering a story of rape or sexual assault perpetrated by someone who is a stranger to the victim-survivor, emphasize the fact that it is an anomaly. 86% of serious sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim-survivor knows, and only 9% of rapes reported to the police are committed by a stranger<sup>3</sup>.

### False accusations

It is important not to mistake withdrawing an allegation with false accusation. 58% of survivors who reported rape withdrew their case because of threats to their privacy or how invasive the process was, in a further 29% the police decided to take no further action<sup>4</sup>.

The average time from the offence taking place to the court case being completed in court is two years, and it can be traumatising to the victim-survivor. Where no evidence for the assault could be found, this could be because victim-survivor didn't report it straight away.

It is highly uncommon for women to regret consensual sex, then later claim it was rape. There are no more false reports of rape than of any other crime. It is important to mention this when covering a story of false allegations.



About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against women

10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately

Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## Domestic abuse and domestic homicide

- Use 'domestic abuse' instead of 'domestic violence'. Not all domestic abuse is physical violence.
- Use 'domestic abuse' instead of 'a domestic' or 'a domestic dispute'. These terms frame the incident of violence as a private, family problem and not a crime. It also ignores the wider society within which men commit violence.
- Use 'abusive partner' or 'woman living with an abusive partner', instead of 'an abusive relationship'. Placing the blame on the relationship or relationship dynamics, rather than on the abuser, suggests that both people are equally at fault.
- Don't refer to children as 'witnessing' domestic abuse. Instead, use 'exposed to' or 'impacted by'. Children are not simply 'witnesses' to incidents of domestic abuse. They are impacted and harmed by domestic abuse including physical violence and a range of coercive behaviours.
- Avoid speculation on "reasons" or "triggers" or describing the domestic homicide as an isolated incident. Place the responsibility solely on the killer. Homicides are usually underpinned by a longstanding sense of ownership, coercive control, and possessive behaviours.

Protecting victim-survivor's right to privacy is essential to safeguard them from further harm and victimisation. **Section 8 of Ofcom Broadcasting Code provides guidance on avoiding infringement of privacy.**

Check **Appendix 6** for relevant extract from the **Ofcom Broadcasting Code.**

### TIP:

Check **Level Up's media guidelines for reporting domestic violence deaths.**

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References



## Harmful traditional practices

- Be clear that harmful traditional practices are rooted in misogyny.
- Be clear that inequalities affecting the groups who follow these practices are due to power dynamics and perceptions that exist in the larger society. The discrimination that some communities face, in the form of islamophobia and racism, can act as a barrier to seeking support or speaking out about any form of violence.
- Emphasize that it is premeditated violence which no cultural tradition can justify.
- Use the expression 'so-called honour crimes'. These practices have nothing to do with honour, they are criminal acts.
- Maintain the distinction between forced marriage and arranged marriage. Be clear that in forced marriage, at least one party does not consent to the marriage and some element of duress is involved. Affected communities may protect and support perpetrators, and victim-survivors themselves may be unaware they are experiencing VAWG.
- If you are covering a story in which a victim-survivor would like to remain anonymous, ensure that you do not include any details which could lead to identification. Connections which communities have with each other can too easily be underestimated. Disclosing a detail which may seem innocuous can lead to the identification of an individual within their community.
- Most so-called 'honour-based' violence is interfamilial. If an interviewee requires language support, always use a professional interpreter service. Never ask family members or children to interpret as any member of the family could be involved, including the mother of the victim.



About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting  
Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## Commercial sexual exploitation

- Focus on the choices of some men to exploit women, not the women's motivation to be involved in prostitution.
- Avoid using broad terms to describe the women involved, such as 'prostitute' or 'sex worker,' - many women do not use or identify with this language, use term 'women who sell sex' instead. Applying a blanket term not only denies women the agency and power to tell their stories in their own terms, but it risks framing all woman's involvement in selling sex as a choice even where they had none. Women become involved in selling or exchanging sex for a variety of reasons, such as poverty, lack of opportunities, to support a habit, because they are being forced by an abuser, for a place to live, and many other reasons, and they may understand their situation in different ways.
- Reporting of commercial sexual exploitation, such as through webcams, prostitution, or pornography, should include information about dangers and harms.
- Don't use 'murdered/dead prostitute'. Regardless of their involvement in selling sex, women who experience men's violence are women first. Use 'woman who was (e.g.) raped, murdered'; use the woman's name where appropriate.
- Women involved in prostitution experience men's violence. Regardless of any financial transaction, women have a right to withdraw consent. Any sexual activity after the withdrawal of consent is sexual assault or rape.

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against women

10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately

Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## Online abuse

- Don't reproduce abusive or malicious posts, tweets or images when reporting online abuse. Making it easy to find the abusive material can cause further harm to the victim-survivor. It may also enhance the perpetrator's profile, and, under current legislation, you may be at risk of breaking the law.
- If someone shares an intimate image of another person without their consent, it is not the fault of the person in the image because they took or agreed for the image to be taken. It is the fault of the person who shared the image without consent.

## Child sexual abuse

- Sexual contact with a child is always abuse. Don't use 'child prostitute', 'teenage prostitute', 'underage women', 'schoolgirl lover', 'women on the younger side', etc. These terms present the violence as an issue of sexual morality and imply children can consent to sex, which is inaccurate. Children cannot consent to sex and are never willing participants in their abuse. The above terms put the responsibility of the violence, or not avoiding it, on the child, and excuse the men accused. Instead, use 'abused child'.
- Don't refer to child sexual abuse as 'sex'. This framing downplays the severity of men's sexual violence. Always call it by its name 'sexual assault' or 'child sexual abuse' except when the perpetrator is charged with rape.

### TIP:

Check The National Association of People Abused in Childhood's [media guidelines for reporting child abuse](#).

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

# Language guide

Careful use of language in  
the media will give a more  
accurate reflection of the  
reality of the true nature of  
VAWG, and this can positively  
affect people's attitudes.

“It is not about dictating how a story should be written but recognising that too often language is still being used to trivialise and sensationalise – when it can have the power to help change attitudes in society.”

Judith Duffy, Assistant Producer STV; Chief Reporter at Sunday Herald

### TIP:

You can use our easy-to-use language checker before publishing your piece (see [Appendix 5](#)).

**Media Guidelines on  
Violence Against Women**

- About Zero Tolerance
- About these guidelines
- Why read these guidelines?
- Facts about violence against women
- 10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately
- Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women
- Language guide
- Headlines matter
- Things to avoid
- Visual representation of women
- Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women
- What about violence against men?
- Appendix 1: Helplines
- Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics
- Appendix 3: Definitions
- Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence
- Appendix 5: Language checker
- Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting Code - Extracts
- Acknowledgements
- References

## Name the crime

INSTEAD OF	USE	WHY
Sex, sex scandal, sex case, affair, fondle or caress to describe sexual violence	Sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual harassment	Using phrases like sex scandal makes it sound consensual: it both minimises and sensationalises the crime. Use language that accurately conveys the gravity of sexual assault.
Non-consensual sex, sex act, assault, sex with minor, having violent sex	Rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse	Using phrases like this when writing about rape makes it seem less severe than it is.
Revenge porn	Image-based sexual abuse	Revenge porn suggests that the victim-survivor has done something wrong.
Domestic violence	Domestic abuse, men's violence against women	The term domestic abuse conveys a much wider spectrum of abuse, which can be emotional, economic, psychological and/or physical.
Abusive relationship	Abusive partner, woman living with an abusive partner	Placing blame on the relationship or relationship dynamics, rather than on the abuser, suggests that both people are equally at fault.
A domestic/domestic dispute	Domestic abuse	Domestic/domestic dispute frames the incident of violence as a private domestic or family problem and not a crime.
Child sex charges	Rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse	This language fails to recognise that children cannot consent to sex.
Child pornography	Child sexual abuse material, images of child sexual abuse	Children cannot consent to sexual exploitation.



## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against women

10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately

Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting Code - Extracts

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## Name the perpetrator

INSTEAD OF	USE	WHY
Fiend, sex-beast, pervert, monster, paedo, brute, criminal, thug, wife-beater, woman-basher, vile predator, love-struck man	Man, perpetrator, offender, abuser, rapist, husband, father, son, etc	Men who rape, commit sexual violence or domestic abuse are ordinary men, usually someone's dad, brother, uncle, or friend. Presenting them as 'monsters' ignores the wider context of VAWG and perpetuates myths of who the perpetrators are. Phrases like 'love-struck man' absolves men from blame.
Great father/devoted dad/ a good guy/respected member of the community/esteemed coach, professional, community leader, medical student, etc	Man, perpetrator, offender, abuser, rapist, husband, father, son, etc	These generate sympathy for the perpetrator and are often followed by a reason for a perpetrator's action. There is no justification for violence against women.

## Court reporting

INSTEAD OF	USE	WHY
Perpetrator	Alleged perpetrator	Unless found guilty, any perpetrator must be referenced as an alleged perpetrator to avoid creating a bias against those testifying for the prosecution.
Accused/accuser	Accused and witness, accused and complainer, or accused and complainant	Terms accused/accuser can portray the accused as the victim and the witness as the aggressor.

**Media Guidelines on  
Violence Against Women**

- About Zero Tolerance
- About these guidelines
- Why read these guidelines?
- Facts about violence against women
- 10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately
- Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women
- Language guide
- Headlines matter
- Things to avoid
- Visual representation of women
- Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women
- What about violence against men?
- Appendix 1: Helplines
- Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics
- Appendix 3: Definitions
- Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence
- Appendix 5: Language checker
- Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting Code - Extracts
- Acknowledgements
- References

## Name the victim-survivor

INSTEAD OF	USE	WHY
Prostitute, sex worker, porn actress/porn star	Woman who sells sex, woman involved in pornography/prostitution	Prostitution and pornography are exploitative of women and the language used should reflect this. It is not work and using 'prostitute' or 'porn actress' suggests a job title.
Murdered/dead prostitute	Woman who was murdered	Regardless of their involvement in commercial sexual exploitation, women who are murdered are women first.
Underage women, women on the younger side, underage girls, child prostitute, teenage prostitute, schoolgirl lover, underage girl, underage lover	Abused child	Sexual contact with a child is always abuse. Using these terms rather than 'children' presents the issues as one of sexual morality whilst implying that consent was possible.
In a relationship with, had sex with, was dating, having a fling with, Illicit or illegal affair with a girl	Perpetrator sexually abused child/girl	An adult cannot be in a relationship with a child. Any sexual contact with a child is abuse.
Tranny, she-male	Woman, wife, partner, person	All women need the support of an unbiased media that does not contribute to harmful stereotypes. You should mention a person's gender identity only if it is relevant to the story, e.g. raising awareness of violence against trans women.

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

# Headlines matter

We know headlines  
are designed to attract  
attention, but they need  
to do this in a way that  
doesn't reinforce myths and  
misconceptions about  
violence against women.  
Here are a few lessons from  
recent headlines.

---

“How we frame stories about violence against women is so important. Violence against women is not caused by drink, drugs, provocative outfits, mental health issues, stress, money problems, or infidelity. It is caused by men. That is the story that we need to tell.”

Anna Burnside, Feature Writer, Daily Record

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## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against women

10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately

Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

BAD HEADLINE	WHY	BETTER
Woman raped at his flat	Headlines using passive voice imply that violence is something that 'just happens' to women, when in fact these crimes always have both a victim-survivor and a perpetrator. Violence is always a choice by the perpetrator, and the perpetrator is the only person to blame.	Man raped woman at his flat The perpetrator raped the victim-survivor at his flat
[Woman's name] tragedy	Words like 'tragedy' make it seem as if the violence was unavoidable instead of a conscious action by the perpetrator.	The murder of [woman's name]
Man, who tried to suffocate his wife gets suspended sentence	This headline doesn't tell the whole story.	Convicted murderer who suffocated his wife gets suspended sentence
Beautiful mum-of four tragically dies leaving kids behind as man charged with murder	Passive voice in this headline overlooks the fact that perpetrator murdered the victim. Violence is always a conscious choice of the perpetrator.	Man murdered a woman
Woman died of compression of the neck	Passive voice suggests that violence 'just happened', making the perpetrator invisible.	The perpetrator killed the victim-survivor by strangling her
Former music teacher who had sex with two girls aged 13 and 14 convicted of 32 sexual offences	Anyone under the age of 16 is incapable of consenting to sex. Sexual contact with a child is never 'sex': it is always 'child sexual abuse'. If the perpetrator was not charged with rape, journalists should always call it by its name 'sexual assault' or 'child sexual abuse'.	Former music teacher who sexually abused two girls aged 13 and 14 convicted of 32 sexual offences



## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against women

10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately

Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

BAD HEADLINE	WHY	BETTER
Thug who had murder in his eyes strangled his partner and threatened to kill her	Labelling the perpetrators of these crimes in a way that suggests they are some kind of monster or 'other' does not frame the violence as a choice and does not help the audience to understand perpetrators' motivations or to make sense of the crime. It also ignores the prevalence of violence against women by framing it as a rare and random occurrence.	Man assaulted a woman and threatened to kill her
Married Polish butcher, is found guilty of raping and murdering drunk student	Alcohol consumption is irrelevant to the story, and it shifts the blame for the crime to the victim. Mention of perpetrator's nationality can also contribute to stigmatising an ethnic group.	Man found guilty of raping and murdering [woman's name]
[Perpetrator's name] convicted of luring women, underage girls for sex	There is no such thing as 'underage girls' – it is always abused child.	[Perpetrator's name] convicted of sexually abusing girls/sexually exploiting children

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References



## Things to avoid

### Sympathy for the perpetrator

Avoid suggesting that men will have their careers, or lives, ruined by sexual assault allegations. Men ruin their own careers by perpetrating violence. Instead, consider the impact on the victim-survivor.

### Sensationalising victim-survivor's gender identity

Reports should include information about gender identity only if it is relevant to the story. All transgender people should be treated with dignity and respect, including being referred to by their chosen name and pronouns.

#### **TIP:**

Check Transgender Europe's **Guide for Journalists**.

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against women

10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately

Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

### Stigmatising ethnic groups or religions

There is no evidence that VAWG is more prevalent in ethnic minority communities in the UK. Reporting must avoid implying that any form of VAWG is a part of any community's culture or religion. There is evidence<sup>5</sup>, however, that ethnic minority women experience and react to abuse and violence differently from other women. Studies suggest they may be less likely to seek support or to report the abuse to authorities, potentially influenced by a concern that their report will contribute to racist stereotypes.

### When court reporting

Defence lawyers will use many of the excuses listed in the next section of this document in court. It is a journalist's responsibility to give a fair account of what happened in the courtroom, but it is important to avoid using the narrative of the defence as the narrative of your story. Don't give it prominence in the story. Phrase it accurately as 'defence claims'. Include quotes from victim-survivors and expert agencies which can give context to these claims.

### Glamourising commercial sexual exploitation

Commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of violence against women. Reporting on CSE, such as through webcams, prostitution, or pornography, should include information about the associated dangers and harms to the individual.

Focus on some men's choices to exploit women, not the women's motivation to be involved in commercial sexual exploitation.

**Glamourising commercial sexual exploitation can lead to higher acceptance of this form of violence in our society and Section 2 of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code on Harm and Offence provides guidance on that.**

**Check Appendix 6 for relevant extract from the Ofcom Broadcasting Code.**

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting  
Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## Excusing violence against women

Here are some common themes used to justify men's violence that need to be avoided:

### Alcohol and drugs

Use: He stalked the woman on her way home and assaulted her.

Don't use: She had several drinks, then walked home alone and was assaulted.

Women can experience violence when they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol and when they are sober. Never make it sound like a woman's choice to drink or take drugs led to violence. Alcohol and drugs are not the cause of VAWG – abusive men are.

### Crime of passion

Violence is a form of control, an assertion of dominance, not a loss of it. It is controlled, planned, and specific. It is often made to look like a loss of control, but it isn't.

## Cycle of violence

The evidence available<sup>6</sup> does not suggest that men who experience violence in their own childhoods will be more likely to go on to perpetrate violence.

Blaming current VAWG on experiences of violence in childhood stigmatises adults with adverse childhood experiences, most of whom do not turn to abuse and violence. It also evokes sympathy for the perpetrator rather than framing his actions as unacceptable.

## Just a one-off, isolated incident

Be aware that one-off crimes may be part of a pattern of abuse, and that perpetrators may have engaged in several forms of VAWG. Men don't 'just snap' and are not 'provoked' by an argument or event. The overwhelming majority of men who commit violence have a history of abusing women.

Don't write about violence as standalone incidents. Instead, situate the incident/s using statistics. When reporting an incident, you can simply give it context with a single sentence. E.g., 'An incident of domestic abuse is reported to Police Scotland every 9 minutes'<sup>7</sup>.

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## Excusing violence against women

### Led to...

Avoid the narrative that one life event 'led to' any violence that occurred.

Don't use: The loss of job and financial pressure **led** to murder; husband murders wife **after** her affair.

Phrasing stories this way makes it sound like violence is an obvious next step in response to these events, when in fact the only cause of the violence was the perpetrator. Lots of people lose their jobs or have an unfaithful partner and most do not turn to abuse and violence. Women and girls get stressed too, yet commit disproportionately fewer violent crimes than men and boys. Job losses, financial pressures, and affairs are not the cause of VAWG: abusive men are.

### Link with football

Although there is evidence suggesting a correlation between Old Firm matches and reports of domestic abuse, this should not be mistaken for causation. Football is not the cause of VAWG: abusive men are <sup>8</sup>.

## Mental health

Media coverage suggested that a man murdered his ex-partner due to 'anger management issues'. Abusers do not suffer from anger management problems. They can manage their anger whenever there are witnesses. Blaming poor mental health stigmatises those with mental health issues, the vast majority of whom do not perpetrate VAWG. Mental health conditions are not the cause of VAWG: abusive men are.

## Sex game gone wrong

Legally, no one can consent to injury or death. Consider that even if a woman has agreed to an act, an abusive partner may have coerced her into it. 'Sex games' do not kill women – abusive and violent men do.



## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting  
Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References



## Visual representation of women

Visual representation of women beaten and bruised is an inaccurate depiction of violence and abuse. It reinforces outdated myths that domestic abuse is only physical. Avoid images that portray victim-survivors as passive and/or helpless. Instead, aim to show them as people with agency who decided to speak up.

Don't use re-enactment images in a way that sensationalise, trivialise or minimise the harassment. Before commissioning re-enactment, ask victim-survivor or their next of kin for consent if possible.

Let victim-survivors choose if they would like to remain anonymous, use an alias or have their contribution read by voice actor and their face blurred in video or images.

Take great care to ensure they cannot be identified through details such as items of jewellery, hairstyle or language mannerisms etc.

Sexualised imagery of the victim-survivor dehumanises women and can be upsetting for them, friends, family members, and other victim-survivors of violence.

Featuring only white, non-disabled, young women reinforce myths that violence doesn't affect older women, minority ethnic women, or disabled women, when in fact violence can affect any woman, anywhere.

When reporting on commercial sexual exploitation, broadcast material needs to portray the women who sell sex as ordinary women who can be mothers, students, professionals; young and old; employed and unemployed; belonging to different faiths and backgrounds.

Likewise, imagery should be used to bring attention to the men who buy sex and who are seldom brought into the discussion in any critical way.



We offer a **free selection of ethical and diverse stock images to illustrate VAWG.**

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## Online comments and images

## Know when to use 'victim' or 'survivor'

**Turn off online commenting under articles about VAWG or moderate them stringently. Comments under articles and on social media often spread misinformation, blame victims rather than perpetrators for abuse, and deter other victims from coming forward and seeking help.**

If you want to include a photo or article on a woman who has been murdered in a non-recent incident, contact her family or next of kin to ask for permission before running it.

Don't reproduce abusive or malicious posts, tweets, or images. Making it easy for readers to find the abusive material can cause further harm to the victim-survivor. It may also enhance the perpetrator's profile, and, under current legislation, you may be at risk of breaking the law.

Some women who've experienced VAWG identify as victims, and some identify as survivors. It is best to ask the individual which they would prefer. Where this is not possible, use 'victim' when an attack has resulted in the murder of a woman and when discussing the crime or criminal justice system. Although victim is a legal definition which is necessary in the criminal justice system, some women prefer to use survivor as a term of empowerment.

Use 'survivor' when not discussing the crime or criminal justice system. You can also use 'victim-survivor' if you are not sure, or if you are speaking in general terms. Only if you have permission, use the woman's name.

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

# Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women

Victim-survivors of violence have experienced trauma, and this can make it very difficult to talk about their experiences. These tips will help you work with victim-survivors respectfully so that you get the best possible story and give the victim-survivor an opportunity for their story to be shared.

## Talk to the experts

Get in touch with local support organisations to make sure your interviewee will have support. Give services plenty of notice if you want their help to find a victim-survivor to interview.

## Connect

Help the interviewee feel comfortable: listen, get to know them, and build a rapport. If other people will be involved in the interview, such as a film crew, allow the interviewee time to meet everyone. If the interviewee does not communicate in English, ensure a professional interpreter is present, and that they're a woman.

## Provide support

Before the interview, explain the process and outline the areas you want to discuss.

Suggest that the interviewee brings along a friend, relative, or support worker.

Plan for the support worker to be present or have numbers for support agencies on hand: you can find a list of helplines on [pages 32-34](#).

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting  
Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

### Respect confidentiality

Ask the victim-survivor if they would like to remain anonymous. Let the woman know in advance that you will be recording the interview and ask if this is okay. It is paramount to maintain the privacy of victim-survivor's addresses and the location of women's refuges.

Be mindful of this when using footage, audio, stills or pictures. Help the interviewee feel comfortable: listen, get to know them, and build a rapport. If other people will be involved in the interview, such as a film crew, allow the interviewee time to meet everyone. If the interviewee does not communicate in English, ensure a professional interpreter is present, and that they're a woman.

**Sensitive and fair reporting may encourage more victim-survivors to come forward to share their stories, as is providing them with a choice to remain anonymous.**

**Section 7 of Ofcom Broadcasting Code provides guidance on some considerations broadcasters need to take into account when interviewing victim-survivors of VAW.**

**Check Appendix 6 for relevant extract from the Ofcom Broadcasting Code.**

### Questions

Ask open-ended, non-judgmental questions that allow the interviewee to share their story.

Some examples of good questions to ask include<sup>9</sup>:

- What do you think is important for people to know?
- How has this experience affected you?
- What services/resources/people helped you in your recovery?
- What were the barriers to you coming forward?
- What suggestions do you have to make it safer for victim-survivors to come forward?

Avoid questions about the victim-survivor's behaviour that imply they somehow provoked the abuse.

Avoid questions which refer to a women's faith, immigration status, and/or ethnicity unless directly relevant. Including this type of information about victims-survivors and perpetrators feeds into societal stereotypes about minority communities.

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against women

10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately

Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

### Be prepared to stop and start, or simply just stop

Let the interviewee share the amount of information that they're comfortable with in their own time. Let them take a break if they need it.

### Using the story

Let the interviewee check over the quotes you are planning to use to make sure they're happy with how they've expressed themselves.

If the interviewee wishes to remain anonymous, let them check how you have described them so that they are confident that they won't be identified.

Give victim-survivors the opportunity to view/listen to the footage and re-enactments ahead of going to air.

Be clear how the interview will be used, where and when. If the interview will appear online and on social media, make sure this is understood and consented to.

Be clear that news priorities can overtake the planned publication or broadcast dates and times, and keep the interviewee updated.

If you have them, consult in-house lawyers first. In-house lawyers for media organisations may not wish you to report on cases when there has not been a conviction. It can be very disappointing for a victim-survivor to go through the emotions of giving an interview for it not to be used because lawyers weren't consulted first.

### Looking after yourself

Reporting on VAWG can be difficult and can affect your health and wellbeing. You can find more information about vicarious trauma and strategies to cope in [this presentation by Women's Aid Federation of England](#).

### TIP:

If you are an editor, check the Dart Centre's [Staff Care Tips for Managers and Editors of News Personnel Exposed to Traumatic Events](#) for information on how to support your staff.



## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

# What about violence against men?

Men experience significant  
and unacceptable amounts of  
violence in our society.

When reporting on violence against men, journalists should be mindful that:

- Men perpetuate the majority of violence experienced by boys and men. Men perpetrate most of the violence in the UK <sup>10</sup>.
- Women are twice as likely to experience psychological and/or physical abuse by a partner as men <sup>11</sup>.
- By working to prevent VAWG, Zero Tolerance works to challenge gender stereotypes, e.g. the idea that men should always be strong. It is these stereotypes that may prevent men who experience violence from seeking help.



About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against women

10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately

Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

# APPENDIX 1: Helplines

Your story will reach women who have experienced or are experiencing men's violence.

Zero Tolerance is a campaigning organisation and does not provide advice or support. Providing information on how to contact local and national sources of support can encourage women to seek help. It can save lives. These helplines are available to copy and paste from our website.

## England

### Metropolitan Police

999 – Emergency 101 – Non-emergency

### Domestic abuse

#### The National Domestic Abuse Helpline

0808 2000 247

#### The National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline

0800 999 5428

### Rape and sexual assault

#### The Rape Crisis National Helpline

0808 802 9999

### Stalking

#### National Stalking Helpline

0808 802 0300

### Trafficking

#### Metropolitan Police Trafficking Hotline

0800 783 2589

### Prostitution

#### Women @thewell

020 7520 1710

### Female genital mutilation (FGM)

#### NSPCC Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Helpline

0800 028 3550

#### Childline

0800 11 11

### Specialist support for ethnic minority women

**Imkaan's** list of specialist agencies by and for Black and minoritised women.

**Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)** for victims of domestic abuse.

0808 145 4909

#### Southall Black Sisters Helpline

020 8571 0800

**Karma Nirvana Helpline** for victims of honour-based violence and forced marriage.

0800 5999 247

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against women

10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately

Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## Legal advice for women experiencing violence and harrassment

### Rights of Women

Rights of Women provides free and confidential legal advice covering family law, criminal law, immigration and asylum law and sexual harassment. Details of its advice lines can be found on the Rights of Women's [website](#).

## Northern Ireland

**Police Service of Northern Ireland**  
999 – Emergency 101 – Non-emergency

### Domestic abuse, rape and sexual violence

**Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline**  
0808 802 1414  
Text: 07797 805 839

### Stalking

**National Stalking Helpline**  
0808 802 0300

### Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

**NSPCC Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Helpline**  
0800 028 3550

**Childline**  
0800 11 11

## Scotland

**Police Scotland**  
999 – Emergency 101 – Non-emergency

### Domestic abuse

**Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline**  
0800 027 1234

### Rape and sexual assault

**Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline**  
08088 01 03 02  
Text: 07537 410 027

### Stalking

**National Stalking Helpline**  
0808 802 0300

### Prostitution

**Women's Support Project**  
0141 418 0748

### Trafficking

**Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance (TARA)**  
0141 276 7724

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

### Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

**NSPCC Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Helpline**  
0800 028 3550

**Childline**  
0800 11 11

### Specialist support for ethnic minority women

**Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre**  
0808 801 0301

**Saheliya**  
Edinburgh 0131 556 9302  
Glasgow 0141 552 6540

**Shakti Women's Aid Domestic Abuse Helpline**  
0131 475 2399

### Other useful helplines

**Respect Phonenumber**  
0808 802 4040  
Free and confidential service for anyone who is concerned about their own behaviour towards their partner (male, female, in heterosexual or same-sex relationships).

**Scottish Women's Rights Centre**  
08088 010 789  
Helpline for across Scotland providing free legal help for women affected by violence.

**Victim Support Scotland**  
0800 160 1985

## Wales

**Wales Police**  
999 – Emergency 101 – Non-emergency

**Domestic**  
abuse, rape and sexual assault

**The Live Fear Free Helpline**  
0808 80 10 800  
Text: 07860077333

### Stalking

**National Stalking Helpline**  
0808 802 0300

### Specialist support for ethnic minority women

**Bawso Helpline** for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, human trafficking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.  
0800 731 8147

### North Wales

**Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC)**  
01248 670 628

### Mid, West, East and South Wales

#### New Pathways

**01685 379 310** help for victim-survivors of rape and sexual assault.



## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## Other useful contacts for the media

### End Violence Against Women Coalition

EVAW is a leading coalition of specialist women's support services, researchers, activists, survivors and NGOs working to end violence against women and girls in all its forms.

Media enquiries: **07960 744 502**

### Angles Project

The Angles project works on coverage of sexual violence and domestic abuse, bringing media influences together with people with lived experience.

**0203 559 6766**

Email: [info@onroadmedia.org.uk](mailto:info@onroadmedia.org.uk)

### Engender

A membership organisation working on an anti-sexist agenda in Scotland and Europe to increase women's power and influence and to make visible the impact of sexism on women, men, and society.

**0131 558 9596**

Media contact: [media@engender.org.uk](mailto:media@engender.org.uk)

### Pass the Mic

A list of expert women of colour in Scotland who can be consulted about a range of issues.

### Equal Media and Culture Centre, Engender

Scotland's first Equal Media and Culture Centre is a hub for research, monitoring and advocacy for equality in the creative and media sectors in Scotland.

Email: [info@engender.org.uk](mailto:info@engender.org.uk)





## APPENDIX 2: Snapshot of statistics

### Globally

1 in 3

women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime<sup>12</sup>.

### In the UK

1 in 3

women will experience domestic abuse<sup>13</sup>.

1.6 million

women experienced domestic abuse between March 2019 and March 2020<sup>14</sup>.

1 in 5

women will experience sexual assault during her lifetime<sup>15</sup>.

71%

of women of all ages in the UK have experienced some form of sexual harassment in a public space<sup>16</sup>.

95%

of all women did not report their experiences of sexual harassment<sup>17</sup>.

92%

of girls have been sent unsolicited explicit pictures or videos<sup>18</sup>.

### In Scotland

1 in 10

women in Scotland have experienced rape<sup>19</sup>.

1 in 5

women in Scotland have had someone try to make them have sex against their will<sup>20</sup>.

65,251

incidents of domestic abuse in Scotland in 2020-21, 4 out of 5 had a female victim and male accused<sup>21</sup>.

### In England and Wales

170,973

sexual offences recorded by the police in the year ending September 2021<sup>22</sup>.

845,734

reports of domestic abuse related incidents to the Police in the year ending March 2021<sup>23</sup>.

### Different inequalities affect women's experiences of violence, in example:

Disabled

women are twice as likely to experience men's violence as non-disabled women<sup>24</sup>.

68%

of disabled women have experienced sexual harassment at work<sup>25</sup>.

Black, minority ethnic and migrant

women face higher levels of domestic homicide, so-called 'honour' killings, and abuse driven suicide<sup>26</sup>.

83%

of trans women have experienced hate crime at some point in their lives<sup>27</sup>.

For latest statistics on violence against women and gender inequality, visit [zerotolerance.org.uk/vaw-facts/](https://zerotolerance.org.uk/vaw-facts/)

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## APPENDIX 3: Definitions

### Commercial sexual exploitation

Commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) describes a range of activities which (typically) men pay for or profit from, and which objectify and harm women. These include stripping, pole-dancing and lapdancing, peep shows, prostitution, including prostitution via massage parlours/saunas, brothels and escort agencies, phone sex lines and webcams, pornography, trafficking, sex tourism.

### Consent

Consent is active and ongoing. A person can always change their mind, even during an activity.

Consent to one activity is not consent to all – just because a person has consented to sex before, does not mean they've consented to sex in the future. Just because a person kisses someone does not mean they have consented to sex.

Consent must be freely given: a person has not consented if they are pestered, worn down, made to feel like they 'owe' something, or feel like they can't say no.

Consent cannot be given if a person is incapable because of the influence of alcohol and/or drugs or because they are asleep or unconscious.

Consent can be expressed verbally or non-verbally (known as body language). If someone does not 'fight back', that does not mean they have consented. Freezing is as common a reaction to fear as **'flight or fight' as well as 'friend' and 'flop'**.

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against women

10 Steps to reporting violence against women responsibly and accurately

Tips for reporting different forms of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is a pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour, including sexual violence, by a partner or ex-partner. Domestic abuse can happen even when partners are not living together. Domestic abuse does **not** always include physical violence.

‘Coercive control’ is a term used to describe abusive behaviour. It can take the form of psychological, financial or emotional abuse, including constantly criticising a woman, undermining her self-esteem, isolating her from her friends, family and other support networks, and restricting her right to wear what she wants, see who she wants, and enjoy leisure time as she pleases.

## Online abuse

Online abuse is part of the continuum of men’s violence against women rather than a unique phenomenon. For example, in domestic abuse situations, men have used email, text and social media to stalk, harass and threaten female partners. This includes threatening to share intimate photographs without consent, and doing so. Even if perpetrators are not known to victim-survivors offline, online abuse causes real world fear, often exacerbated by abusers sharing details such as a victim-survivor’s address or information about family members.

## Harmful traditional practices

‘Harmful traditional practices’ is an umbrella term to describe forms of violence against women that have existed in communities for so long that they are considered, or presented by perpetrators, as part of accepted traditional practice. They include:

### **Forced or early marriage:**

marriage in which at least one person does not consent to the marriage and duress is involved.

### **So-called ‘honour’-based abuse:**

any type of physical or psychological violence committed in the name of ‘honour’ predominantly against women for actual or perceived immoral behaviour, which is deemed to have shamed their family or community.

### **Female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM):**

refers to procedures that intentionally alter or injure female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

## Rape and sexual assault

Rape is defined as the ‘penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth by the penis without consent’. There is a range of sexual assault and abuse which does not fit within the legal definition of rape but can be just as distressing and have as much of an impact. Any sexual activity without consent is sexual assault or rape.

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References



## APPENDIX 4: List of truths about sexual violence

- Women are raped every day in the UK.
- Rape is a form of control, an assertion of dominance, not a loss of it.
- Rape is a crime of violence, abuse and degradation, involving sexual behaviours but primarily motivated by violence and not by sexual desire.
- Women of all ages, backgrounds, and physical health conditions are raped.
- Men are responsible for rape, and no woman ever asks to be raped.
- Rape is always rape and women in prostitution can withhold consent the same as any other woman.
- Rape is always a crime, whether the perpetrator is a relative, friend, acquaintance, or stranger.
- Freezing doesn't mean consent, it is a common reaction to fear.
- If a woman initiates kissing, she is consenting only to kissing.
- If a woman goes into a room alone with a man, it is not an invitation to sex.
- False accusations of rape are no more over-reported than any other crime.



## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting  
Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## APPENDIX 5: Language checker

Before publishing your piece, ensure the language used does not:

- Justify men's violence against women.
- Suggest that there is a legitimate time, place or situation where men's violence against women is acceptable (e.g. if a woman has sex with a man other than her partner).
- Excuse men's violence against women by suggesting that external factors, and not the man, are responsible for the violence (e.g. stress, substance abuse, financial stressors).
- Minimise men's violence against women by denying the seriousness of men's violence or imply a weighting scale to the violence (e.g. the notion that financial violence is not really a crime or not as serious as physical or sexual violence).
- Trivialise men's violence against women by suggesting that the violence is not serious, or not serious enough, to warrant intervention.
- Shift the blame for men's violence against women by putting greater emphasis on the woman than the man (e.g. including details about where she was, who she was with, what she was wearing, if she was under the influence of drugs or alcohol or any other actions she took, rather than focusing on the actions of the man who chose to be violent).
- Characterise the violence as rare, abnormal, monstrous, or otherwise promote myths about the types of men who choose to use violence.
- Sensationalise people's identities, the crime itself or the circumstances in which the crime was committed.



## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting  
Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

# APPENDIX 6: Ofcom Broadcasting Code –Extracts

## Section 2: Harm and Offence

### Violence, dangerous behaviour, and suicide:

2.4: Programmes must not include material (whether in individual programmes or in programmes taken together) which, taking into account the context, condones or glamorises violent, dangerous or seriously antisocial behaviour and is likely to encourage others to copy such behaviour.

## Section 7: Fairness

7.1: Broadcasters must avoid unjust or unfair treatment of individuals or organisations in programmes.

7.7: Guarantees given to contributors, for example relating to the content of a programme, confidentiality or anonymity, should normally be honoured.

7.15: Broadcasters should take due care over the welfare of a contributor who might be at risk of significant harm as a result of taking part in a programme, except where the subject matter is trivial or their participation minor.

A contributor might be regarded as being at risk of significant harm as a result of taking part in a programme for reasons including (but not limited to) the following:

- they are considered a vulnerable person;
- they are not used to being in the public eye;
- the programme involves being filmed in an artificial or constructed environment;
- the programme is likely to attract a high level of press, media and social media interest;
- key editorial elements of the programme include potential confrontation, conflict, emotionally challenging situations; or
- the programme requires them to discuss, reveal, or engage with sensitive, life changing or private aspects of their lives.

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting  
Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

# APPENDIX 6: Ofcom Broadcasting Code –Extracts

## Section 8: Privacy

### Principle

To ensure that broadcasters avoid any unwarranted infringement of privacy in programmes and in connection with obtaining material included in programmes.

### Suffering and distress

8.16: Broadcasters should not take or broadcast footage or audio of people caught up in emergencies, victims of accidents or those suffering a personal tragedy, even in a public place, where that results in an infringement of privacy, unless it is warranted or the people concerned have given consent.

8.17: People in a state of distress should not be put under pressure to take part in a programme or provide interviews, unless it is warranted.

8.18: Broadcasters should take care not to reveal the identity of a person who has died or of victims of accidents or violent crimes, unless and until it is clear that the next of kin have been informed of the event or unless it is warranted.

[Visit OFCOM for the full Code](#)

## Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References



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About Zero Tolerance

About these guidelines

Why read these guidelines?

Facts about violence against  
women

10 Steps to reporting violence  
against women responsibly and  
accurately

Tips for reporting different forms  
of violence against women

Language guide

Headlines matter

Things to avoid

Visual representation of women

Interviewing victim-survivors of  
violence against women

What about violence against men?

Appendix 1: Helplines

Appendix 2: Snapshot of statistics

Appendix 3: Definitions

Appendix 4: List of truths about  
sexual violence

Appendix 5: Language checker

Appendix 6: Ofcom Broadcasting

Code - Extracts

Acknowledgements

References

## References

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