

Handle with Care Summary

A guide to responsible media reporting of violence against women

1.

Tell the whole story

- ▶ Acknowledge that men's violence against women is caused by an unequal distribution of power and affects women disproportionately more than men.
- ▶ Put the story into context with local, national and even international statistics.
- ▶ Provide a 'bigger picture' by placing individual incidents in a wider social context.
- ▶ Provide opportunities for survivors and experts on VAW to speak about the issue.
- ▶ Be aware that seemingly one-off crimes may be part of a pattern of abuse, and that perpetrators may have engaged in a number of forms of VAW.
- ▶ Be mindful of the lack of evidence for the link between men's violence against women and their own childhood experiences of violence.¹

2.

Name and frame it right

- ▶ Always use language that accurately conveys the gravity of sexual assault: sexual abuse; rape, etc. Avoid using terms like affair, sex or 'a domestic'.
- ▶ Accurately portray perpetrators of violence as 'ordinary' men, boys, husbands, fathers etc. Don't use terms such as brute, beast, fiend or monster.
- ▶ Unless an attack has resulted in murder, do not use the word 'victim' unless the woman self-identifies as one; use the word 'survivor'.
- ▶ The perpetrator is the only person responsible for their violence. Never suggest that the survivor was to blame for what happened to them.
- ▶ Do not emphasise what the survivor was wearing, whether they used drugs or alcohol, or were selling sex. None of these factors explain the perpetrator's use of violence.

¹ Woman-battering, child abuse and social heredity: what is the relationship? Evan Stark, Anne Flitcraft 1985 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1983.tb00101.x>

3.

Be considerate

- ▶ Report VAW in a way that upholds the survivor's right to dignity and does not compromise their safety or anonymity.
- ▶ Do not use irrelevant personal details, such as the transgender identity of a victim, to sensationalise the story.
- ▶ When covering harmful traditional practices, be clear that these are rooted in misogyny, and avoid stigmatising any ethnic group or religion.
- ▶ Choose images carefully in reporting on VAW and ensure the images chosen do not distort the story, contribute to the problem, or objectify women.
- ▶ Call on community experts on VAW for comment; they will put the issue in context and give information about available support options for people who have experienced violence.
- ▶ Remember to always include numbers for local support services for relevant jurisdictions (i.e. England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, etc.).

If you are an editor:

- ▶ Circulate this Handle with Care guidance to all staff members involved in content creation.
- ▶ Ensure that the headline/teaser/sub heading and clickbait on social media do not distort the real story.
- ▶ Support staff to attend training on reporting of VAW and its causes.
- ▶ Ensure that images chosen to illustrate stories about VAW do not distort the story, its seriousness or contribute to the problem by further objectifying women.
- ▶ Allow Zero Tolerance access to archives to research and monitor VAW reporting.

Zero Tolerance can help by:

- ▶ Providing media outlets with detailed guidance on reporting VAW.
- ▶ Offering ongoing phone support for reporters and content producers on the reporting of VAW.
- ▶ Supplying a current list of expert contacts for reporting on VAW.
- ▶ Supporting media outlets to implement relevant policies.

Language guide

Below you will find a list of common terms and phrases that are used to speak about men’s violence against women; the list is not exhaustive and the alternative language is not definitive. This list is intended to support you to make informed language choices when writing about VAW.

⊗ DON'T USE	✔ DO USE	? WHY?
Euphemisms i.e.: <i>engaging in or sex scandal, affair, fondle or caress, private parts</i> to describe sexual violence.	Language that accurately conveys the gravity of sexual assault: <i>sexual abuse, rape</i> etc.	Using words like <i>sex scandal</i> diminishes and sensationalises the crime.
Salacious details of the assault e.g. <i>forced mouth onto (the survivor's specific body part)</i> .	Words that make it clear that sexual assault is violent and non-consensual e.g. <i>oral rape, sexual assault</i> etc.	Rape is an act of violence, there is no need to insert salacious details.
<i>Fiend, beast, pervert, monster, paedo, brute, criminal, thug, wife-beater, woman-basher.</i>	<i>Husband, father, son etc. Man, perpetrator, offender, abuser, rapist etc.</i>	Men who rape, commit sexual violence or domestic abuse are ordinary men, usually someone’s dad, brother, uncle, or friend.
<i>Great father/devoted dad/ a good guy/respected member of the community/esteemed coach/ professional/community leader.</i>	<i>Man, perpetrator, offender, abuser, rapist etc.</i>	These generate sympathy for the perpetrator, implying there is a ‘reason’ for their ‘out of character’ behaviour.
<i>She had several drinks then walked home alone and was assaulted.</i>	<i>He stalked the woman on her way home and assaulted her.</i>	The perpetrator is the only person to blame for the act of violence, regardless of the behaviour of the victim/survivor.
<i>Sex worker, porn actress/porn star</i>	<i>Woman who sells sex Woman involved in pornography</i>	Prostitution and pornography are exploitation of women, not work.
<i>Murdered/dead prostitute</i>	<i>Woman who was murdered;</i> use the woman’s name where possible.	Regardless of their past, women who were murdered are women first.

⊗ DON'T USE	✔ DO USE	? WHY?
<i>Child prostitute, teenage prostitute</i>	<i>Abused child</i>	Sexual contact with a child is always abuse.
<i>Abusive relationship</i>	<i>Abusive partner, woman living with an abusive partner</i>	Placing blame on the relationship or relationship dynamics, rather than on the abuser, suggests that both people are equally at fault.
<i>Domestic violence</i>	<i>Domestic abuse Men's violence against women</i>	Most organisations working in this field use the term <i>domestic abuse</i> instead of <i>domestic violence</i> , as this conveys a much wider spectrum of abuse, which can be psychological as well as physical.
<i>Battered woman</i>	<i>Woman who has experienced domestic abuse A survivor of domestic abuse</i>	These alternatives better describe the survivors of domestic abuse.
<i>A domestic/domestic dispute</i>	<i>Domestic abuse</i>	Domestic/domestic dispute frames the incident of violence as a private domestic or family problem and not a crime.

The full Handle with Care Guide is available on our website:
www.zerotolerance.org.uk

For further information please call **0131 556 7365**
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