



What journalists need to know about the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill

Zero Tolerance

October 2017



Acknowledgement

We've produced this briefing in consultation with Scottish Women's Aid, ASSIST, the National Union of Journalists Scotland and the Scottish Government Justice Directorate. The Scottish Government has funded it as part of its national strategy to prevent violence against women. There's more information about this strategy in *Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls*.

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Contents

Introduction	1
About the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill	5
About coercive control	7
Responsible journalism: ten ways	11
Personal safety	13
Checklist	15
More information	17



All photos: Laura Dodsworth

Introduction

Who it's for

We've written this briefing for journalists who are reporting on the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill as it goes through the Scottish Parliament.

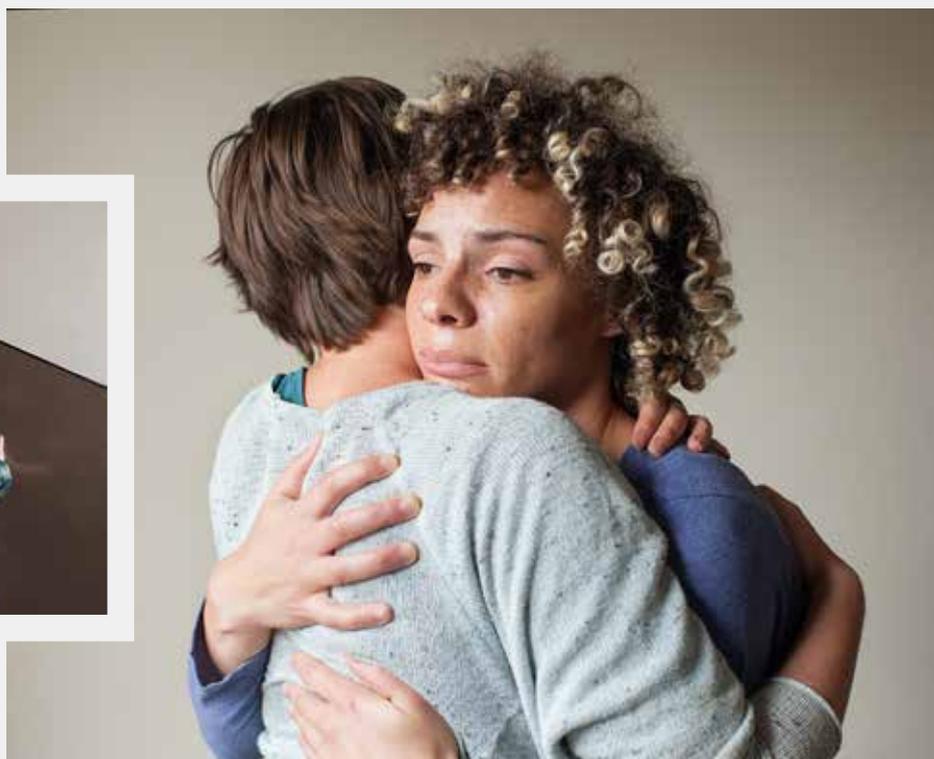
The Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament on 17 March 2017. If passed, we understand that it is likely to come into effect in late 2018 or early 2019. So, there are many opportunities for covering the Bill's progress and contents, and then, if enacted, reporting on prosecutions.

We've kept this briefing short. If you need to know more, and have time to go a bit deeper, we've included sources to help you do that.

It's for any media journalist: local reporters, national press, bloggers, TV, radio, digital, editors, picture editors – whatever. So, we've kept it general, and given pointers for you to apply in your own context.

If there's anything you want to ask or discuss, just get in touch. We want to speak to you.

We can supply free stock images for you to use when reporting on domestic abuse. Too often stock images show only physical violence, and are not representative of the reality of domestic abuse. Our 'One Thousand Words' image library contains accredited stock images, produced with Scottish Women's Aid, Laura Dodsworth and in consultation with survivors of domestic abuse. Images are available to download via dropbox, <http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/one-thousand-words-stock-images-journalists-reporting-domestic-abuse>. Our partners can supply case studies and interviewees.



What's included

We've already published a detailed guide to writing about domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women: *Handle with care: a guide to responsible media reporting of violence against women* (2010), <http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/handle-care-media-guide>. Check that first because it contains all the background you need for writing well-informed news reports and features about domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women, and details of reliable sources for information and interviews. It includes:

- ▶ Definitions
- ▶ Language
- ▶ The law
- ▶ Using case studies
- ▶ Sensitive interviewing
- ▶ Myths and facts about domestic abuse
- ▶ Data and statistics
- ▶ Gender equivalency (who does what to who)
- ▶ Contacts

This briefing adds to *Handle with care* by covering:

- ▶ The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill and its background
- ▶ 'Coercive control' as domestic abuse
- ▶ Main elements of reporting responsibly to protect those experiencing domestic abuse, including children
- ▶ Safety of victims and journalists
- ▶ More information and media contacts



Rationale

Your words count. Many victims of domestic abuse don't report it because they are anxious about reprisal, public shame and blame, and/or concerns about children involved.

Many don't recognise their experience in how domestic abuse is shown and described in the media (think pictures of black eyes). Headlines such as 'Thug punched his girlfriend in the face after she turned down his romantic marriage proposal'¹ excuse perpetrators and undermine victims (if only she hadn't done such and such, he wouldn't have had to... see page 11). Perpetrators are ordinary: they are not 'thugs'. Many victims may believe that domestic abuse, in its slow creep, is not happening to them, and/or won't be taken seriously, and/or that they caused their own abuse, especially because that is exactly what the perpetrator will be telling them too.

Your stories and headlines reach victims, perpetrators, children, adults who grew up with domestic abuse, professionals and communities. Otherwise, there would be no point in writing them. So, this briefing is about supporting you to write and produce news, features, comment and headlines which are accurate, in the public interest, and which don't put victims of domestic abuse at more risk than they are already living with.

Not only is this professional good practice, but it also avoids complaints to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) or IMPRESS and all that that entails, including the consequences if a complaint is upheld.

For any journalist worth their salt, how much better would it be to win a Write to End Violence award rather than its antithesis: a wooden spoon? <https://writetoendvaw.com/>

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'Sometimes – as in the case of Oscar Pistorious and Reeva Steenkamp – victims are effectively erased from their own killings, their names and identities lost in the column inches devoted to their attackers. Clodagh Hawe, murdered along with her three sons, in August, became known as “the invisible woman” after reports focused on her husband Alan, who had killed her, and the children “missed by all who knew them”. Outside the worst of the tabloids, things are improving. There are many reporters and columnists committed to writing on issues such as campus rape culture and inadequacies in the justice system. In Scotland, the Write to End Violence Awards, run by Zero Tolerance, acknowledge good journalism, while handing out a wooden spoon to the worst offenders.' **DANI GARAVELLI²**

¹ Daily Record, 25 August 2017. Available at: <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/uk-world-news/rogue-romeo-punched-girlfriend-face-11050645>

² <https://nujscotland.org.uk/2017/03/22/time-to-end-clumsy-coverage-of-violence-against-women-says-dani-garavelli/>

Terminology

Zero Tolerance recognises that domestic abuse can be perpetrated and experienced by men and women within the context of heterosexual and LGBTI intimate relationships.

The guidance refers to those experiencing domestic abuse as women and children, and those perpetrating it as men. This is based on prevalence and the context of domestic abuse and the Scottish Government's definition of domestic abuse³ as a form of violence against women and girls. There is information about prevalence and context in *Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls*. The Bill is framed within this context: it uses gender-neutral terminology.

The criminal justice system in Scotland differs from those in other parts of the UK. There is information about the main laws relevant to domestic abuse on pages 31 and 32 of *Handle with care: a guide to responsible media reporting of violence against women* and on the Scottish Government website at: <https://beta.gov.scot/policies/violence-against-women-and-girls/strengthening-the-law/>

Most recently, since the Bill's publication, the Scottish Parliament has passed the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016. Amongst its provisions, it set out a new domestic abuse aggravator⁴, and a new offence of non-consensual sharing of private and intimate images.

In England and Wales, the Serious Crime Act 2015 created an offence of 'controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate family relationship'. So, if you're searching for information online, this might come up. Be aware that there are important differences between the proposals in Scotland and the offence in England and Wales. For example, in England and Wales, the offence may be committed against family members other than a partner or ex-partner and does not encompass physical violence. The Scottish Bill includes both physical and psychological abuse within a specific offence of 'domestic abuse' in order to enable prosecutors to include all acts of abuse in a single charge as evidence of a course of conduct. The offence is restricted to partners or ex-partners. It does not include abuse within other types of relationship, for instance parent/child or carer/client. This is consistent with the Scottish Government's 'gendered analysis' of domestic abuse and its understanding of the gender roles which affect relationships and entitlements.

More information on pages 6/7 of the SPICe research briefing for the Bill⁵ and the Stage 1 Report⁶.

³ Domestic abuse, as gender-based violence, can be perpetrated by partners or ex partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends. Source: National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland, Scottish Partnership on Domestic Abuse, Edinburgh, November 2000.

⁴ May result in an increased sentence.

⁵ <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2017/6/13/Domestic-Abuse--Scotland--Bill>

⁶ <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/103883.aspx>

About the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill

At the time of writing, the Bill is in progress. The following describes what's in it and why.

Background

1. The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill, was introduced to the Scottish Parliament on 17 March 2017.
2. Amongst other provisions, it creates a statutory offence of domestic abuse against a partner or ex-partner.
3. This is significant because it means that, if the Bill is enacted, for the first time, domestic abuse against a partner or an ex-partner will be a specific criminal offence.
4. The Solicitor General called for such an offence in 2014. Police Scotland, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), and specialist services which work directly with those experiencing domestic abuse, support the Bill.

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'This Bill was developed with more engagement with beneficiaries, police and Crown Office than any other law we know of.' **SCOTTISH WOMEN'S AID**

5. Domestic abuse is not new. What is 'new' is that the proposed law will allow the criminal justice system to investigate and prosecute more effectively what those experiencing domestic abuse typically describe: the coercive and controlling behaviour of partners/ex-partners. It means that there is a legal sanction against perpetrators of such behaviour to hold them to account and to protect victims. Effectively, the law is catching up with what women have been reporting to services for decades.
6. While some abusive behaviour of partners/ex-partners, such as physical or sexual assault or threats of these, are already criminal offences, emotional and psychological abuse (which also cause fear, alarm and distress), and which are constituent elements of domestic abuse, are not captured by current law and/or are difficult to prosecute.
7. So, the proposed offence recognises that domestic abuse can include physical and sexual abuse and threats, **and/or** psychological and emotional abuse. It means that if, as is common, the abuse is not always or only physical, the perpetrator can still be prosecuted.
8. This recognises how perpetrators commit, and how victims experience, domestic abuse, and the impact of this.



'The proposed offence addresses a gap in existing law by recognising that domestic abuse may not only damage or violate a victim's physical integrity; but may also undermine a victim's autonomy and freedom and their ability to live their life in the manner they choose.' COPFS⁷

What the Bill includes

Briefly:

1. The Bill sets out a statutory offence of domestic abuse against a partner or ex-partner.
2. There are three conditions. The prosecution has to prove all three for there to be a conviction.
3. These three conditions are:
 - ▶ The accused engaged in a course of behaviour which was abusive of their partner/ex-partner
 - ▶ A reasonable person would think it likely that this course of behaviour would cause physical or psychological harm
 - ▶ The accused intended the course of behaviour to harm their partner/ex-partner, or 'was reckless' as to whether it would
4. A course of behaviour means that it occurred on at least two occasions. If those two occasions are unconnected in time or place, it may not constitute a course of behaviour. The court will decide, in each case, whether the evidence shows a course of behaviour.
5. The offence defines 'abusive behaviour' as including behaviour that is violent, intimidating or threatening (which could be prosecuted under existing law).
6. It **also** includes behaviour which has the purpose or likely effect of an accused making their partner/ex-partner dependent on, or subordinate to them; isolating them from friends, relatives or support; controlling, regulating or monitoring their day-to-day activities; depriving them of, or restricting, their freedom of action; or frightening, humiliating, degrading or punishing them. Such behaviour cannot easily be prosecuted using existing criminal law.
7. The description in the Bill of what constitutes abusive behaviour is 'non-exhaustive'. The court has the freedom to decide whether the behaviour is abusive, based on the evidence.
8. The prosecution does not need to prove that the abusive behaviour of the accused actually harmed the victim. The offence is committed if the conditions at point 3 above are met. These take into account the likely impact of the behaviour, and the intention or 'recklessness' of the accused.
9. The Bill also reforms some existing rules to make sure that an accused can't use court processes to control or influence or traumatise the victim. For example, the offence can be prosecuted without the victim(s) having to testify; and the accused will not be able to conduct their own defence in court. This is similar to current rules which protect victims in sexual offence trials.
10. There is a statutory aggravator⁸ if the offence involves a child (for example the perpetrator is abusive of their partner/ex-partner when a child can see or hear what is happening or is present).
11. The proposed offence carries a maximum prison sentence of 12 months under summary procedure and 14 years under solemn procedure⁹.

More information about the Bill, the thinking behind it and its progress at:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/103883.aspx>

⁷ Submission to the Justice Committee call for evidence on the Bill cited in Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill: SPICe Briefing, 2017. Available at: <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2017/6/13/Domestic-Abuse--Scotland--Bill>

⁸ May result in an increased sentence.

⁹ The maximum prison sentence for a sheriff and jury case is five years. For the High Court, the maximum is limited only by the maximum penalty for the offence; in this case 14 years.

About coercive control

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‘You don’t spot it right away. It’s a drip, drip effect. It grinds you down. It’s an effort to get through the day. You still have to make the good times for your children. You still have to get to your work. How hard is that when people can’t see any bruises? It’s all-pervading. Not everyone is locked in their homes. But they might as well be. People just don’t get how difficult it is to live with. How would you feel if you couldn’t just decide to go out for a coffee with your pal; you couldn’t just decide to do the washing tomorrow rather than today; you can’t just say “sorry I’m late because there was a traffic jam” without all hell breaking loose.’ **ASSIST**

Domestic abuse is not ‘a fight’ or a one-off act¹⁰. Yes, verbal and/or physical fights occur between partners/ex-partners, but there is a difference between a one-off incident and the pattern of abuse which is domestic abuse. Think pattern not punches; impact not incidents; abusive behaviour rather than abusive ‘relationship’.

Most women who ask for help have been ‘subjected to a pattern of domination that includes tactics to isolate, degrade, exploit and control them...’¹¹ This is known as ‘coercive control’: a pattern of behaviour, or as worded in the Bill, a ‘course of behaviour’.

Coercive control is the best predictor of women’s deaths associated with domestic abuse – not because of the severity of the abuse but because of its frequency. A history of physical abuse is a poor predictor of women’s deaths (although a pretty good predictor of further abuse). However, coercive control is present in around 90% of partner homicides (male perpetrator/female victim) with stalking/monitoring behaviour being one of the most common manifestations¹².

Coercive control is not a ‘warning sign’ of abuse – it IS abuse and it’s the most dangerous sort. Coercive control plus a ‘trigger event’ (such as the woman leaving) can and does lead to homicide even without a history of physical abuse (hence news reports quoting neighbours about the perpetrator being such a nice man and no one – not even the woman’s friends/family – thinking that he was abusing her).

The control can be psychological and/or physical, actual or threatened. For victims, the result is confusion; isolation; fear; walking on eggshells; losing the sense of self; and limiting their ability and freedom to participate in the world. For perpetrators, the result is being able to direct a partner/ex-partner’s life, with or without using physical violence. Indeed, he may be able to control her with just a look or by lifting his eyebrow. She will know what he means or intends by that.

¹⁰ Johnson, M. P. (2008). A typology of domestic violence: intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and situational couple violence. Northeastern University Press.

¹¹ Stark, E. (2007). How men entrap women in personal life. Oxford University Press.

¹² Monckton-Smith, J., Szymanska, K and Haile, S. (2017). Exploring the relationship between stalking and homicide. Suzy Lamplugh Trust.

There are examples of the sorts of behaviour which constitute coercive control on page 7 of the Bill's policy memorandum¹³. These include intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimising and denying the abuse, blaming the victim, manipulating the children and withholding money from the household. The memorandum gives examples of forcing a partner/ex-partner to eat off the floor and controlling their access to the toilet. These have seemed extreme to some people: they are common, although memorable. But that's missing the point: coercive control describes the end result of the litany of everyday abuse over time. Individual actions which, in isolation, some might dismiss as 'extreme' or 'insignificant' or even 'romantic', constantly repeated with malice, end up oppressing and conditioning those on the receiving end. It's been described as 'entrapment'. You can see what this means here:



Power and Control wheel
The Duluth Model
www.theduluthmodel.org

“ ‘One woman ... her husband didn't have a house key, and the reason he didn't have a house key is that he said she should always be in when he came home. No matter where he'd been and no matter what time of day or night, she should be in the house. And she didn't see that as abuse, you know, which to me, alright, he wasn't hitting her or anything like that but he was controlling her. "No matter what, you be in the house when I get home. If I want to go out and come home at midnight or whatever, you should be there waiting for me. And if I want a meal at that time then you should be making me a meal" and stuff like that, you know.' SCOTTISH WOMEN'S AID

¹³ <http://www.parliament.scot/Domestic%20Abuse%20Scotland%20Bill/SPBill08PMS052017.pdf>

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‘The first ever woman I worked with, a woman from well-to-do area, had left and was in homeless accommodation (without her teenage boys because she couldn’t bear to put them through that). But she was still going home each night to do the washing and make the dinner before he came home. He even ‘persuaded’ her to sign up for a second mortgage on the home, so he could use it to keep his business afloat “or the kids would suffer”. I’m still raging about that!!!’ **NHS LANARKSHIRE**

For someone on the receiving end of this pattern of behaviour, everyday life is characterised by trying to avoid harm; to keep children safe; to hide what’s going on from children, friends and family; to anticipate what he will do next; to understand his rules, although these may change on a whim; and to behave in the way he wants, although that may change too.

Separation does not equal safety: leaving is dangerous, over and above the practical, financial, emotional and other worries which are part and parcel of any separation from a partner. This is because perpetrators see separation as a challenge to their authority, which they then want to reassert. It’s when, or after women try to separate, that they are at most risk of being killed by their partner/ex-partner¹⁴.

You get a more accurate understanding of what’s going on if you re-word the phrase ‘she won’t leave him’ with ‘he won’t let her go’. Women who separate from a perpetrator are not ‘fleeing domestic abuse’. They are trying to make an autonomous life.

That is difficult because, living with him or without him, his influence, presence and control, or reminders of these, are likely to follow her wherever she goes (for example a text every hour of the day; a bunch of flowers every week; a life insurance policy or funeral plan in the post; using other people (including the children) to report on her movements).

Coercive control affects children in a family whether or not they witness any physical or emotional abuse of their mother. The tactics which perpetrators use to deprive women of freedom, independence and resources affect children¹⁵. For example, if the man isolates their mother from family and friends, children are also likely to be isolated too. The man may manipulate and confuse children; blame their mother for the abuse; try to turn them against their mother; encourage them to report on their mother (they may not even realise he is doing this). His behaviour and choices in the household affect and disrupt children’s lives. Within the family, coercive control is a ‘parenting choice’ on the part of the perpetrator¹⁶.

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‘He’d turn the music up and wake the children. I’d then struggle to get them up in the morning, and they’d be late for school, and crabbit.’ **NHS LANARKSHIRE**

¹⁴ Richards, L. (2004). Findings from the Multi-Agency Domestic Violence Murder Review in London found that 76% of partner homicides occurred after the victim had left.

¹⁵ Katz, E. (2017): presentation (and citations) on children’s experiences of coercive control available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299412128_Children’s_Experiences_of_Coercive_Control

¹⁶ David Mandell: www.endingviolence.com

You may be thinking as you read this that you would not let this happen to you or that you would never do that to someone else. But it happens, often drip by drip, and people do it (in the UK, one in four women experiences domestic abuse at some point in her life, and one in five children by the time they are 18). So, you will know someone who is experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse.

But it's often under the radar. One of the reasons is that the law is not yet in a position to prosecute perpetrators of the psychological and emotional abuse which characterise coercive control, although victims have reported this for decades.

You can write about domestic abuse in a way which tells a story and which also returns some control to women and children experiencing domestic abuse, which understands what domestic abuse means, and which protects victims.

That is what we are asking you to do.

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‘He thought completely differently to how I thought. My Auntie Ellen loves [shop] and because I drove and she didn't drive, I would drive her. We went out to [shop] and, when mobile phones came out, he was on the phone – phoning, phoning, phoning all the time – and she would be like, “For God's sake! Why is he phoning you all the time” and I was like, “Oh, I don't know. He does it all the time”. Another time we had an argument and I was due to go to my work and he told me not to go to my work and I said, “I have to go to my work” and he ran out to the car, in the bonnet, and then – I don't know what he did but I couldn't press my clutch or my brake. I can't remember what it was but I couldn't start my car, and I couldn't drive my car and I was frustrated because I had to get to work. If I fell asleep on the couch he would open all the windows and put the big light on or pour a basin of water over me. If he came in from a night [out]... sometimes I'd take the bulb out of the bedroom [light] because he'd just come in and turn all the lights on, demand his rights whether you wanted to or not. One time he came in [the bedroom] and he was really different this time. He had an axe and then he was really shouting and – he always came in saying, “I've been talking to somebody” and, “What have you been up to? I know you've been...” this and that and accusing me of having affairs and... I was not ... never! Anyway, I wasn't allowed out anywhere. And you couldn't placate him. He wouldn't believe anything. He would just think you were lying, lying. And he [swung] the axe as if he was going to hit me but it went into the [bed]side table and the axe, the axe mark was just a constant reminder as well.’ **SCOTTISH WOMEN'S AID**

Responsible journalism: ten ways

Responsible journalism in the context of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill means:

1. **Complying** with the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) ten guidelines on reporting violence against women. The last thing any journalist wants to do is cause harm. In its list of ten, IFJ states:
‘Maintain confidentiality: as part of their duty of care media and journalists have an ethical responsibility not to publish or broadcast names or identify places that in any way might further compromise the safety and security of survivors or witnesses.’
2. **Assuming** that she is no longer with her partner, if you are reporting a court case of a woman who is a complainer of domestic abuse. If you give any information that could identify her, you could put her and any children at risk. This could include where she lives, where she works or what school the children attend. It does not matter if this information is already in the public domain, you don’t need to repeat it if there is no legal reason to do so.
3. **Balancing** information which is considered as public interest (although it’s worth asking yourself who ‘the public’ is) with the safety of individuals and any children. Journalists are adept at protecting identities whilst also reporting accurately and writing something interesting. Remember that when you report, especially in small communities, it can be doubly humiliating for victims and children involved.
4. **Not blaming** the victim for the abuse. This often happens inadvertently but it can reinforce the abusive behaviour of the perpetrator. The headline mentioned above: ‘Thug punched his girlfriend in the face after she turned down his romantic marriage proposal’ suggests that if she had only accepted his proposal, he wouldn’t have had to punch her. Perpetrators of coercive control typically create a diversion or a false reality (if you didn’t do that, I wouldn’t HAVE to do this). He might say something like, ‘If only you’d let me have sex with you I wouldn’t have had to get angry’ or ‘You embarrassed me in front of my pals by phoning me.’
5. **Recognising** the humiliation, degradation and vulnerability of women and children who experience domestic abuse. Reflect rather than sensationalise the abuse. Responsible reporting means being sensitive to what amounts to trauma: protecting identities, correcting distortions and diversions, and not colluding with the perpetrator.

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‘We had a woman who left her home in the middle of the night in her nightclothes. It was in the wee local paper. She felt so embarrassed, so humiliated because everyone in her village then knew that, not “just” about the abuse but that she had been outside in her nightie. And there was another woman who was horrified by the court report in the paper, because her children ended up being teased in the playground, “Your dad’s in the paper for being in the jail”. How is that public interest?’ ASSIST



'I'm sitting thinking of every report I've ever written, and it just fell into place.'

COURT REPORTER

6. **Speaking** to the experts: for example, Scottish Women's Aid; ASSIST; Scotland's specialist domestic abuse prosecutor; Police Scotland domestic abuse specialist staff; those who experience domestic abuse; the agencies which support them. These are all experts. Specialists can supply case studies and interviews. It's also good to give the specialist support organisations the chance to give their perspective if there's a letter or a piece which could be harmful for victims and for the public interest.
7. **Going through** a specialist organisation such as Scottish Women's Aid or ASSIST if you want to speak to a victim. They can make sure that anyone who speaks to you has support and is not at risk, either from the perpetrator or from you re-traumatising them. There can be repercussions for anyone doing media interviews. Victims themselves may not understand the implications. Perpetrators can go to great lengths to find out where a victim is living or personal information to use against the victim.
8. **Raising awareness.** You might not have much space, perhaps only a headline, but you can make a massive difference with your choice of words. 'Why doesn't she leave?' is only one word shorter than 'He won't let her go'. The former blames the victim; the latter describes coercive control. Whatever you do, you are raising awareness in some way: raising it to protect and help victims is much more productive.
9. **Always giving** Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline. It is open all the time. It can route any caller to the best source of support. It's on: **0800 027 1234** and at <http://sdafmh.org.uk/>
10. **Signing up** to the Zero Tolerance pledge on reporting violence against women at: <http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/write-end-violence-against-women-pledge?destination=node%2F333>

Briefly

- ▶ Name it: it's domestic abuse not a relationship; it's a pattern not an incident
- ▶ It's a crime: somebody committed it; it didn't just happen; there is a perpetrator, a victim and no excuses
- ▶ Safety comes before story: why compromise someone's safety for the sake of a story
- ▶ Coercive control means the perpetrator is trying to control every aspect of a woman's life; and, to a large extent, the children's. It's a predictor of very serious harm
- ▶ Knowledge: ask an expert – they want to speak to you
- ▶ Always give Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline number: **0800 027 1234** and website <http://sdafmh.org.uk/>

Personal safety

Writing about domestic abuse and violence against women can affect journalists.

More and more journalists are writing about violence against women because they want to support those affected and to raise public awareness. There's been a fantastic response to our annual Write to End Violence Against Women awards, and we are impressed by the heart, soul and all-round quality of the writing.

Abuse and threats

Journalists can face violent personal abuse and threats for example on email, Twitter, Facebook. They may be discredited and criticised professionally as being 'one-sided' or inaccurate if they write pieces which are sympathetic to victims or challenge perpetrators and their supporters. Journalists are well-used to criticism but there is a particular misogyny about the abuse: entirely consistent with the issue. The abuse of women journalists is a particular concern¹⁷.

Journalists use different techniques to stand up for themselves and their right to express themselves. Some deal with 'trolling' and abusive comments on social media by blocking and muting people; ignoring and not reading comments; not responding immediately; and not engaging with such people.

If this is happening to you, it may be helpful to speak to your employer, your union (if you are a member), a colleague, manager or someone you can rely on.

If you are in any way anxious about a threat or an actual incident, you can speak to the police. Stalking, harassment and threats are criminal offences.

Writing about abuse

Researching violence against women, reading survivors' stories and/or speaking to survivors of domestic abuse can be hard, and can expose journalists to trauma. This can be all the more so if you are experiencing domestic abuse now, or have done so in the past, or are close to someone affected.

There are things you can do to protect yourself from harrowing and difficult interviews and information. This includes self-care techniques (the positive things you usually do to reduce stress); speaking to colleagues, managers, your union; and/or seeing your GP.

You might find this Australian video on vicarious trauma and harassment helpful:

<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/News-media/Reporting-Guidelines> and, from Canada, tips and other information for journalists and their employers at <http://www.femifesto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/JournalistsAndSexualViolence.pdf>.

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/sep/13/bbc-chair-calls-for-end-to-abuse-of-journalists-especially-women>



Checklist

Check	More information
You have reported the Bill and its intentions accurately	Pages 5-6
You have said or implied that domestic abuse is a pattern of behaviour which harms victims	Pages 7-8
You have not identified a victim and any children in your item or headline or photo: who they are, where they are	Page 11
You have focused on the behaviour of the perpetrator, rather than the experience of the victim and any children	Page 11
You have said or implied that fault lies with the perpetrator and not with victims, and children	Page 11
What you have written or shown complies with guidelines on responsible reporting of DA/VAW	Page 11
If there are victim interviews, you are confident that how you have conducted the interviews, and what you have written, will not result in further trauma or harm	Page 11
What you have written, edited or portrayed will not expose or humiliate a victim further	Pages 11-12
You have checked your facts with a reliable expert in the field/ current data source	Pages 17-18
You have given details of Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline	0800 027 1234 and at http://sdafmh.org.uk/

“

‘Many journalists are so helpful. There are now so many positive examples of journalists making the story accessible to the audience and getting it right for victims at the same time. And, although there is still sensationalism, at least now we are seeing more of a focus on what the perpetrator did rather than what the victim experienced.’ ASSIST



More information

Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill

The Bill:

<http://www.parliament.scot/Domestic%20Abuse%20Scotland%20Bill/SPBill08S052017.pdf>

Scottish Parliament page with all background materials, timetable and so on:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/103883.aspx>

Scottish Government consultation and responses:

<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/09/4616/downloads#res505326>

<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/05/8982/2>

Scottish Government policy and strategy:

<https://beta.gov.scot/policies/violence-against-women-and-girls/>

<https://beta.gov.scot/policies/violence-against-women-and-girls/strengthening-the-law/>

Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls

<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/03/7926>

Resources for journalists

NUJ code of conduct:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/about/nuj-code/>

Editors' code of practice:

<https://www.ipso.co.uk/editors-code-of-practice/>

The IMPRESS Standards Code:

<https://impress.press/standards/impress-standards-code.html>

ZT *Handle with care*, media guide:

<http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/handle-care-media-guide?destination=node%2F358>

ZT Write to end violence against women pledge:

<http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/write-end-violence-against-women-pledge?destination=node%2F333>

NUJ responsible reporting on mental health, mental illness and death by suicide:

<https://nujscotland.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/nuj-responsible-reporting-on-mental-health-mental-illness-death-by-suicide.pdf>

NUJ guidelines for journalists reporting violence against women

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/nuj-guidelines-on-violence-against-women>

International Federation of Journalists guidelines for reporting on violence against women:

<http://ethicaljournalisminitiative.org/en/contents/ifj-guidelines-for-reporting-on-violence-against-women>

Use the right words: media reporting on sexual violence in Canada:

<http://www.femifesto.ca/>

Information about domestic abuse

What is coercive control? Scottish Women's Aid briefing paper:

<http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk/node/255>

Coercive control and LGBT people: film from Scottish Women's Aid and LGBT Youth Scotland explaining LGBT people's experiences of domestic abuse and coercive control:

<https://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/news/coercive-control>

Understanding violence against women: myths and realities: free course from FutureLearn and the University of Strathclyde – for anyone:

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/understanding-violence-against-women>

Helpline for anyone affected

Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline: 0800 027 1234 and at <http://sdafmh.org.uk/>

Media contacts

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Scottish Women's Aid

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Media: Brenna Jessie

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ASSIST: Mhairi McGowan

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assist@glasgow.gov.uk

Scottish Government: Barbara Burke

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LGBT Youth Scotland

0131 555 3940

communications@lgbtyouth.org.uk

Fearless: Aaron Slater

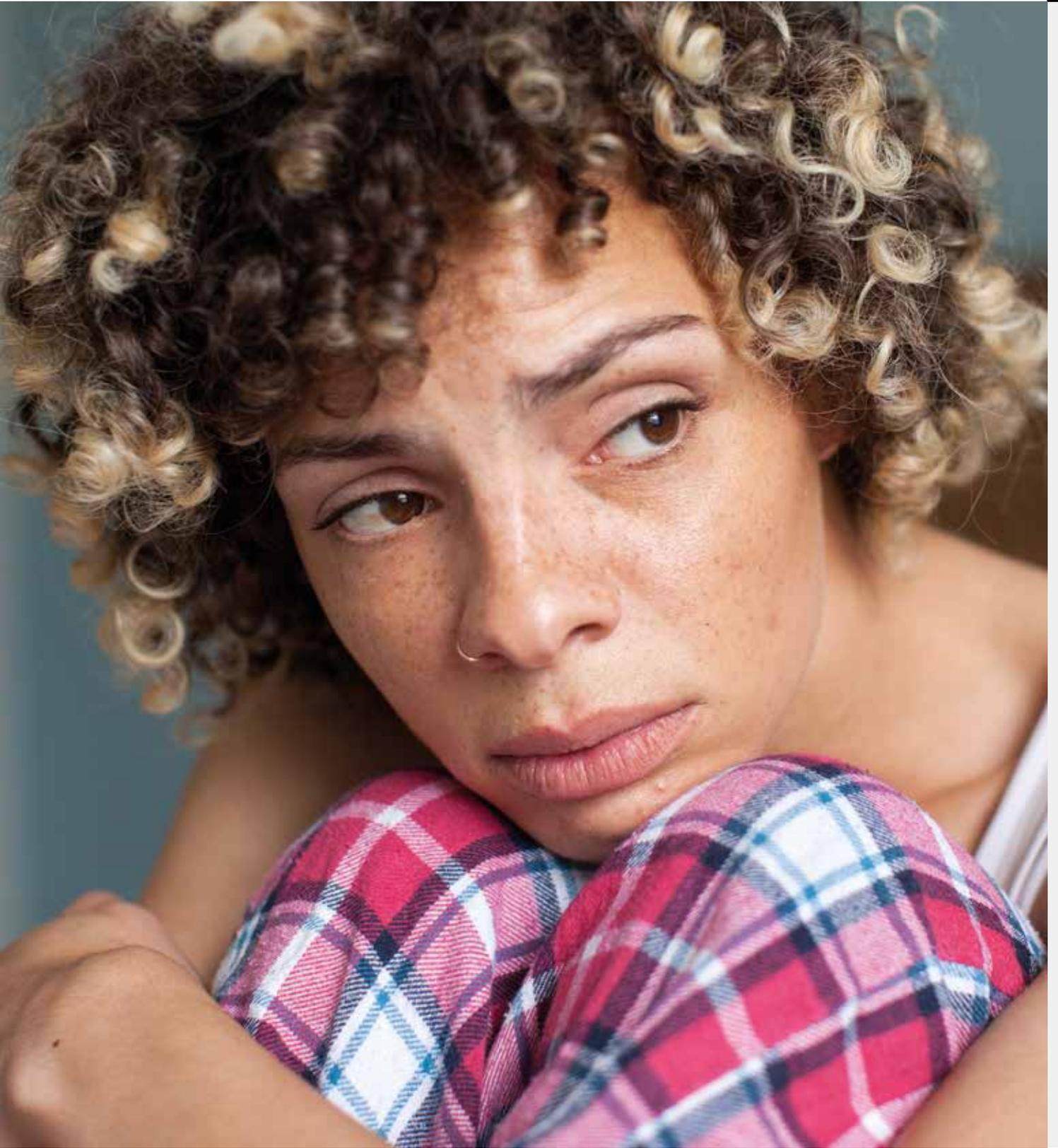
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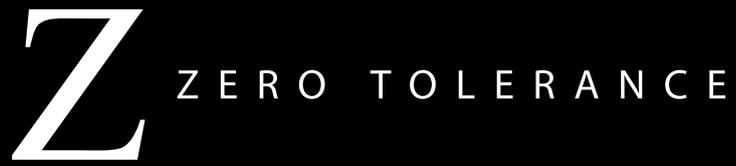
fearlessinfo@sacro.org.uk

Rape Crisis Scotland: Sandy Brindley

0141 331 4181

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