

Tips for reporting on violence against women and their children

2019 Victorian edition

Our WATCH
End violence against
Women And Their Children

Language

- ‘**Violence against women**’ (VAW) is any act of gender-based violence that harms women, in public or private. It covers family violence as well as non-partner/family violence (e.g. perpetrated by a colleague or stranger).
- ‘**Family violence**’ (FV) is a term used to describe violence occurring within a broader network of family (e.g. between family members/intimate partners). In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the term also refers to violence within extended kinship relationships¹.
- ‘**Domestic violence**’ (DV) only refers to acts of violence that occur in a domestic setting between two people who are, or were, in an intimate relationship, and is a less-used term.

Understand how discrimination exacerbates violence

Power imbalances that create discrimination (sexism, racism, ableism, homophobia, etc.) can mean that some women are disproportionately affected by violence, repeat victims of violence, and face additional, including systemic, barriers to reporting violence and accessing specialist support services².

E.g. an Aboriginal woman living with disability could experience intersecting racism (she fears that reporting will result in the removal of her children) and ableism (she relies on her abusive non-Aboriginal carer), so she does not report the violence.

How discrimination exacerbates violence	Examples
Violence against women experiencing discrimination and oppression is more likely to be condoned	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Written off as ‘part of their culture’– Justified by referencing religious texts– Excused as a symptom of ‘carer stress’
Women who face multiple forms of oppression are often stereotyped	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Labelled as ‘loud’, ‘aggressive’, ‘drug-users’– Violence is normalised by being attributed to disadvantage
Male peer relations that emphasise aggression can impact more on some women	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Migrant women can be eroticised and fetishised as ‘exotic’, ‘passive’ and ‘available to men’ and can be targeted and promoted for sex tourism and race-fetishising pornography
Some women are more likely to be impacted by men’s control of decision-making which limits independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Through lack of equal access to education and work opportunities and justifications for men’s control over decision making as ‘just part of their culture/religion’

Common misconceptions

Misconception	Reality
Violence is driven or ‘fuelled’ by alcohol or drugs, mental health, stress, culture, the ‘burden’ of caring for someone with disability or ‘just snapping’	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– This does not align with the evidence. <u>Research</u> indicates 80% of men who murder their partners had a history of abusing them³
Some cultures or socio-economic groups are more violent than others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Men of all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds perpetrate violence against women– Reporting frequently implies that violence against Aboriginal women is perpetrated only by Aboriginal men when non-Indigenous men are also perpetrators, particularly in urban areas⁴
Women could leave violence “if they wanted to”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The most extreme violence, including murder, often occurs when a woman tries to leave a relationship

Tips for using statistics

- The Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Personal Safety Survey provides the most comprehensive data on violence experienced by both men and women.
- Recorded crime statistics do not tell the full story, as most people who experience violence do not report it to the police.
- The National Community Attitudes Survey captures Australia-wide data on attitudes to violence against women.

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Dos and don'ts

Tip	Do	Don't
Name it	Do: Use the terms 'violence against women', 'family violence', 'elder abuse', 'child exploitation material', 'rape' and 'murder'	Don't: Use terms that minimise and trivialise violence (e.g. 'volatile relationship', or 'child porn')
Safety first	Do: Be mindful that it may be easy (e.g. in Aboriginal communities or rural/regional areas) to identify a person even when measures to de-identify are taken	Don't: Compromise the survivor's safety. Consider that including specific details about the survivor/s, what occurred, and where, can risk identification
Evidence-based language	Do: Use language that helps the audience understand the evidence ⁵ : that most violence against women and their children is driven by gender inequality through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the condoning of men's violence against women, – men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence, – rigid gender stereotypes, and – disrespect towards women and male peer relations that emphasise aggression 	Don't: Use language that inadvertently suggests the victim is responsible for what happened to them, including whether they were drinking, out late at night, walking at night or alone, seeing other people, etc. The perpetrator is responsible
Serious not sensational	Do: Use respectful language and headlines to articulate the seriousness of this violence	Don't: Sensationalise or trivialise violence through overly dramatic language and puns, unnecessary details and disempowering images of survivors
Acknowledge the perpetrator	Use active language to emphasise that someone perpetrated this violence, e.g. 'man assaults wife' Do: If it is safe/legally possible, name the relationship between victim and perpetrator to remind your audience that most violence against women is perpetrated by somebody they know	Don't: Use passive language that erases the perpetrator, e.g. 'woman assaulted' Don't: Reinforce the idea that women should police or modify their own behaviour to avoid men's violence; accountability should always sit with the perpetrator
Include support options	Do: Always include: "If you or someone you know is experiencing family violence, phone 1800 RESPECT." Also include a referral for men, such as: "For counselling, advice and support for men who have anger, relationship or parenting issues, call the Men's Referral Service on 1300 766 491"	Don't: Only provide information about specialist suicide or mental health services. This overlooks the impact of violence and misses an opportunity to inform the community about other specialist help options
Use appropriate imagery	Do: Ask yourself: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What impact might this image have on the victim-survivors' family? – Am I perpetuating harmful stereotypes about gender, race, ability and age? 	Don't: Take photos of survivors or victims from a height to make them appear small, ask them to 'look sad' or use bikini-clad images from social media
Refer to experts	Do: Refer to experts on violence against women to put the issue into context: go to ourwatch.org.au/News-media/Media-Contacts	Don't: Only rely on the police and judiciary for comment. Police can provide a history of reported crime, however, most violence against women goes unreported.

This document is a summary of *How to report on violence against women and their children*. For more information and to access the complete reporting guidelines, go to: ourwatch.org.au

Notes

- 1 Australian Human Rights Commission, Ending family violence and abuse in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, 2006
- 2 Our Watch, *Changing the picture*, 2018
- 3 Australian Domestic and Family Violence Review Network, *Data Report*, 2018
- 4 Our Watch, *Changing the picture*, 2018
- 5 Our Watch, *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women*, 2015