



NUJ guidelines for journalists on violence against women

September 2013

The union's national executive council has endorsed this guidance and it has been created in partnership with other organisations.

Key issues:

- Frame violence against women and girls¹ (VAWG) as a gender equality and human-rights abuses rather than as a "mishap", a "bad relationship" or as the consequence of women undertaking activities that would be unremarkable for men (walking alone, being out after dark, drinking in a bar, etc.).
- In the case of attack that has not resulted in murder, do not use the word "victim" unless the woman self-identifies as one. If she has survived the attack, she is a "survivor".
- Have regard for women as individuals and avoid media reporting which reinforces negative gender stereotypes.
- Take care not to contribute to the sexualisation of women and girls in the media.

Guidance:

- Include helplines at the end of articles or broadcasts and include all jurisdictions information where appropriate (i.e. England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, etc.).
- Include more informative and educational materials (e.g. challenging rape myths and misconceptions about the "types" of victim).
- Broadcast warnings before presenting material in which violence against women is to be depicted, especially if reporting sexual violence.
- Name violence against women as violence against women (e.g. domestic violence is not a "volatile relationship"). Do not use the word sex when you mean rape. "Honour" crime should appear in quotes or with "so-called" before it. "Crimes of passion" is not an appropriate way to describe murder.

¹ VAWG is a collective term for a set of human rights abuses relating to women because they are women (e.g. female genital mutilation) or which disproportionately affect women and girls (e.g. rape). As such it is a description of crime *types* rather than victims. It includes (but is not limited to: rape, sexual assault, 'honour' based violence, forced marriage, domestic violence, sex trafficking, forced prostitution, sexual harassment and female genital mutilation).

- Do not blame religion or culture for gender-based violence and do not assume that one religion or culture is more inclined than others. Represent gender-based violence as a cross-cultural phenomenon with no geographical or cultural boundaries.
- Female genital mutilation is a violation of the human and bodily rights of women and girls which is practised in many countries for different stated reasons. It is not circumcision. The word mutilation in itself condemns the practice in the view of the World Health Organisation, which states female genital mutilation includes "all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons".
- When reporting on violence against women working in prostitution, avoid using derogatory language (e.g. hooker).
- Make the perpetrator visible in your report (e.g. women do not "get themselves raped"), it is not domestic violence that "claims the lives of two women a week", it is murder.
- Do not refer to abusers as "monsters", "fiends", "maniacs" or "beasts" as this creates the myth that abusers are noticeably and substantially different from "normal" men.
- Take care not to imply that a survivor of gender-based violence might be somehow, even partially, to blame for the violence she has experienced, nor assume or imply that any of her behaviour might have triggered the abuse or that "she asked for it".
- Avoid treating homicides resulting from domestic violence as inexplicable or unpredictable tragedies simply because the factors which led to the homicide are unknown.
- Avoid comments which could be interpreted as making excuses for the abuser, such as commenting on his remorse, or suggesting that the way women dress or behave incited the incident.
- In general, when presenting stories on rape keep in mind that stranger rapes are rarer than those involving people known to the survivor.
- Use up-to-date statistics and do your research.
- Pay attention to potential risks and the safety of the woman being interviewed (e.g. take care when filming, even if only doing hand shots, her jewellery may be recognisable).

- Consider reporting more fully on the successful prosecutions of those guilty of violence against women, as well as the success many women have had recovering and rebuilding their lives.

For more information:

The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

UN women - www.unwomen.org

World Health Organisation information about violence against women - http://who.int/topics/gender_based_violence/en

The End Violence Against Women Coalition is a unique coalition of organisations and individuals campaigning to end all forms of violence against women in the UK - <http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk>

Women's aid UK - www.womensaid.org.uk

Women's aid Ireland - www.womensaid.ie

Women's aid federation Northern Ireland - www.womensaidni.org

Scottish women's aid - www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk

Welsh women's aid - www.welshwomensaid.org.uk

NUJ ethics:

The union has always stood for high journalistic standards based on the NUJ code of conduct and the union backs members willing to take a stand for ethical journalism.

NUJ code of conduct: www.nuj.org.uk/about/nuj-code/

The NUJ ethics hotline number is 0845 450 0864 (members only).

Email the NUJ ethics council: ethics@nuj.org.uk

Email the NUJ equality council: equality@nuj.org.uk