

5 Essential Considerations for Reporting on Domestic Abuse

Special care, awareness, and sensitivity are required when reporting on domestic abuse. By reporting responsibly and thoughtfully, the media can help increase public understanding of domestic abuse and support survivors. Therefore, though this is not a comprehensive checklist, FinAbility has created a short guide of five things to remember and links to additional resources to support journalists.

- 1 Safety comes first:** The main goal for reporting on domestic abuse should be to promote public safety and awareness. At every stage of the reporting process, reporters must ensure that they are not putting any survivor(s) at risk. For example, if a survivor wants to remain anonymous, the final report must be thoroughly reviewed and checked to ensure the survivor's anonymity is not compromised.
- 2 Respect survivors' boundaries:** Survivors should have agency over how and when they tell their story. Having a short, off-the-record conversation or sharing the intended list of questions prior to the interview can help establish boundaries. Survivors should also be informed ahead of time on when, where, and how their story will be published. Providing survivors the chance to do a review of the story prior to publication is ideal.
- 3 Be careful with language:** Reporters must ensure they are using language that accurately describes domestic abuse and does not lead to victim blaming. Inaccurately describing domestic abuse, such as using phrases like "domestic dispute," can minimize the severity of the abuse.¹ Terms such as "alleged" and "accused" should also be avoided as they can imply disbelief of survivors.² However there are scenarios in which such terms have legal implications so consulting a lawyer is vital when in doubt. Further, though the term "survivor" is most often used when referring to individuals who have experienced domestic abuse, this does not apply everywhere. Not only may there be legal/policy scenarios in which the term "victim" is required, but also the person being interviewed should always have a choice.
- 4 Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of race, gender, sexual identity, ability, or socioeconomic situation:**³ Inequality and oppression result in not only an overall lack of media representation but also silencing of survivors from marginalized communities who already face greater barriers to accessing support. Reporters must remember to ensure inclusivity and diverse representation when reporting on domestic abuse.
- 5 Bring in experts and include resources:** It is important to acknowledge that domestic abuse is a global shadow pandemic, not one isolated incident. Wherever possible, reporters should include expert voices and the latest research to contextualize the prevalence of domestic abuse, keeping in mind that sexual and domestic abuse are severely underreported.⁴ Also, every story should feature details and links to resources and support for survivors.

1. National Network to End Domestic Violence, Media Guide: Resources for Reporters, Editors, and Media Professionals, <https://nnev.org/content/media-guide/>

2. Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls & Young Women, Reporting on Rape and Sexual Violence: A Media Toolkit for Local and National Journalists to Better Media Coverage, <http://www.chitaskforce.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Chicago-Taskforce-Media-Toolkit.pdf>

3. National Network to End Domestic Violence, Media Guide: Resources for Reporters, Editors, and Media Professionals

4. Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, The Product: Writing With Insight, Accuracy and Context, 19 Jan. 2012, <https://dartcenter.org/content/product-writing-about-ipv-with-insight-accuracy-and-context>

Additional resources

- **National Network to End Domestic Violence, Media Guide: Resources for Reporters, Editors, and Media Professionals**
<https://nnedv.org/content/media-guide/>
- **Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls & Young Women, Reporting on Rape and Sexual Violence: A Media Toolkit for Local and National Journalists to Better Media Coverage**
<http://www.chitaskforce.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Chicago-Taskforce-Media-Toolkit.pdf>
- **Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma:**
 - **Reporting on Sexual Violence**
<https://dartcenter.org/content/reporting-on-sexual-violence>
 - **The Basics: What Every Reporter Needs to Know about IPV**
<https://dartcenter.org/content/basics-what-every-reporter-needs-to-know-about-ipv>