

How to report on violence against women and their children

2019 National Edition



Our
WATCH
End violence against
Women And Their Children

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1.

About these guidelines

These guidelines provide information and tips to support media organisations across Australia to report on violence against women.

The guidelines were developed by Our Watch in consultation with representatives of the media and organisations working to address violence against women. Additional information can be found at media.ourwatch.org.au.

2.

Why these guidelines matter

Violence against women and their children represents a serious problem in Australia. On average, one woman is murdered each week by her current or former partner (AIC, 2017).

Research tells us that the media is a powerful driver of social change and can positively influence the culture, behaviours and attitudes that drive violence against women and their children. This is because:

- Strong media reporting on violence against women and their children can help readers, listeners and viewers understand how widespread it is, who is affected, what drives it, and how it can be prevented.
- The media can shape the way women and their children understand their own experiences of violence and influence decisions on whether to speak out, take action or seek support.
- The media can influence the way perpetrators understand their own choices to use violence and whether to seek support to change their behaviour.
- The media can influence public policy and legislation through its investigation of violence against women and their children.
- The media can help society reframe how violence is talked about – particularly violence experienced by women who face multiple forms of discrimination and oppression – and champion the belief that this violence is never acceptable or excusable.

Media coverage of violence against women and their children has significantly improved in Australia. Media outlets increasingly examine the causes of violence and avoid language that can inadvertently blame victims, excuse decisions made by perpetrators, or incorrectly suggest that factors like alcohol or mental health are drivers of violence.

But we still have a long way to go. **A recent report found that 15 per cent of Australian incident-based media reports included elements of ‘victim-blaming’: that she was drinking, flirting/went home with the perpetrator, or out late at night.** Just as many offered excuses for the perpetrator: he was drunk, using drugs, jealous, “snapped” or “lost control” (ANROWS, 2016). These findings are particularly pertinent when it comes to reporting on women who experience multiple forms of discrimination and oppression.

These guidelines provide tips and information media can use to ensure their reporting does not further harm victim-survivors and is part of the solution to end violence against all women and their children.

“[The media are] uniquely placed to help stop violence before it starts.”

Rosie Batty
former Australian of the Year

Understand how discrimination affects violence

Violence against women is not limited to any culture or community.

However, **power imbalances that create discrimination can mean that some women are disproportionately affected by violence**, may be repeat victims of violence, and face additional, including systemic, barriers to reporting violence and accessing specialist support services.

Women who are disproportionately affected by violence include but are not limited to women who identify as:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander,
- migrant and refugee,
- living with disability,
- LGBTIQ+, and
- older women.

It is important to think about the different forms of oppression or discrimination a woman may also face and how this shapes her experience of violence. For instance, an Aboriginal woman with a disability is likely to experience intersecting racism and ableism alongside gender inequality. It can also explain why it is harder for some women to seek help or access support services, particularly for groups who have experienced or continue to experience institutional abuse or state-sanctioned violence.

Reasons some women are disproportionately affected by violence include:

- **Violence against women experiencing multiple forms of discrimination or oppression is more likely to be condoned.** For example, by being written off as ‘part of their culture’, justified in religious texts, or excused because a formal/informal carer is experiencing ‘carer- stress’.
- **Women who face multiple forms of discrimination and oppression are often stereotyped.** For example, they may be labelled as ‘loud, aggressive, drug-users’, considered asexual because of age or disability, or that violence against them is normalised and attributed to disadvantage.
- **Male peer relations that emphasise aggression can impact more on some women.** For example, women from immigrant backgrounds can be eroticised, targeted and promoted for sex tourism, ‘racist porn’ and fetishism.
- **Some women are more likely to be impacted by men’s control of decision making which limits their independence.** For example, 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’.

While it is important that the media understand how structural discrimination and oppression can exacerbate women’s experiences of violence, this does not mean blaming their culture, sexuality, work choices, disability or other factors for the violence. Instead, the media can help to draw attention to the structural or systemic barriers that can make it harder for different women to seek support, such as visa restrictions, discrimination in service provision or inability to access services.

Note on language:

For the purposes of this guide, the term ‘violence against women’ is used to encompass all violence experienced by women, including family and domestic violence, sexual assaults and abuse, and physical attacks from strangers.

See Definitions, p 17.

10 steps to reporting on violence against women and their children

Here are 10 steps you can take to ensure your reporting is **part of the solution** to violence against women and their children, and to ensure your reporting does not cause new or additional harm to victim-survivors or reinforce attitudes and behaviours that can support violence:

1. Safety first

Do: Ensure that you report on the issue in a way that doesn't compromise the survivor's safety. The risk of identifying survivor/s may arise from including specific details about the survivor/s, the perpetrator, what occurred and where (e.g. number of children, household or pet details, force or weapons used, injuries sustained, etc.)

Do: Be mindful that it may be easy to identify a person even when measures are taken to de-identify them, for example in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, migrant communities (particularly, smaller communities) or rural and regional areas.

2. Name it

Do: When legally possible, use the terms 'violence against women/and their children', 'family violence', 'assault', 'sexual assault', 'elder abuse', 'child abuse', 'child exploitation material', 'rape' or 'murder' if/when charges have been laid and when they apply. This helps the audience understand that violence against women and their children is widespread rather than as 'random acts of violence' that no one could see coming. See *Definitions*, p 17

Don't: Use terms that minimise or trivialise violence (e.g. 'domestic dispute', 'volatile relationship', or 'child porn').

"As survivors of violence and intense anguish, how our mother's case was reported on profoundly affected us... Growing up, I thought family violence was just a fact of life, but I know that it doesn't have to be that way."

Arman Abrahamzadeh
Our Watch Ambassador

3. Keep the perpetrator in view

Do: Use active language to emphasise that someone perpetrated this violence against a victim. For example, instead of using passive headlines such as 'woman punched', instead consider 'man punches woman' or 'man punches ex-wife'. Otherwise, it can seem like violence is something that 'just happens' to women, when, in fact, there is always a perpetrator.

Do: Name the current or previous relationship between the survivor and perpetrator (if there is one and you are legally able to). Remind your audience that most violence against women is perpetrated by somebody known to them (such as a current or ex-partner, an adult child or other family member, or a carer) and that attacks from strangers are less common (e.g. physical or sexual assault by a stranger).

Don't: Reinforce the idea that women should police or modify their own behaviour in order to avoid men's violence. While it is important that women and girls are safe, accountability for violence should always sit with the person who has perpetrated it.

4. Keep the tone respectful and appropriate

Do: Use language and headlines to articulate the seriousness of the violence.

Do: Seek to uphold the dignity of victims, survivors and their families.

Do: Plan for how to support the respectful treatment of the story once it goes live, including social media commentary.

Don't: Sensationalise or trivialise violence, including through the use of overly dramatic language, unnecessary details, gratuitous or disempowering images (see *Use appropriate images and footage*, p 6) or inappropriate references or puns. See *Examples of 'bad to better' reporting*, p 11.

Don't: Identify people by race, ethnicity or other status unless pertinent to the story. Including identifiers unnecessarily can reinforce myths about the causes of violence and may be perceived as blaming a person's victimhood or perpetration on their race, religion or sexuality, for instance.

5. Use evidence-based language

Do: Use language and framing that helps the audience understand the evidence that, globally, **most violence against women and their children is driven by gender inequality**, including through:

- Excusing or condoning violence against women
- Restrictive gender stereotypes (for men and women)
- Men's control of decision making and women having less power in public and private lives
- Men's peer groups encouraging disrespect towards women

Don't: Describe violence as being driven or 'fueled' by alcohol or drugs, or connected to mental health, stress, finances, culture, the 'burden' of caring for someone with disability, or a perpetrator 'just snapping.' This does not align with the evidence. While these issues may exacerbate violence, **they do not drive it.**

Don't: Use language that justifies violence or inadvertently blames the victim for what happened to them, including whether they were drunk, out late at night, walking alone, seeing other people, etc.

"I've found reporting and language guidelines from organisations like beyondblue and People with Disability Australia hugely beneficial – it makes sense that for something as pervasive as family violence there are similar guidelines to help reporters cover the issue in the most meaningful way possible."

Melissa Davey
Melbourne Bureau Chief
Guardian Australia

6. Use appropriate images and footage

Do: Remember that images and vision are vital to telling a story but can perpetuate harmful stereotypes about gender, race, disability, sexuality and age. Examples include imagery portraying that ‘she was drunk’, cowering from her abuser, ‘promiscuous’ and ‘irresponsible’, or that ‘he was a wholesome family man’.

Do: When you’re generating imagery or selecting stock images, ask yourself what story the chosen imagery tells about a person and consider the impact the image may have on the victim-survivor, their family, or on other survivors of violence.

Do: Use images that present survivors in a stronger light or that keep the perpetrator in view.

Don’t: Take photos of survivors or victims from a height to make them appear small, ask them to ‘look sad’ or ‘helpless’ or fall into the trap of using bikini-clad images from social media – if that’s all you can find, crop it.

Don’t: Use imagery that disempowers, victimises or infantilises women, or that reinforces the idea that only physical violence is serious. Avoid ‘clenched fists’ and ‘cowering women’ imagery.

“Good blokes do not murder their families. They don’t abuse their wives. They don’t harm their daughters and sons. And they certainly don’t murder their grandchildren.”

Rebecca Poulson
for The Sydney Morning Herald

7. Call on experts for comment

Do: Refer to experts on violence against women to put the issue in context.

Do: Be cautious about including a character assessment of the perpetrator from neighbours or friends, such as “He was an ‘amazing husband’ and ‘loving dad.’” Doing so is fraught because family violence most often occurs in secret and over a long period of time.

Don’t: Only rely on the police or judiciary for comment when reporting on violence against women. Keep in mind that while police can provide a history of reported crime, most violence against women is non-criminal, not an “incident”, and most violence against women goes unreported. Also, be mindful that the police or judiciary may use language that is victim-blaming, excuses violence or perpetuates harmful stereotypes.

8. Always include support options available

Do: Always use the opportunity to help men, women and children in your audience who may be looking for help. Routinely include information about specialist support options for people who have experienced family violence, such as: **“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 inadvertently overlooks the impact of violence perpetrated against women and their children and misses an opportunity to alert those currently experiencing violence about where to go for specialist help.

“Media has been incredibly influential in raising awareness of family violence and the introduction of these guidelines will support newsrooms to report this complex issue.”

Andrew Eales
Managing Editor
Australian Community Media – Nine

9. Know the law

Do: Be aware that there are certain legal parameters in each state that outline what you can and can't report regarding certain sexual offences, protection orders that have been issued, or where there are children involved. **Journalists and media outlets are required to know their obligations in these cases and should not solely rely on these guidelines.**

Do: Understand that there are many forms of violence, including emotional or psychological abuse, elder abuse, financial abuse and coercive control that may not currently be criminalised, but remember that all forms are serious and can become life-threatening.

Do: Respect private grief and personal privacy when approaching the family or friends of victims, survivors or perpetrators. Avoid harassing or intruding on their right to privacy.

Don't: Cover only the 'sensational' aspects of court and police reports.

*"Without these elements, the incident is represented as an isolated and random event. This leaves the **responsibility** with the individuals and the solution with the justice system. It allows the rest of society to dismiss it as someone else's problem."*

Annie Blatchford
The Conversation

10. Contextualise the story

Do: When you can, use state, national, and (if appropriate) global statistics on violence against women to frame the story. Keep in mind that many women do not report violence and that the way statistics are or are not collected and understood may be an important part of the story. See *The problem of data*, p 15.

"When my sister Niki was murdered, so much of the media reporting was about the colour of her skin, our cultural background, or in some way excusing the perpetrator's responsibility for criminal action because of "culture" or "honour killings" ... when all it was, was one man choosing to take the life of a woman. [We need to be] looking at all of those factors and how they make violence against women so much more serious for women from particular ethnic and other cultural groups."

Tarang Chawla
Our Watch Ambassador

Vicarious trauma and journalism

- Vicarious trauma can occur after repeated exposure to the trauma and abuse of others, having a cumulative effect over time. It is common for people working in a range of fields, including the media.
- Signs to watch for include physical impacts such as headaches and fatigue, psychological impacts like feeling numb, hopeless, guilty or disturbed sleep, and behavioural signs such as mood changes, withdrawal or reliance on unhealthy coping mechanisms.
- Support is available through inhouse employee assistance programs, private practitioners or through trauma counsellors available through 1800 Respect.

For further information, see resources from the Dart Centre Asia Pacific, including: *Tips for Managers and Editors* and *self-care tips for news media*.

Interviewing survivors

When interviewing survivors, it is important to **focus on the process as well as the outcome**. Consider the impact of the story on those it is about. Your interview and reporting may re-traumatise or inadvertently shame them. Talking to children who are survivors of or witnesses to violence can also be particularly risky.

Here are some tips to protect women and children you're reporting on.

Before a story breaks:

- Build relationships and trust with specialist services and survivor advocacy groups to support more urgent responses when court cases and violence occur.
- Understand that services working with women and their children have relatively few resources, probably won't have people immediately available to tell their stories, and might not encourage survivor media engagement for safety reasons.
- Be aware that violence against women can take many forms and change over the period of a lifetime, for example, older women experiencing abuse by their adult children.

When a story breaks:

- Avoid approaching survivors or their families in the immediate aftermath of an incident when they are still in shock and may be unable to fully comprehend what they are consenting to by speaking to you.
- Deal honestly with survivors and their families and respect their right not to talk.

Before the interview:

- Be aware – and support survivors to be aware – that there are current and emerging safety and ethical issues involved in survivors telling their stories, including risks of identification and retribution, public backlash and trolling/online abuse, and the potential to influence or affect legal proceedings.
- Explain the implications of being named or not named, and that once in the public realm other journalists can use their story without their consent.
- Allow them to choose the location of the interview at a place they feel safe and to bring a support person along if they wish.
- Be mindful of the power imbalance between you and the survivor, and seek to provide them with as much control over things as possible, including by suggesting they have a plan for the day the story comes out.

During the interview:

- Give them as much time as possible to tell their story.
- Recognise and respect the survivor's objective in telling their story and seek to reflect this in your reporting. Ask: "Why are you telling your story?"
- Ask open ended questions, such as: "What are you able to tell me about what happened?"
- Ask how they want to be identified and referred to (e.g. as a 'victim' or 'survivor', 'woman with a disability' rather than 'disabled woman', with their preferred pronouns (he/him, she/her, they/their) and any cultural connections.)

After the interview:

- Ensure you have informed consent to disclose elements of their story, and where possible, give them the opportunity to review the way they are referred to or quoted. Be transparent about how you will use their story.
- Explain what will happen after the interview, including fact-checking and the right to reply so that these are not interpreted as you 'not believing' their story.
- As best you can, keep survivors informed of when their story will go live, including any hold ups or changes.
- Check to see if there are any family or friends they need to tell before the story goes live.

For more information, see resources from the DART Centre Asia Pacific including [*Getting it Right: Ethical reporting on traumatised people*](#).

5.

Reporting on violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

It is important to acknowledge that there is a long history of misrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly when reporting on violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. It is the media's responsibility to ensure that reporting does not contribute to this further, or to the harm experienced by victim-survivors, their families and communities.

Framing and context matter

- It is vital to understand the broader impacts of colonisation, including racism, dispossession, intergenerational trauma, forced child removal and entrenched poverty, within the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's experiences of violence as this may make it more difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to seek help or access services. A history of state-sanctioned violence means many women may distrust government agencies or fear having their children taken from them.
- Consider including community solutions and approaches to the issue (e.g. leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in community, legislative reforms, community-driven programming dedicated to addressing or preventing family violence.)
- Avoid inadvertently using someone's victimhood to make a point. Keep the humanity and dignity of the victim and their family at the centre of your work.
- Consider who is the most appropriate person to be reporting a matter and what additional information is needed in order to do so respectfully and well.

“Journalists need to understand where the violence and problems come from and that they're symptomatic of colonisation, disadvantage and poverty, not race and culture. People need to connect with Australian history to understand that.”

Paul Daley
Walkey-winning journalist
author and playwright

Damaging stereotypes

Consider any assumptions or biases that might be inherent in the story.

Don't:

- Perpetuate negative stereotypes through use of images, language and statistics, for example, that Indigeneity is causing or contributing to violence, or that all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people have substance abuse and alcohol problems.
- Make assumptions about the ethnicity of the perpetrator, keeping in mind that non-Indigenous men are also responsible (and mostly responsible in urban areas) ([Our Watch](#), 2018).
- Blame culture, alcohol or women's behaviour for the violence.

Do:

- Link violence against Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women to the national and global problem of violence against women, rather than presenting it as an 'Indigenous issue.'

Cultural protocols

- Seek advice from community members regarding the cultural protocols of naming or using the image of a deceased person in their particular Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community.
- Learn more about the communities in the area you report on and upskill your cultural competency.

Consider your sources

- Always use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and experts as your primary sources.
- Understand that no ‘one voice’ speaks on behalf of the whole Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and that this actually consists of many diverse communities.
- Seek advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people regarding who they consider a reputable leader or expert.
- Where possible, include the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in your stories in a way that highlights their leadership and authority on this issue rather than portraying them negatively.
- Take time to develop relationships and build trust with your contacts and sources. Historically, reporting has created community mistrust when speaking to the media.

Bad reporting

Headline: ‘Mum killed was...ice addict who ‘starved’ and ‘beat’ her kids’

Problem: Rather than focusing on the perpetrator’s murder of a woman and her two children, this article focuses on the victim’s parenting, alleged drug use and involvement with Child Protection. This inadvertently implies that the woman is responsible for her own murder, and those of her two children.

Good reporting

Headline: ‘We’re real women and we want to live in peace’

Success: The reporting draws attention to the disproportionate levels of violence experienced by Aboriginal women in a way that recognises the broader context of colonisation, dispossession and ongoing disadvantage that reinforces this violence.

More advice on good reporting can be found in [Reporting on Aboriginal People’s Experiences of Family Violence \(2018\)](http://kalinya.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Reporting-on-Aboriginal-peoples-experiences-of-family-violence-media-toolkit-1.pdf) <http://kalinya.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Reporting-on-Aboriginal-peoples-experiences-of-family-violence-media-toolkit-1.pdf>

6.

Examples of bad to better reporting from Australia and the world

See below some valuable learnings taken from media reporting of violence against women and their children from Australia and the world.

Bad	Problem	Evidence	Better
'Presumed gang-raped victim had consumed too much alcohol'	The victim's alcohol intake is irrelevant to the story and inadvertently implies that she was complicit in her own rape. This also erases the perpetrators and directs all the attention to the survivor of violence.	Victim blaming has <u>multiple negative effects</u> , such as less empathy and support, less intervention, poorer health outcomes, worse redress through the courts, and <u>does not address</u> what drives violence against women and their children.	'Three adult men accused of gang-raping teenage girl'
Refers to a murdered woman as "left to bleed after 'wild sex'"	Reporting on the brutal rape and murder of Aboriginal woman Lynette Daley included explicit and sensationalised detail of her injuries. This article was found to have breached the Australian Press Council's Standards as 'inaccurate' and 'unfair' for using the phrase 'wild sex' to describe an alleged rape.	For a long time, violence against Aboriginal women has been minimised, justified or 'invisible' in media reporting. By failing to name the alleged rape, the article shifts accountability away from the perpetrators and ignores the non-consensual and brutal nature of Lynette Daley's rape and death.	'Campaign for justice over Lynette Daley death after alleged brutal rape and murder.'
Refers to 'heartache blamed for violence'	The community is looking for ways to understand unspeakable violence, but rather than educating the public on the underlying drivers of violence, an account of the hardship experienced by the perpetrator is reported.	To suggest that 'heartache' or mental health issues are 'to blame' for men's violence against women is not based on the evidence and is contrary to the <u>findings of Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence</u> .	'Perpetrator's need to control drove unspeakable violence'
Refers to 'suitcase murder', 'shocking twist' and that 'murder suspect's family wanted to find him an arranged marriage'	Sensationalised language and framing used in reporting shifts the focus away from the violent murder of the victim, presenting it instead as a narrative unfolding for the benefit of the audience. The unnecessary focus on arranged marriage suggests that culture and cultural practices could justify the violence, rather than the choice of the perpetrator to use violence.	Implicitly or explicitly implying that culture or cultural practices are responsible for violence does not reflect the evidence-base and shifts accountability away from the perpetrator. Violence against women occurs across all cultures and communities. The common thread is the perpetrator's choice to use violence.	'Ex-boyfriend suspected of murdering Dr Preethi Reddy.'

Bad	Problem	Evidence	Better
Refers to murdered woman as ‘the shemale’	When transgender woman Mayang Prasetyo was brutally murdered by her husband Marcus Volke, some reporting focused on unnecessary and explicit details of violence, sexualised her in a series of swimsuit poses, and investigated her sex work and personal life as a way to justify or understand this violence.	<p>Women who identify as transgender, gender diverse, lesbian and bisexual experience discrimination and are particularly targeted to experience violence.</p> <p>All women need the support of an unbiased media that do not perpetuate harmful stereotypes.</p> <p>Mayang Prasetyo’s gender identity, occupation, medical history and country of origin are not to blame for the violence – her husband’s decision to use violence is.</p>	‘Man brutally killed wife’
‘Elderly man facing child sex charges’	Often in reporting on the rape and sexual abuse of children, language is used that fails to recognise that children cannot consent to sex and that the sexual abuse of children is a serious and devastating crime.	By failing to name the crime, the impact of childhood sexual abuse on victim-survivors can be diminished or ignored, and may infer that the victim-survivor was an active or consensual participant in their abuse, rather than placing accountability for the abuse of trust and power with the perpetrator.	‘Man charged with raping child’
‘Murder on the dancefloor’	<p>Arman Abrahamzadeh’s mother was brutally murdered by his father in front of 300 people, notably sparking attention.</p> <p>Following his mother’s murder, Australian media outlets reported that, because of his Muslim heritage, the murder was somehow culturally related.</p> <p>The headline’s reference to a well-known pop-song was unnecessary and disrespectful.</p>	<p>Arman explained: “Our mother’s death was not something that should have been dramatised in order to sell papers, my father’s violence was not the result of a religious or cultural value and it certainly wasn’t because he had a ‘brain snap’.</p> <p>“My mother’s death was a result of the deeply entrenched gender-unequal society in which we existed, where my mother, sisters and I were my father’s possessions.”</p>	‘Man kills wife after years of abusing her’

7.

Common misconceptions

There are many misconceptions when it comes to violence against women and their children, including:

Misconception	Reality
Alcohol, drug-taking, mental health issues or stress drive or cause violence against women.	While these issues may exacerbate violence, they <u>do not drive or cause it</u> .
Men ‘just snap’ or violence is ‘sparked’ by an argument or event.	<u>Research</u> indicates that the overwhelming majority (80 per cent) of men who murdered their partners had a history of abusing them.
Sexism/gender inequality has nothing to do with violence against women.	Women are overwhelmingly the victims of family violence and sexual and physical assault (<u>ABS, 2017</u>) because they are <u>targeted, based on their gender, for violence</u> , and men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators.
Violence against women is rare or unpredictable.	The World Health Organisation tells us violence against women is both <u>predictable and preventable</u> . Across Australia, police are called out to a family violence incident on average once every two minutes. Family violence is also the biggest contributor to ill-health and premature death in women aged 15–44 (<u>VicHealth, 2018</u>).
Some cultures or socio-economic groups are more violent than others.	While discrimination can mean that women from some cultures and low-socioeconomic groups are disproportionately affected by violence, the assertion that perpetrators from these groups are inherently more violent is both inaccurate and damaging. Reporting frequently implies that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is perpetrated only by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, when non-Indigenous men are also perpetrators, particularly in urban areas (<u>Our Watch, 2018</u>). We also know that women on temporary visas experience violence from partners from all cultural backgrounds, including Australian citizens.
Women frequently lie about sexual assault and rape.	False claims of domestic violence or sexual assault are extremely rare (<u>AIFS, 2013</u>) and a staggering 80 per cent of women who experience current partner violence (<u>ABS, 2012</u>), and 80 per cent of women who experience sexual assault, don’t contact the police about the violence (<u>ABS, 2006</u>).

Misconception

Women could leave a violent situation if they wanted to.

Reality

The most extreme violence, including murder, often occurs when a woman tries to leave a relationship.

When it is assumed that a woman who is a victim of violence stays by choice, blame is taken away from the perpetrator.

There are many reasons why women do not report and leave violence, including:

- fear for their/their children’s lives (and a heightened risk for pregnant women)
- cultural expectations or pressures from family and friends
- lack of housing and financial resources to be able to flee and find support
- barriers to accessing specialist support services or emergency housing – including visa status, language and geographical location (such as living in rural and regional areas)
- difficulty trusting police or other officials because of past experiences of racism or discrimination, or worry about losing their children into care if they report violence
- difficulty leaving as they may rely on support from their abusers (for example, for women with disabilities and older women).

Facts and figures

The statistics

In Australia:

- On average, one woman a week is murdered by her current or former partner ([AIHW, 2018](#))
- One in three Australian women has experienced physical violence ([ABS, 2017](#))
- One in five Australian women has experienced sexual violence ([ABS, 2017](#))
- Women are at least three times more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner. ([ABS, 2017](#))
- One in five LGBTIQ+ Australians has experienced physical forms of homophobic abuse ([Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014](#))
- Women who identify as lesbian or bisexual experience far higher rates of sexual violence than heterosexual women ([de Visser et al. 2014](#))
- Women and girls with disabilities are at least twice as likely to experience violence as those without disability ([Women with Disabilities Victoria, 2013](#))
- One third of the 49 women who lost their lives to violence against women in Australia in 2017 were over the age of 60 ([Counting Dead Women Australia 2018](#))
- Aboriginal women are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised by family violence than other women. Two in five Aboriginal homicide victims (41 per cent) are killed by a current or previous partner, twice the rate of non-Indigenous victims (22 per cent) ([AIHW 2018](#))
- Reporting frequently implies that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is perpetrated only by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, when non-Indigenous men are also perpetrators, particularly in urban areas ([Our Watch, 2018](#))

The problem of data

The most comprehensive data we have comes from the Personal Safety Survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), which collects information about the nature and extent of violence experienced by both men and women (but not recorded crime statistics).

Recorded crime statistics don't necessarily tell us how many people experience gendered violence because most people who experience it do not report it to the police.

Further, women who face multiple forms of discrimination and oppression (for example, because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, or age) experience higher levels of violence than other women but are even less likely to report violence or to receive appropriate responses or support.

We need also to beware that our own **implicit biases** can make us interpret statistics incorrectly. For example, while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience family violence at higher rates than other women¹, public debate and media reporting would imply this violence is only perpetrated by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander men, when in fact non-Indigenous men are also accountable (and mostly accountable in urban areas) ([Our Watch, 2018](#)).

¹ There is no single data source that provides a direct comparison for all forms of violence. However various data sources consistently show Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing higher (and often much higher) rates of violence than non-Indigenous women, with the size of the difference varying according to the type of violence, data source and jurisdiction. In 2014-15, hospitalisation rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family violence-related assaults were 530 females per 100 000 female population. After adjusting for differences in population age structures, this was 32 times the rate for non-Indigenous females. Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2016) [Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage: Key indicators 2016](#), Productivity Commission, Canberra, p.4.98, and table (table 4A.12.13).

“It’s vital the media comprehend and embrace the significant role it has in helping develop and implement these guidelines.”

Shaun Gough
Content Director, Triple M, Melbourne

9.

Impacts of violence against women and their children

The impacts of violence against women and their children are varied, profound, and can be long-lasting. Survivors may continue to need support years after the violence has finished. It therefore has a range of social, health and economic consequences for families and communities, and ultimately for society, at an estimated cost to Australia of \$21.6 billion each year.

Living with family violence is particularly distressing for children. The effects can be traumatising, ongoing and long-lasting. They can build up over time and impact on every aspect of children's lives, including health, development and wellbeing.

Definitions

Term	Definition
‘Violence against women’	is any act of gender-based violence that is likely to lead to harm or suffering to women, whether it happens in public or behind closed doors.
‘Gender-based violence’	means that the violence <u>disproportionately affects women</u> more than men (on the whole), that it occurs in a broader social context where power and resources are distributed unequally between men and women, and that the violence reinforces that gendered power imbalance. While much of the violence women experience is perpetrated in a ‘family’ context (by male partners or ex-partners, or other family members), this is not <i>always</i> the case – gendered violence experienced by women includes many other forms – for example, non-partner/family member rape and sexual assault, dating violence, and physical violence or harassment perpetrated by, for example, a colleague, classmate, or stranger.
‘Family violence’	<p>is a broader term used to acknowledge violence that happens within a broader network of family (for example, between family members) and community members and is used to refer to kinds of violence (physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, or financial) that occur within the context of an intimate relationship. Family violence also refers to violence that occurs within extended kinship and family relationships in <u>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities</u> or in other cultural communities. The term is used more often than ‘domestic violence’, which only refers to acts of violence that occur in a domestic setting between two people who are, or were, in an intimate relationship.</p> <p>It is important to note that legal definitions may differ between states.</p> <p>For women experiencing multiple forms of discrimination and oppression, perpetrators may use this disadvantage as part of their abuse. For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – removing a person’s disability-related equipment or aids – threatening to ‘out’ someone – using a woman’s temporary visa status to control her – denying an older person access to or control over their finances <p>Family violence can happen to anyone regardless of sex, sexuality, gender identity, or any other marker of identity. However, statistically, men represent the majority of perpetrators and women and children represent the majority of survivors.</p>
‘Elder abuse’	<p>is any act which causes harm to an older person and is carried out by someone they know and trust such as family or friends. The abuse can be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – physical – such as hitting or shoving – financial – using someone’s property, finances or other assets illegally or improperly – emotional – such as verbal abuse and threats; – or sexual – including unwanted sexual acts or touching. <p>It can also include neglect, and often more than one type of abuse is used.</p>

Media and background contacts

There are a range of people and organisations with expertise in family violence and preventing violence against women and their children to contact for media and background information.

Experts may include:

- national and state-based family violence organisations
- individuals (such as academics or community experts)
- organisations relevant to reporting on specific groups
- survivor advocates.

Remember that no one person can speak for an entire community and it is important to draw on a range of experts within the cohort or community you are reporting on.

Additional information is available from media.ourwatch.org.au.

Resources and further reading

Statistics and surveys

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2017, *2016 Personal Safety Survey*: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4906.0>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2017, *Recorded Crime - Victims, Australia, 2017 - Victoria*: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4510.0~2017~Main%20Features~Victoria~8>
- Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network, *Data Report, 2018*: http://www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/Reviews/Documents/FDV/ADFVDRN_Data_Report_2018.pdf
- ANROWS, 2016, *Media Representations of Violence Against Women and their Children*. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/media-representations-of-violence-against-women-and-their-children-final-report/>
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018, *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia*: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-in-australia-2018/contents/summary>
- Crime Statistics Agency (Victoria), *Family Violence Data Portal*: <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portal>
- Morgan A & Chadwick H, 2009, *Key issues in domestic violence*. Research in practice No. 7. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://aic.gov.au/publications/rip/rip07>
- Our Watch, 2018, *Changing the Picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*, <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/ab55d7a6-8c07-45aca80f-dbb9e593cbf6/Changing-the-picture-AA-3.pdf.aspx>
- Our Watch, 2017, *Preventing family violence against people in LGBTI communities*, [https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/13fded0c-851b-4935-b402-e00fdb9b6e4b/Summary-report_Preventing-FV-against-people-in-LGBTI-communities-\(Accessible-PDF\).pdf.aspx](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/13fded0c-851b-4935-b402-e00fdb9b6e4b/Summary-report_Preventing-FV-against-people-in-LGBTI-communities-(Accessible-PDF).pdf.aspx)
- VicHealth, 2017, *National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS)*: <https://www.anrows.org.au/research-program/ncas/>
- Victoria Government, 2018, *Dhekk Dja: Safe Our Way. Strong Cultures, Strong People, Strong Communities*, <https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/strong-culture-strong-peoples-strong-families-10-year-plan>
- Victorian Government, *Royal Commission into Family Violence, Status of Implementation of the 227 Recommendations*, <https://www.vic.gov.au/familyviolence/recommendations.html>
- World Health Organisation (WHO), *16 Days of Activism against gender violence*, available at http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/16_days/en/index1.html

Media guidelines and resources

Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2016, *Reporting on Domestic and Family Violence*, <http://about.abc.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Final-DFV-Fact-Sheet-15-Feb-2016.pdf>

Australian Press Council, 2014, *Specific Standards on the Coverage of Suicide* https://www.presscouncil.org.au/uploads/52321/ufiles/SPECIFIC_STANDARDS_SUICIDE_-_July_2014.pdf

Australian Press Council, 2016, *Advisory Guideline on Family and Domestic Violence Reporting*, https://www.presscouncil.org.au/uploads/52321/ufiles/Guidelines/Advisory_Guideline_on_Family_and_Domestic_Violence_Reporting.pdf

DART Centre, 2011, Tips for Managers and Editors, <https://dartcenter.org/content/tips-for-managers-and-editors>

DART Centre, 2009, Self-care Tips for News Media, <https://dartcenter.org/content/self-care-tips-for-news-media-personnel-exposed-to-traumatic-events>

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Dubberly, M & Grant, M, 2017, *Journalism and Vicarious Trauma: A guide for journalists, editors and news organisations*, <https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/vicarioustrauma.pdf>

Funnell, N & Full Stop Foundation, *Factsheet: Reporting on Sexual Assault within University Communities*, <http://www.fullstopfoundation.org.au/Portals/0/Users/003/03/3/Factsheets%20and%20Brochures/FSF%20-%20Unis/Sexual%20Assault%20within%20University%20Communities%20-%20Journalists%20Factsheet.pdf>

Funnell, N & Full Stop Foundation, *Factsheet: Sexual Assault within University Communities: Working with the Media*, <http://www.fullstopfoundation.org.au/Portals/0/Users/003/03/3/Factsheets%20and%20Brochures/FSF%20-%20Unis/Sexual%20Assault%20within%20University%20Communities%20-%20Victim-Survivors%20Factsheet.pdf>

Kalinya & Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2017, *Reporting on Aboriginal People's Experiences of Family Violence* <http://kalinya.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Reporting-on-Aboriginal-peoples-experiences-of-family-violence-media-toolkit-1.pdf>

Media Diversity Australia, 2018, *Reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and Issues: An introductory resource for the media*, <https://www.mediadiversityaustralia.org/indigenous/>

Monash University, 2018, *Inclusive language*, <https://www.monash.edu/about/editorialstyle/writing/inclusive-language>

Pearson M & Polden M, 2014, *The journalist's guide to media law: A handbook for communicators in a digital world*, Allen and Unwin

Queensland Government, *Domestic and family violence media guide*, <https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/gateway/campaigns/end-violence/domestic-family-violence-media-guide.pdf>

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