



Advisory Guideline: Family and Domestic Violence Reporting

Introduction

The Australian Press Council recognises the media has an important role to play in reporting on the serious and widespread social problem that is family and domestic violence.

Publications must adhere to the Council's Standards of Practice, particularly the Statement of General Principles, which the Council refers to when considering complaints.

This Advisory Guideline has been developed in consultation with editors, journalists, police, survivors, women's safety advocates, family violence service providers and others to suggest a "good practice" approach and should be supported by high quality education and training. It is not intended to constrain or discourage news coverage, rather it provides guidance for editors and journalists.

Definitions

Violence can happen to anyone, and publications should take care not to blame victims/survivors.

The term "family violence" is used throughout this Guideline for simplicity. However, terms such as "gender-based violence", "intimate partner assault", "domestic abuse" and "coercive control" are often used, they reflect different aspects of violence and may carry distinct meanings.

Gender-based violence is directed against a person because of their gender and can be experienced by women, men and gender diverse people. The term incorporates violence against women, domestic and family violence, sexual harassment, technology-facilitated abuse, image-based abuse, stalking and non-intimate partner sexual assault. It may include physical, sexual, spiritual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse in public, private or virtual spheres.

Domestic and/or intimate partner violence refer to acts of violence in domestic settings between two people who are, or were, in an intimate relationship. Family violence is a broader term that includes violence between intimate partners, family members, elder abuse and adolescent violence against parents and can also include threatening behaviour, or behaviour that controls a family member or makes them fearful. In First Nations communities, family violence is often the preferred term as it encapsulates violence within extended family and kinship networks.

While commonly associated with intimate partner relationships, coercive control can occur in other close relationships, it may involve manipulation, intimidation, sexual violence, or domination by someone who holds emotional, financial, or physical power over another person. This can include restricting access to social connections, controlling daily routines, monitoring through smart home or tracking devices, stalking, belittling or undermining a person's autonomy or using threats and guilt to influence decisions. In caregiving relationships, coercive control may involve withholding care, exploiting dependency or using a person's health or disability to exert control.

Regardless of the definition applied, it is important to acknowledge that violence can happen to anyone, and it is never the victim-survivor's fault. It can be a one-off incident or an ongoing pattern of behaviour and control, and can occur in an array of relationships including:

- Past or current intimate relationships, regardless of gender or sexuality
- Relationships involving carers of people with medical needs, disabilities, the elderly, children and adolescents
- Relationships with relatives, carers or guardians
- Relationships in faith organisations and cults
- With colleagues at work.

Safety and privacy

The safety and well-being of those affected by family violence must be the primary consideration.

When interviewing a person affected, consider whether they have necessary support and are in an appropriate frame of mind, particularly in the immediate aftermath of violence, also consider any unintended consequences of interviews and published material, especially on children.

Survivors often comment that their pain and suffering was exacerbated by media coverage. Ask victims how they wish to be described or identified. In some cases, it may not be appropriate to use real names or information that could identify their whereabouts.

Without sufficient public interest, avoid publishing information and images that could cause or contribute to the risk for victims of additional harm, offence or distress or intrude on their reasonable expectation of privacy.

Responsibility

Avoid undue emphasis on the characteristics or surroundings of victims or implying they contributed to violence, unless essential to the narrative and in the public interest.

Equally, avoid undue emphasis on the "characteristics" or so-called "qualities" of a perpetrator or implying they would not commit such violence or were pushed to act that way by the victim.

News coverage, including headlines, should not suggest the victim enabled or caused the violence or could have avoided it.

Using the active voice in relation to (alleged) perpetrators can avoid undue emphasis on victims, i.e. "Police have charged a 38-year-old man with the murder of a woman", as opposed to "A woman was murdered and a 38-year-old Melbourne man has been charged".

Context and content

Avoid terms that trivialise, demean or excuse domestic, family and sexual violence, such as “a domestic”, “a domestic dispute” or “a troubled marriage”. They can reinforce perceptions that it is a private matter not meriting media coverage, police intervention or criminal proceedings.

Where legally possible, the relationship of the people involved can be described but when not appropriate, avoid descriptions that might inadvertently identify the victim or children.

Sensational and/or insensitive language and story presentation and overly graphic details can impact victims, survivors and families.

Where appropriate, explain the causes of the violence which can include gender inequality, racism, ageism, alcohol and drug use, poverty, poor education, intergenerational trauma and inadequate or inappropriate social services.

Frequency and severity of violence can be influenced by a person’s personal and/or social situation and this can create barriers to seeking help. Some groups, such as women and gender-diverse people, experience violence at significantly higher rates and severity.

Publications should not identify people by their status unless relevant and should refer to Council Advisory Guidelines “Reporting of ‘race’”; “References to Religion and Ethnicity” and “Reporting on Persons with Diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Sex Characteristics”.

Where legally possible and relevant, seek comment from other survivors, women’s safety advocates and experts who can provide broader context and refer to resources such as official statistics and research to highlight family violence is a widespread social issue and mostly perpetrated by men.

Cultural sensitivities

The public interest in reporting on family violence includes instances in First Nations communities and other communities with diverse cultural, ethnic and language backgrounds.

First Nations women and children are disproportionately impacted; are significantly more likely to be hospitalised with serious injuries and are more likely to be killed.

But take care to avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes about First Nations culture. Perpetrators, mostly men, against First Nations women and children come from all backgrounds.

Respect community-specific protocols. There is no single perspective representing all First Nations communities. Cultural practices and sensitivities can vary even within families. Consider carefully any sensitivities concerning publication of names or images of the deceased.

Apply similar considerations for other communities with diverse cultural, ethnic and language backgrounds. Avoid reporting to the victim or perpetrator’s religion unless it is a contributing factor and sufficiently in the public interest.

Imagery

Portray victims with respect and dignity. Take care with imagery that portrays men with clenched or raised fists or women as passive, fearful or cowering. They can contribute to insensitive, limited or stereotyped ideas of family violence.

Legal considerations

Reporting on family violence is restricted by law. Wherever possible seek legal advice on what information can be reported.

Sources of assistance

It is strongly recommended that information advising the public how to seek assistance is published with family violence reports. Use neutral phrasing such as: "If you are affected by this story and want to seek assistance, contact ...". Support lines should include sources of support for victims (e.g. 1800Respect) and for men concerned about their behavior (e.g. Men's Referral Service).

When dealing with specific communities or circumstances, consider including other sources such as contact details of local or specialised sources of assistance, including 13YARN and Qlife.

The Press Council's website contains suggested [sources of assistance](#).