



Reporting on domestic violence

A guide for ACT media

whm!
women's centre for health matters •

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document is designed to provide information to those in the ACT media who report about violence against women and their children in the ACT.

Sincere thanks to the following organisations for their support and the provision of their specialist expertise and knowledge in the development of the content of the Media Guide – the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, the ACT Domestic Violence Crisis Service, and Beryl Women Inc.

Thanks to Melissa Meadowcroft, the 2013 University of Canberra Press Club President, and Professor Matthew Ricketson from the University of Canberra Media and Journalism faculty, for their support and commitment to exploring ways to include respectful reporting of violence against women and their children in the curriculum for journalism students in the ACT.

Thank you also to the ACT Government for the provision of funding to design and publish this media guide.



Publication/Copyright Information

ISBN 978-0-9775984-9-6

© 2014 Women's Centre for Health Matters Inc.

Written by Annelise Roberts, WCHM Health Promotion Officer.

Design by Paper Monkey.

Published by Women's Centre for Health Matters Inc.

This publication is protected by copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the *Copyright Act* 1968, no part may be reproduced without acknowledgement.

About the Women's Centre for Health Matters Inc.

The Women's Centre for Health Matters Inc. (WCHM) is a community based organisation which works in the ACT and surrounding region to improve women's health and wellbeing. WCHM believes that the environment and life circumstances which each woman experiences affects her health outcomes. WCHM focuses on areas of possible disadvantage and uses research, community development and health promotion to provide information and skills that empower women to enhance their own health and wellbeing. WCHM undertakes research and advocacy to influence systemic change with the aim to improve women's health and wellbeing outcomes.

About the author

Annelise Roberts is a WCHM Health Promotion Officer.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The media plays a significant role in the way people understand complex social issues. At the local level, the media has a key part to play in communicating messages about violence against women and children in the ACT and in ensuring that the public knows and understands the facts about this issue.

Local journalists have asked for guidance on how to report about domestic violence and sexual assault against women and children because they can be difficult issues to investigate and report on. If not accurately and appropriately portrayed, media reporting can help to perpetuate negative stereotypes and social beliefs and may cause additional harm to victims through public shame and stigma.

The *Guides for ACT Media – Reporting on Violence against Women and Children in the ACT* have been developed as a resource for those in the ACT media who have any involvement with the reporting of domestic violence, sexual violence, child sexual assault and Indigenous family violence.

The guides aim to support ACT media to gain an understanding about the nature of these issues, through the provision of local information, relevant evidence and research, and advice about the sensitivities of the use of language in reporting.

We hope that they will find this a useful reference and that, through better awareness and understanding, they will be better able to play their vital role in the prevention of violence against women.

DEFINITIONS

Domestic violence is violent, abusive, or intimidating behaviour carried out by a partner, family member, housemate or carer in order to control and instil fear. This behaviour can take many forms. It may involve:

- physical violence;
- controlling who you see or what you do;
- emotional abuse such as insults, manipulation, threats;
- financial abuse, such as controlling access to money;
- stalking or other kinds of harassment;
- sexual violence, including coercion; and
- other forms of behaviour that are used to control you, make you afraid, or to diminish your sense of self-worth.

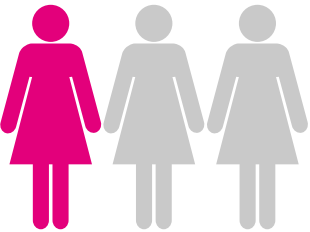
Domestic violence can happen to anyone regardless of sex, sexuality or gender identity, but women and children are statistically much more likely to be affected by it.¹

SIMILAR TERMS

'Intimate partner violence' is used to refer to kinds of violence that occur within the context of an intimate (i.e. close, romantic, usually sexual) relationship, such as a marriage, a de facto partnership, or other kinds of less formal relationships. It happens in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships.

'Family violence' is a broader term which is used to acknowledge violence that happens within a broader network of family and community members—for example, violence that occurs within extended kinship and family relationships in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities.²

FACTS AND FIGURES



IT IS ESTIMATED
THAT AROUND
1 IN 3
AUSTRALIAN
WOMEN WILL
EXPERIENCE
SOME KIND
OF VIOLENCE
IN HER LIFETIME

¹ For example: Melanie Heenan, 'International Violence Against Women Survey: Findings from the Australian component', Australian Institute of Family Studies, Commonwealth of Australia, 2004; Dr Rochelle Braaf and Isobelle Barrett Meyering, 'The Gender Debate in Domestic Violence: The Role of Data', Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, Sydney, 2013: http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/IssuesPaper_25.pdf.

² Dr Lesley Laing, 'Progress, trends and challenges in Australian responses to domestic violence', Issues Paper 1, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, Sydney, 2000: <http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/issuespaper1.pdf>.

FACTS AND FIGURES

NATIONAL STATISTICS

WHILE THERE IS LIMITED DATA AVAILABLE ON THE PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, WE DO KNOW THAT IT IS AN EXTREMELY WIDESPREAD PROBLEM.

Every community in Australia feels the impact of domestic violence in one way or another.

- IT IS ESTIMATED THAT AROUND **1 IN 3 AUSTRALIAN WOMEN** WILL EXPERIENCE SOME KIND OF VIOLENCE IN HER LIFETIME.³
- IN AUSTRALIA, **1 IN 6 ADULT WOMEN** HAS EXPERIENCED ACTUAL OR THREATENED VIOLENCE BY A PARTNER.⁴
- DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS VASTLY UNDERREPORTED TO AUTHORITIES.⁵
- DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS LINKED TO GENDER INEQUALITY.⁶
- MORE THAN A THIRD OF ALL HOMICIDES BETWEEN 2008 AND 2010 OCCURRED IN A DOMESTIC CONTEXT.⁷ IN FACT, **A WOMAN IS MORE LIKELY TO BE KILLED IN HER OWN HOME BY HER MALE PARTNER THAN ANYWHERE ELSE.**⁸

ACT STATISTICS

There is currently no available data that can indicate exactly how many people in the ACT have experienced domestic violence. The ACT Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) keeps statistics on their service users which can give some sense of the size of the issue—however, it’s important to understand that the majority of incidents of domestic violence will not be reported to police, and it’s likely that many do not even come to the attention of services.

- DVCS statistics from 2012–13 indicate the following:
- 1096 clients were assisted on post-incident crisis visits with ACT Policing.
 - 13,959 calls were received on the 24/7 crisis line.
 - 160 bed nights were provided to families/individuals receiving emergency motel accommodation.
 - 25–34 year olds were the most common age group DVCS worked with, followed closely by 35–44 year olds.
 - 7.5% of DVCS’s service users identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Given that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up only 1.2% of the ACT’s population,⁹ this group is very much overrepresented as DVCS service users.
 - 31.75% were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (women from Indian and Chinese backgrounds are the two most represented by a significant margin).

AT-RISK GROUPS

Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence. However, some people are more at risk than others, and it can be harder for people from marginalised groups to get help.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 35 times more likely to experience domestic or family violence than other Australian women.¹⁰
- Refugee women are more vulnerable to domestic violence in their country of resettlement, and experience significant barriers when trying to escape it.¹¹
- Women with disabilities are more likely to experience domestic violence than other women, although research on this remains limited.¹²
- Women living in rural or remote areas also seem to be at higher risk of experiencing domestic violence.¹³

⁹ ACT Government Demographer, *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population: A Demographic Analysis*, Chief Minister’s Department, Canberra, 2010: http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0011/154487/ACT-Aboriginal-Torres-Strait-Islanders.pdf

¹⁰ Mouzos and Makkai, ‘Women’s experiences of male violence: findings from the Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey’: <http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/5/8/D/9%7b58D8592E-CE77-4005-AB11-B7A8B4842399%7dRPP56.pdf>

¹¹ Lana Zannettino (et. al.), ‘Improving responses to refugees with backgrounds of multiple trauma: Pointers for practitioners in domestic and family violence, sexual assault and settlement services’, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, Sydney, 2013: http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/documents/PracticeMonograph_1_000.pdf

¹² For example: D Brownridge, ‘Partner violence against women with disabilities: prevalence, risk, and explanations’, *Violence Against Women*, 12(9):805–822, 2006.

¹³ The Women’s Services Network (WESNET), *Domestic violence in rural Australia: a literature review*, Department of Transport and Regional Services, Canberra, 2000: <http://dpl/Books/2000/DomesticViolenceRegional.pdf>.

IMPACTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

THE IMPACTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ARE VARIED, PROFOUND, AND CAN BE LONG-LASTING.

Survivors may continue to need support years after the violence has finished. It also has a range of consequences for families and communities, and ultimately for society.

HEALTH

- Intimate partner violence has been identified as the leading contributor to death amongst women aged 15–44 in Australia—a greater risk than high blood pressure, smoking, and obesity.¹⁴
- As well as leaving survivors with serious physical injuries, domestic violence has been shown to lead to physical, mental, and intellectual disabilities, including acquired brain injury and traumatic brain injury.¹⁵
- Violence against pregnant women can lead to miscarriage, later trimester bleeding and infection, abdominal trauma, and death.¹⁶
- There is evidence that there are both short and long-term health impacts (including disability) for unborn children whose mothers experience violence during pregnancy.¹⁷ This includes foetal death, foetal fractures, low birth weight and injury.
- Sexual violence can cause pain and injury, infections, fertility problems, unwanted pregnancy, or even miscarriage.¹⁸

MENTAL HEALTH

- There are many studies which show that domestic violence has serious impacts on survivors’ mental health. It can lead to depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, and other stress and trauma-related syndromes.
- In Australia, it is estimated that nearly 18% of all depression experienced by women and 17% of all anxiety disorders experienced by women are associated with domestic or family violence.¹⁹
- Children who are exposed to domestic violence are also likely to experience these impacts.
- Survivors of domestic violence are more likely to have problems with alcohol, to smoke, and to use non-prescription drugs.²⁰
- Women who have experienced domestic violence are at much greater risk of attempting suicide than women who have not.²¹

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

- Domestic violence is a huge economic burden for the nation. Recent estimates project that domestic violence will cost the Australian economy \$9.9 billion in the year 2021–22, if system responses do not change.²²

¹⁹ Rochelle Braaf and Isobelle Barrett Meyering, ‘Domestic violence and mental health’, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, Sydney, 2013: http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/documents/Fast_Facts_10.pdf

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ R. Braaf and I. B. Meyering, ‘Domestic violence and mental health’: http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/documents/Fast_Facts_10.pdf

²² National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, *The cost of violence against women and their children*, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra, 2009.

- The largest proportion of the economic burden of domestic violence is borne by victims – more than half, according to some studies.²³
- This includes costs associated with homelessness, loss of employment, and healthcare linked with domestic violence.²⁴
- Domestic violence cost Australian businesses \$175.2 million in 2002–03, with employee absenteeism, permanent loss of labour, and employee death all contributing factors.²⁵ Without any effective intervention, this figure has been projected to rise to \$456 million in 2021–22.²⁶

HOMELESSNESS

- One in 4 people accessing specialist homelessness services cite domestic and family violence as the reason for needing assistance – it’s the most common reason given.²⁷
- More than half of women who approach homelessness services with their children say that domestic violence is the main reason they need help.²⁸
- What’s more, nearly 90% of people using homelessness services report that they grew up with conflict in the house. This suggests that childhood exposure to domestic violence is a major risk factor for homelessness later in life.²⁹

²³ Rosa Campbell, ‘The financial cost of domestic and family violence’, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, Sydney, 2011: http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Fast_Facts_3.pdf

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Access Economics, *The cost of domestic violence to the Australian economy: part 1*, Office of the Status of Women, Canberra, 2004.

²⁶ National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2009, *The cost of violence against women and their children*.

²⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services Data Collection, cat. no. HQU 265, Canberra, 2012: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=10737422983>

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

SYSTEM RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

LEGAL

The ACT legal system responds to domestic violence in two ways:

- dealing with crimes that have already occurred—if there is evidence that a crime has been committed, an alleged offender will be charged with a criminal offence; and
- using Domestic Violence Orders (DVOs) to prevent future violence.

Domestic or family violence matters are fast-tracked through the courts, although it can still take a number of months. Consequences for a guilty finding for a domestic or family violence offence may include a fine, a good behaviour order, the completion of court-mandated programs to address use of violence in relationships, periodic detention or a prison sentence.

For more information about DVOs or any other aspect of the court system in relation to domestic violence, see the resources at the end of this document.

COMMUNITY

There are a number of organisations who offer support for people living with domestic or family violence in the ACT. When police attend a domestic violence incident, they routinely offer referral to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS), who are able to provide on-site assistance to all parties as well as an extensive range of follow-up services and supports. Housing and emergency accommodation support can be arranged through First Point, and legal information and advocacy is available through Legal Aid ACT as well as the Women’s Legal Centre (ACT and region) Inc.

GOVERNMENT

Australian state and federal governments have responded to domestic and family violence on a policy level in a range of ways. The key national document that deals with domestic and family violence is COAG’s *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010–2022*. In the ACT there is the *ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy 2011–2017*. There are many other government documents—for instance, health strategies (such as the 2009 *National Women’s Health Policy*) and crime prevention strategies—that also deal with domestic and family violence.

³ Michael Flood, ‘Fact Sheet 5: Violence Against Women: Facts and Figures’, White Ribbon Foundation, Killara, 2008: <http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/uploads/media/Fact%20Sheet%205%20Facts%20and%20Figures%20What%20is%20violence%20against%20women%202009.pdf>.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Personal Safety Survey, Cat no: 4906.0, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2012. <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4906.0Chapter1002012>

⁵ Jenny Mouzos and Toni Makkai, ‘Women’s experiences of male violence: findings from the Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey’, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 2004: <http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/5/8/D/9%7b58D8592E-CE77-4005-AB11-B7A8B4842399%7dRPP56.pdf>

⁶ E. Reed, A. Raj, E. Miller and J. G. Silverman, ‘Losing the “gender” in gender-based violence: the missteps of research on dating and intimate partner violence’, *Violence Against Women*, 16(3): 348–354, 2010.

⁷ Andy Chan and Jason Payne, ‘Homicide in Australia: 2008–09 to 2009–2010 National Homicide Monitoring Program annual report’, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 2013: http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/mr/21-40/mr21/04_homicide.html

⁸ R Alexander, ‘Women and domestic violence’, in P Easteal, ed., *Women and the law in Australia*, Butterworths, Chatswood, N.S.W., 2010, p. 152: <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22library%2Fjrnart%2F158210%22>

HOW TO REPORT ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS A SERIOUS PROBLEM IN OUR COMMUNITY.

There are things you can do when you’re reporting on domestic violence that will help readers, viewers and listeners to see it as an issue that affects everyone in some way, and that everyone can take action on. Remember: you can report on this issue in a way that informs, educates, and contributes usefully to public dialogue!

Name it. Always use the term ‘domestic violence’ when it applies. Using language like ‘domestic dispute’ or ‘volatile relationship’ minimises and trivialises a violent situation. Plus, readers who consistently come across the phrase ‘domestic violence’ will get a better understanding of the extent of the problem.

Safety comes first. Ensure that you report on the issue in a way that doesn’t compromise the victim’s safety. This might involve leaving out some details about the specifics of what occurred in order to protect the victim’s anonymity.

Know the law. Be aware that there are certain legal parameters that outline what you can and can’t report in a situation where a Domestic Violence Order has been issued, or where there are children involved—see the resources at the end of this document for more information about this.

Violence is never acceptable. The perpetrator is always solely responsible for a violent situation. Avoid using language or framing the story in a way that suggests the victim of violence was in any way to blame for what happened to him or her.

Domestic violence is serious and life-threatening. It is never appropriate to report on domestic violence in a way that sensationalises, trivialises, or makes light of it.

Acknowledge that this crime has both a victim and a perpetrator. Domestic violence is sometimes reported with headlines like ‘Woman assaulted’, or with stories that focus only on what happened to the victim. This can make it seem like violence is something that ‘just happens’ to women. Emphasise that someone *perpetrated* this violence, and that it was a crime.

Be fair. Be sure to report what you can from both sides of the story in a balanced way.

Take the emphasis away from ‘stranger danger’. Most violence against women is perpetrated by somebody known to the victim. Where there’s a relationship between the victim and perpetrator, acknowledge that (if you are able to).

Use sensitivity and good judgement when reporting victims’ stories. The emotional impacts of domestic violence often include feelings of intense shame and vulnerability. Make sure you do all you can to report on domestic violence in a way that upholds the victim’s right to dignity, remembering that there might be trauma associated even with an incident that occurred many years ago.

Contextualise the story with statistics. Use local, national, and (where appropriate) international statistics on domestic violence to frame the story.

Domestic violence has a significant gendered dimension. Acknowledge that domestic violence is not just a one-off violent incident—it occurs in a broader context in which power and resources are distributed unequally between genders, and in which women are much more likely to be victims of violence than men.

Humanise the story with appropriate terminology. Where possible, refer to the victim of violence by name. If that’s not appropriate, be as specific as you can—for example, ‘woman who has been a victim of domestic violence.’ The term ‘survivor’ is also sometimes used for people who have experienced domestic violence in the past.

It is important to include information about available support options for people experiencing domestic violence. In the ACT, you can list the following options:

- In an emergency, always dial 000
- If you are experiencing domestic violence, contact the Domestic Violence Crisis Service ACT on 6280 0900

Call on community experts for comment. Don’t just rely on the police or the judiciary for comment when reporting on domestic violence. Community experts on domestic violence will be able to put the issue in context. In the ACT you can contact:

- Domestic Violence Crisis Service ACT
- Victim Support ACT
- Canberra Rape Crisis Centre

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

STATISTICS

Australian Bureau of Statistics – Directory of Family and Domestic Violence Statistics, 2011: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4533.0main+features12011>

Australian Institute of Criminology: <http://www.aic.gov.au/statistics/violent%20crime/domestic%20violence.html>

RESEARCH AND COMMENTARY

Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse: www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au

RESOURCES ON LEGAL REQUIREMENTS SURROUNDING REPORTING ON DVOS

Children and Young People Act 2008 – see ‘Chapter 25: Information secrecy and sharing’: <http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2008-19/current/pdf/2008-19.pdf>

Domestic Violence and Protection Orders Act 2008 – see ‘Part 13: Public access and publication’: <http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2008-46/current/pdf/2008-46.pdf>

RESOURCES FOR SURVIVORS

1800 RESPECT (national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service): <http://www.1800respect.org.au/>

Canberra Rape Crisis Centre: <http://crcc.org.au/>

Domestic Violence Crisis Service ACT: <http://www.dvcs.org.au/>

Victim Support ACT: <http://www.victimsupport.act.gov.au/>



A WOMAN IS MORE LIKELY TO BE KILLED IN HER OWN HOME BY HER MALE PARTNER THAN ANYWHERE ELSE

