

Zero Tolerance and End Violence Against Women Coalition **Response to the 2023 IPSO Review of the Editors' Code of Practice** **Joint Submission**

Who we are

End Violence Against Women Coalition

Established in 2005, the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) is a leading coalition of 137 specialist women's support services, researchers, activists, survivors, and NGOs working to end violence against women and girls (VAWG) in all its forms including: sexual violence, domestic violence, so-called honour-based abuse, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, FGM, stalking and harassment. We campaign for improved national and local government policy and practice in response to all forms of violence against women and girls, and we challenge the wider cultural attitudes that tolerate violence against women and girls and make excuses for it.

As a leading coalition and thought leader on violence against women, EVAW has long worked with the media to shape and improve reporting on violence against women and girls: working with journalists to influence better reporting; being a go-to organisation to answer questions on how best to frame stories, terminology and imagery; connecting journalists with expert organisations specialising in forms of VAWG, and holding annual media awards recognising those that have had a positive impact on public narratives. As a coalition of expert academics, researchers, frontline support services, women's organisations, and survivors, we are best placed to advise on the issue of violence against women and girls.

Zero Tolerance

Zero Tolerance is a Scottish charity working to end men's violence against women and girls by promoting gender equality and challenging attitudes that normalise violence and abuse. Zero Tolerance works to improve the media's coverage of violence against women in the UK and strengthen the regulation around reporting VAWG. Over the past decade we have been working with a range of national organisations, activists, and individuals to encourage media workers to do better, to challenge myths and misconceptions about VAWG, and broaden their understanding of VAWG and its cause. We offer a range of resources for journalists including Media Guidelines for print and broadcast and free stock images to illustrate articles covering violence against women. Our work supports the media to cover violence against women and girls in an accurate and responsible way and contribute to the prevention of violence against women.

The Write to End Violence Against Women Awards

Zero Tolerance, together with End Violence Against Women Coalition, run The Write to End Violence Against Women Awards to celebrate and recognise journalists who report on violence against women accurately and responsibly.

Consultation Submission

Zero Tolerance and EAW are pleased to make a submission to this consultation on the Editor's Code of Practice, and will focus our submission on media reporting on violence against women and girls. We welcome the opportunity to offer our expertise and guidance to strengthen the code to ensure it supports the media in producing accurate and responsible reporting, based on the most up to date knowledge on violence against women and girls.

What is Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)?

The United Nations defines violence against women and girls (VAWG) 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."¹ VAWG is any form of violence disproportionately perpetrated by men against women and girls. It is deeply linked to women's inequality and includes sexual violence, domestic abuse, stalking and harassment, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and so-called 'honour-based' abuse, exploitation and abuse of women and girls in online spaces.

VAWG has a huge impact on us as individuals and as a society; hindering progress towards gender equality. But while it is an almost universal experience for women and girls everywhere, our experiences of VAWG are not the same – they are shaped and compounded by our other identities and multiple characteristics. Women who face other forms of inequality as a result of their race or ethnicity, wealth or social class, religion, sexuality, gender identity, disability, mental health or age are more likely to experience violence and less likely to access justice and support.

Violence against women is a violation of women's fundamental human rights. Women's rights to be free from violence are set out in a number of international legal standards and agreements, as well as national law in the UK:

- [UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women \(1993\)](#)
- [CEDAW – the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women](#)
- [Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence \(also known as the Istanbul Convention\)](#)
- [The UK Human Rights Act 1998 and Equality Act 2010](#)

¹ [UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, \(1993\)](#)

VAWG is endemic in our society:

- Globally: 1 in 3 women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.²
- In the UK:
 - 1.7 million women will experience domestic abuse every year.³
 - 1 in 5 women will experience sexual assault during her lifetime.⁴
 - Nearly 90% of girls reported being sent explicit pictures or videos of things they did not want to see happens a lot or sometimes to them or their peers.⁵
 - 71% of women of all ages in the UK have experienced some form of sexual harassment in a public space.⁶
 - 95% of all women did not report their experiences of sexual harassment.⁷
- Intersecting inequalities:
 - Disabled women are twice as likely to experience men's violence as non-disabled women.⁸
 - 68% of disabled women have experienced sexual harassment at work.⁹
 - 83% of trans women have experienced hate crime at some point in their lives.¹⁰
 - Black, minority and migrant women face higher levels of domestic homicide, so called 'honour' killings, and abuse driven suicide.¹¹

However, we know that VAWG is not inevitable, and that by tackling the norms that underpin it, we can create a world where women and girls don't become victims in the first place. From the government's role in creating laws and policies, to our institutional practices shaping norms and beliefs and our individual attitudes and behaviours - ending violence against women and girls is everyone's business. This includes the media.

Why should the Editor's Code of Practice be concerned with gender and VAWG?

Gender inequality is both a cause and consequence of violence against women, which is a major public health concern. Entrenched gender stereotypes facilitate this inequality and violence, and the media has a significant role to play in its prevalence, as the information it provides can either challenge or enforce harmful attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes. Although there is some good reporting on violence against women, a large proportion of current reporting perpetuates myths and stereotypes and contributes to attitudes that condone and excuse violence. Tolerance of violence against women remains very high in our society and outdated

² [Home Office in the Media, \(2019\), Violence Against Women and Girls and Male Position Factsheets](#)

³ [Office For National Statistics, \(2022\), Domestic abuse in England and Wales Overview](#)

⁴ [Home Office in the Media, \(2019\), Violence Against Women and Girls and Male Position Factsheets](#)

⁵ [Ofsted, \(2021\), Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#)

⁶ [Home Office in the Media, \(2019\), Violence Against Women and Girls and Male Position Factsheets](#)

⁷ [UN Women, \(2021\), Prevalence and reporting of sexual harassment in UK public spaces](#)

⁸ [Safe Lives, \(2017\), Spotlight Report, Disabled Survivors too, Disabled people and domestic abuse](#)

⁹ [Trades Union Congress, \(2021\), TUC survey: 7 in 10 disabled women say they've been sexually harassed at work.](#)

¹⁰ [Equality Network, Scottish Trans, \(2017\), Scottish LGBTI Hate Crime Report Picture \(disaggregated data provided by Equality Network via email:07/08/2018\)](#)

¹¹ [Interventions Alliance, \(2021\), Domestic Abuse in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups](#)

misconceptions are still very much present in public discourse. The current Editor's Code does little to tackle VAWG, and those provisions that do relate to VAWG (e.g. clauses 7 and 11 on sexual violence) do not reflect the gendered nature of this abuse despite this violence and abuse being disproportionately perpetrated by men against women and girls.¹² Gender-neutral responses are ineffective as they fail to grapple with the underlying causes and societal structures which underpin the scale of VAWG in society.

The specialist VAWG sector and wider women's sector are all too aware of the damage media reporting can have in shaping and maintaining problematic cultural norms and beliefs which underpin the scale of VAWG we see today. We know from survivors that victim-blaming attitudes and a fear of not being believed are huge barriers to leaving abusive relationships and/or to getting the support they need,¹³ and this can have grave consequences - with two women a week being killed by a partner or former partner in England and Wales.¹⁴ These grave concerns are shared by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, who recently published her analysis of the problematic media coverage of a number of recent murders of women along with her plans to write to IPSO, Ofcom and the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on the matter and calling for IPSO to conduct an investigation.¹⁵

Zero Tolerance's media monitoring data shows that many journalists, editors and media producers continue to resort to harmful stereotypes when reporting on incidences of violence. Considering the link between media reporting and public attitudes, this type of reporting contributes to a culture where violence against women continues to be normalised and accepted. Furthermore, there is a growing evidence base documenting these links. For example:

- A 2023 academic study on different framings of femicide in the media concluded that "media reporting is a decisive factor in overcoming the downplaying of structural and personal violence against women... Media reports on extreme forms of misogynist violence such as femicides can help to highlight the seriousness of violence against women in everyday life when appropriate frames are used. Already with the choice of certain headlines and crime labels, different emotional reactions can be triggered. Adequate criminological crime labels and critical reporting styles are essential for a change in the social awareness of deadly violence against women".¹⁶
- A 2018 study found that the media can encourage justification of violence against women by focusing on incorrect 'reasons' or 'causes' for it.¹⁷

¹² [Women's Aid Federation of England, 'Domestic abuse is a gendered crime'](#)

¹³ [Koutselini, M., Valanidou F., \(2014\), Discourses emerging from the experiences of the women mothers, victims of violence](#)

¹⁴ [ONS Census, \(2023\), Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2022. Due to lack of collated data this statistic doesn't include Scotland.](#)

¹⁵ [The Guardian, \(2023\), What coverage of Nicola Bulley, Emma Pattison and Brianna Ghey tells us about an out-of-control media](#)
[Nicole Jacobs](#)

¹⁶ [Schnepf, J., & Christmann, U., \(2023\), "Domestic Drama," "Love Killing," or "Murder": Does the Framing of Femicides Affect Readers' Emotional and Cognitive Responses to the Crime? Violence Against Women](#)

¹⁷ [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education; Health and Medicine Division; Committee on Law and Justice; Board on Children, Youth, and Families; Board on Global Health; Forum on Global Violence Prevention. \(2018\) Addressing the Social and Cultural Norms That Underlie the Acceptance of Violence: Proceedings of a Workshop—in Brief.](#)

- A 2016 review of media representations of violence against women found that ‘[t]here is clear link between media reporting and attitudes and beliefs in relation to violence against women, with audiences’ emotional responses and attributions of responsibility affected by how the media frames news.’¹⁸
- According to Level Up’s 2022 research,¹⁹ 93% of respondents did not think rules on reporting fatal domestic abuse are strong enough. In the same study, no respondent could say that they could confidently trust journalists to report on fatal domestic abuse.
- We are also awaiting research due to be published in April/ May 2023 by the Crown Prosecution Service and Equally Ours on the impact of rape myths on prosecuting cases of rape and serious sexual violence, which includes discourse analysis of media coverage of VAWG.

We acknowledge that some relevant guidance already exists in different parts of the IPSO Editors Code of Practice and accompanying guidance. We also recognise that journalists and media outlets are under increasing pressures in an era where budgets at news desks are tight. However, the complexity of the issue, along with the severe short and long-term consequences of poor reporting, mean that stronger regulation is required to ensure that the media is obliged to provide accurate information that contributes to preventing, rather than exacerbating VAWG.

VAWG is recognised as a key human rights issue and is a priority across many international and national bodies, and legal and policy frameworks such as the UN’s Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);²⁰ the Council of Europe’s Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence;²¹ the UK government’s Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy;²² and is noted as one of the strategic policing requirements in 2023 which are deemed national threats.²³ We believe it must follow that reporting on VAWG is sufficiently recognised within the IPSO Editors Code of Practice.

Women who are the victim-survivors of violence and abuse, and their families, deserve to be able to tell their stories on their own terms. Stronger regulation is needed to offer them protection from unethical, sensationalist coverage that:

- contributes to victim-blaming narratives,
- justifies or excuses actions of the perpetrators,
- ignores the dignity of women who have lost their lives,
- trivialises women’s experiences of violence,
- and re-traumatises victim-survivors by including unnecessary details of the crime and disclosure of personal information that can lead to their identification.

¹⁸ [Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety Limited, \(2016\). Media representations of violence against women and their children: Final report](#)

¹⁹ [Level Up, \(2022\). Dignity for Dead Women: How families bereaved by domestic abuse have experienced the press.](#)

²⁰ [The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)

²¹ [Council of Europe, Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating Violence against Women](#)

²² [Home Office \(2021\) Tackling Violence against women and girls strategy](#)

²³ [Home Office \(2023\) Strategic Policing Requirement](#)

Recommendations

We have one overarching recommendation to introduce a new clause on VAWG. In addition, we have mapped out recommendations for how this new clause could be used to strengthen the existing clauses.

1.	<p>Create a new clause covering all forms of violence against women and girls e.g. <i>Reporting should not perpetuate harmful attitudes that condone and excuse violence against women and girls.</i></p> <p>The content of this new clause can also be used to strengthen existing clauses as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Clause 1: Accuracy - the press must take care not to inaccurately frame, justify or excuse violence against women and girls.b. Clause 4: Intrusion into grief or shock - improve and strengthen Clause 4 with regard to fatal domestic abuse, and mandate Level Up's <i>Dignity for Dead Women</i> guidelines.c. Clause 11: Victims of sexual assault - anonymity for all victim-survivors of VAWG.d. Clause 12: Discrimination - Strengthen the discrimination clause so that it recognises intersecting forms of discrimination, and the structural and systemic nature of discrimination.e. Public Interest: the new IPSO Code should make it mandatory to include information about appropriate helplines and specialist support.
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Below we have set out these recommendations in more detail with accompanying evidence:

Recommendation 1) to create a new clause covering all forms of violence against women and girls e.g. *Reporting should not perpetuate harmful attitudes that condone and excuse violence against women and girls.* This can encompass existing clauses 7 and 11 relating to sexual violence.

In light of the extensive evidence outlined above on the scale and harm caused by VAWG, and the role of media in sustaining this, we would like to see reporting on VAWG treated with the same sensitivity as coverage of suicide, where introduction of a specific clause on reporting

suicide has driven a significant improvement in preventing ‘copycat suicides’.²⁴ This new clause will build on the existing provisions in the code relating to ‘children in sex cases’ and sexual violence (clause 7 and 11) which could then sit under this new clause. This new clause should be closely informed by, and include guidance akin to, Zero Tolerance’s Media Guidelines and Level Up’s Dignity for Dead Women media guidelines.

For example, Zero Tolerance’s 10 steps²⁵ to reporting violence against women and girls responsibly and accurately include:

1. Respect women
2. Include diverse voices
3. Name the cause: gender inequality
4. Name the crime
5. Consider how you present the perpetrator
6. Preserve victim-survivor anonymity
7. Place voices of experts and victim-survivors at the centre of the story
8. Use statistics to show the prevalence of VAWG
9. Select images thoughtfully
10. Always include helplines - it can save lives.

Furthermore, Level Up have produced guidelines on how to report fatal domestic abuse sensitively, accurately and responsibly, which are endorsed by IPSO and IMPRESS. The guidelines encourage journalists to follow the acronym AIDA:

- **Accountability:** Place responsibility solely on the killer, which means avoiding speculative “reasons” or “triggers”, or describing the murder as an uncharacteristic event. Homicides are usually underpinned by a longstanding sense of ownership, coercive control and possessive behaviours: they are not a random event.
- **Images:** Centre the image of the victim. Don’t use composite images of the victim placed next to the perpetrator. Use the photo provided by the victim’s family or police.
- **Dignity:** Avoid sensationalising language, invasive or graphic details that compromise the dignity of the dead woman or her surviving family members.
- **Accuracy:** Legal proceedings permitting, name the crime as domestic abuse. Frame the death in the context of a pattern of controlling behaviour and, where possible, signpost to helplines for victims.

We also recommend that this new VAWG clause should include guidance on stringently moderating or turning off comments under articles about VAWG. Research shows that many people hold outdated views on violence against women. Findings from the Scottish Social Attitudes survey 2020 showed that underlying attitudes remain largely unchanged: ‘There were no significant differences between 2014 and 2019 in views on the wrongness of either physical or verbal abuse, or most of the coercive control scenarios.’²⁶

²⁴Jang J, Myung W, Kim S, et al. (2022) Effect of suicide prevention law and media guidelines on copycat suicide of general population following celebrity suicides in South Korea, 2005–2017. Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry.

²⁵Zero Tolerance (2023) Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women

²⁶The Scottish Government, (2019), Scottish Social Attitudes Survey: Attitudes to violence against women.

From Zero Tolerance's work, this finding is reflected in the comments left by members of the public under articles about violence against women published online and on social media. We see victim-blaming comments very frequently. For example, in an article about actress Evan Rachel Wood, who was abused by Marilyn Manson, someone had commented: "Well, look at him. He's a freak, what did she expect?" This comment perpetuates the myth that an abuser can be identified by their appearance, and that the survivor can somehow be complicit in the perpetrator's choice to abuse her. Comments that question why someone stayed in a relationship with an abuser are also very common. These types of comments spread misinformation, blame victims rather than perpetrators for abuse, and deter other victims from coming forward and seeking help.

The content of a new VAWG clause can also be used to strengthen existing clauses as follows:

Clause 1) Accuracy:

Recommendation 1a) the press must take care not to inaccurately frame, justify or excuse violence against women. The revised Editors Code should include a sub-clause stating that reporting should never excuse, justify, or perpetuate myths about violence against women. Including this sub-clause will also help to enable victim-survivors to come forward, seek help and get justice.

Evidence base

Justification and excuses

Media coverage can influence individuals' behaviours as well as their attitudes: for example, distorted coverage of domestic abuse, which suggests that it is a byproduct of a 'messy and difficult' relationship of equals, rather than an expression of power and control by one person over another, might encourage a woman who is living with an abusive partner to stay for fear of not being taken seriously.

Recent evidence suggests that incorrect use of language when reporting domestic homicides, such as "domestic crimes", "family tragedies", "crimes of passion" or even "love killing" leads to greater victim blaming.²⁷ A "domestic" or a "domestic dispute" frames the incident of violence as a private domestic or family problem and not a crime or human rights violation. It also relinquishes the responsibility of those who commit violence, as well as the individuals who might be aware of it.

Zero Tolerance's media monitoring data²⁸ shows that on average, 1 in 5 articles provided a justification for the perpetrator's actions. This figure increases to 1 in 3 stories in tabloid papers. Most commonly, VAWG is excused or justified in the media through reinforcement of

²⁷ Schnepf, J., & Christmann, U. (2023). "Domestic Drama," "Love Killing," or "Murder": Does the Framing of Femicides Affect Readers' Emotional and Cognitive Responses to the Crime? *Violence Against Women*.

²⁸ Zero Tolerance, (2017), *Media Monitoring: Media representation of violence against women: what's the situation in Scotland*

misconceptions about its cause. This is not necessarily the result of specific journalistic intent, '...but rather a correlate of deeply held historical and cultural gender biases in our society...'.²⁹

Violence against women is caused by gender inequality, and yet media reporting often suggests, either explicitly or implicitly, that it is 'caused' by factors such as jealousy, alcohol, football, marriage problems, mental health issues or more recently, lockdowns.³⁰ Football is also often used to excuse men's violence, despite clear evidence³¹ that football matches are not the cause of domestic abuse – abusive men are.

Poor mental health is another factor frequently used to excuse or justify violence. In a report on a sailor who had raped a woman while she slept, the focus of the article was on how apologetic and remorseful he was afterwards, and the 'explanation' provided was that the man is a sex addict who has attended addiction meetings.³² As well as misrepresenting the cause of violence against women, blaming violence on poor mental health also stigmatises those with mental health issues, the vast majority of whom do not perpetrate violence against women.

Perpetrators are often portrayed as mentally weak and acting out of character to justify violence. In recent coverage of a murder of Epsom college head teacher Emma Pattison and her seven-year old daughter a perpetrator was described as 'very good-looking, extremely polite and (...) being rather shy'³³ and "someone who would [unlikely] do anything of that nature, who must have been in a state of madness."³⁴ This framing attempts to excuse his behaviour and amass sympathy for the killer and perpetuates stereotypes of who can commit VAWG, as ordinary men are often portrayed as unlikely culprits. This is harmful because most violence against women is perpetrated by ordinary men. Another article covering the same story puts the blame for the actions of the perpetrator on the victim's 'high profile and demanding job', which suggests that the murder was a reaction to the partner's success. Framing the story in this way shifts accountability away from the perpetrator and onto the victim and ignores the drivers of VAWG.³⁵

According to research,³⁶ people who were shown information intended to increase perpetrator responsibility (e.g. they had committed domestic violence before) were more likely to attribute responsibility to the perpetrator and more likely to feel sympathy for women who had experienced the violence. Whereas people who were exposed to contextual information

²⁹ [Esteal, P., Holland, K. & Judd, K. \(2015\) 'Enduring Themes and Silences in Media Portrayals of Violence against Women' Women's Studies International Forum](#)

³⁰ [Courtney-Guy, S., \(2020\) UK's first coronavirus murder as husband is arrested over death of wife, Metro](#)

³¹ [Bolza, M., \(2022\), 'Bullied' husband claims he strangled his wife of 44-years to death in a 'deliberate act of vengeance' because she 'nagged' too much, Mail Online](#)

³² [Crowley, Annie & Brooks, Oona & Lombard, Nancy. \(2014\). REPORT No.6 /2014 Football and Domestic Abuse: A Literature Review Football and Domestic Abuse: A Literature Review.](#)

³³ [Camber, R., \(2017\), She was Asleep and Drunk...I had Sex with Her. Scottish Daily Mail](#)

³⁴ [Davies, B., Jehring, A., \(2023\), Did living in the shadow of his high achieving wife lead to unthinkable tragedy? Details emerge of the tensions behind the picture perfect lives of the Epsom College head and her husband who 'killed her and their daughter before turning the gun on himself', The Daily Mail](#)

³⁵ [Hughes, T., \(2023\) Shocked family of Epsom College 'killer' speak out, Evening Standard](#)

³⁶ [Rayner, G., \(2023\), Behind the closed doors that led to the Epsom College tragedy, The Telegraph](#)

³⁷ [Palazzolo, K. E., and Roberto, A. J. \(2011\) Media Representations of Intimate Partner Violence and Punishment Preferences: Exploring the Role of Attributions and Emotions. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*. Vol.39\(1\), Carlyle, K. E., Orr, C., Savage, M. W., and Babin, E. A. \(2014\) News Coverage of Intimate Partner Violence: Impact on Prosocial Responses. *Media Psychology*. Vol.17\(4\).](#)

intended to decrease perceptions of perpetrator responsibility (e.g. they had previously been mentally ill, or left no noticeable injuries), were less likely to attribute responsibility to the perpetrator, and were more likely to be sympathetic towards them. The researchers found that being shown information about victims of VAWG intended to increase perceptions of victim responsibility (e.g. they had consumed alcohol, or cheated on their partner) resulted in respondents reacting to stories with less sympathy and increased anger towards women victims.

Rape myths

Currently, the media regularly reinforces rape myths through its reporting choices³⁷ and over-emphasis on the prevalence of 'stranger' rape scenarios. While such occurrences generate significant media coverage, the prevalence of these kind of stories in the media and underreporting of other forms of violence against women disguises the fact that 86%³⁸ of women in England and Wales and 98%³⁹ of women in Scotland were sexually assaulted by someone they know – a friend, relative or colleague.

Research by The Rosey Project Community (2020) found that irresponsible reporting has damaging implications on young survivors of sexual violence. The majority of survivors (83.2%) felt that their experience of sexual violence was not well represented in the media; suggesting a concerning detachment between survivors' experiences and media portrayals. When young people don't see their own experiences reflected, they struggle to identify that what happened to them was sexual violence, which makes it much harder to access support. 83.1% of survivors surveyed stated that the portrayal of sexual violence in the media had deterred them from reporting to the police. 72.7% of respondents said that the way sexual violence is portrayed in the media had a negative impact on their mental well-being.⁴⁰

False allegations

There is no reliable empirical evidence that suggests there are problematic numbers of 'false' police reports of rape; indeed, the Stern review concluded that: "there were very few"⁴¹. And yet the balance of coverage often seems to be uneven, with undue prominence given to the few cases involving a false allegation. Women who see media coverage of cases involving false allegations of rape may be less likely to report an incident of rape or sexual violence for fear of being disbelieved.

It is important not to conflate or mistake withdrawing an allegation with false accusation. 58% of survivors who reported rape withdrew their case because of threats to their privacy or how invasive the process was, and in a further 29%, the police decided to take no further action.⁴²

³⁷ Franiuk, R., Seefeldt, J., Cephress, S. & Vandello, J. (2008) 'Prevalence and Effects of Rape Myths in the Media: The Kobe Bryant case' *Violence Against Women*

³⁸ ONS (2021) *Nature of sexual assault by rape or penetration, England and Wales: year ending March 2020*

³⁹ The Scottish Government (2021), *Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2020/21: Sexual Victimisation*

⁴⁰ The Rosey Project Community (2021) *The Rosey Project Community Investigate the Impact of Media Portrayals of Sexual Violence on Young Survivors.*

⁴¹ Maxwell, L. & Scott, G. (2014) 'A Review of the Role of Radical Feminist Theories in the Understanding of Rape Myth Acceptance' *Journal of Sexual Aggression*

⁴² Mayor of London, (2021), *The London Rape Review.*

It is highly uncommon for women to regret consensual sex, then later claim it was rape. There are no more false reports of rape than of any other crime. It is important that reporting acknowledges this when covering a story of false allegations.

Furthermore, a different study ⁴³ found that rape myths impact on juror decision making in court, and that individuals who hold stereotypical attitudes towards rape are more likely to judge defendants as 'not guilty'. The research findings therefore emphasise that when news articles perpetuate myths about VAWG through the language and text they use, the public often then feel more critical of the actions of the victim rather than the perpetrator.

We know that rape and sexual assault are massively underreported crimes. The rape conviction rate in the UK also remains low ⁴⁴, and one of the reasons for this is the persistence of rape myths among the general population ⁴⁵.

Clause 4) Intrusion into grief or shock

Recommendation 1b) Improve and strengthen clause 4 with regard to fatal domestic abuse, and mandate Level Up's *Dignity for Dead Women* guidelines.

We endorse Level Up's recommendation that clause 4 of the Editors' Code of Practice would benefit from a subclause that specifically addresses domestic abuse killings. We support the recommendation to introduce a subclause to the Editors' Code to the effect of:

In cases where a person has been killed by a partner or former partner, care should be taken not to use language which could frame the murder as an act of 'love', or which could be construed to blame the victim for their death.

Evidence base

Level Up's *Dignity for Dead Women* guidelines⁴⁶ which were co-created with criminologists, domestic abuse experts, victims' families and the IPSO standards team, were published and endorsed by IPSO in 2019. While some changes have been made to reporting practices since the introduction of these guidelines in 2018, it is evident that a voluntary approach is insufficient in enforcing media standards on this pressing public health issue. Level Up have submitted substantial evidence with regard to media coverage of domestic homicides, particularly about the damage caused to victims' families.

⁴³ [Dinos, S., Burrowes, N., Hammond, K. and Cunliffe, C. \(2015\) A Systematic Review of Juries' Assessment of Rape Victims: Do Rape Myths Impact on Juror Decision-making? International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice.](#)

⁴⁴ [EVAW, \(2023\). Latest data shows highest number sexual offences on record, but our justice system still fails women](#)

⁴⁵ [Rich, K. & Seffrin, P. \(2012\)'Police Interviews of Sexual Assault Reporters: Do Attitudes Matter?' Violence and Victims; Aronowitz T., Lambert C. & Davidoff S. \(2012\) 'The Role of Rape Myth Acceptance in The Social Norms Regarding Sexual Behavior Among College Students' Journal of Community Health Nursing; Weiss, K. \(2009\) "Boys Will Be Boys" and Other Gendered Accounts' Violence Against Women ; Deming M., Covan E., Swan S. & Billings D. \(2013\) 'Exploring Rape Myths, Gendered Norms, Group Processing, and the Social Context of Rape Among College Women: A Qualitative Analysis' Violence Against Women ; Carr, M., Thomas, A., Atwood, D., Muhar, A., Jarvis, K. & Wewerka, S. \(2014\) 'Debunking three rape myths' Journal of Forensic Nursing Oct-Dec;](#)

⁴⁶ [Level Up \(2022\) Dignity for Dead Women: Media guidelines for reporting domestic abuse deaths.](#)

Clause 11): Victims of sexual assault

Recommendation 1c) anonymity for all victim-survivors of VAWG

The new IPSO Code should expand existing clause 11, which guarantees anonymity to victim-survivors of sexual crimes, to include victim-survivors of all forms of violence against women. Reporting should not name victims of VAWG, even in cases where doing so is legal. Naming victims is not essential for any story and can lead to immense distress and further victimisation.

Evidence base:

For survivors, identifying information such as names and locations can both exacerbate trauma and complicate recovery. When the press prints a survivor's name, they run the risk of re-victimisation as the survivor may not have shared their experiences with their friends, colleagues, and loved ones, yet are now being exposed in the media. What's more, the associated stigmas of domestic abuse may cause them further harm when they are labelled a 'victim' by a news outlet, as opposed to having the opportunity to tell their own story. Naming survivors in this way can also prevent others from reporting if they do not want to be similarly exposed in the press.⁴⁷ This prevents serial offenders from being brought to justice while also preventing survivors from being able to report their abuse, which can be critical to their recovery.

Confidentiality in reporting is not only essential for the survivor's wellbeing, but also important for their safety. Where there is no conviction, or short sentences are given, survivors remain at risk of further, and often aggravated, abuse by the same perpetrator. In fact, the majority of domestic homicides occur just after a separation, and stalking and harassment are also more likely after a separation. As such, providing the names of survivors can put them at huge risk from the accused perpetrator. Survivors are also more at risk of harassment and violence from members of the public that support the defendant. For example, during the sexual harassment case against Alex Salmond, his supporters complained online that the survivors were acting out of 'malicious intent', were working in support of the British state, and should be 'exposed'.⁴⁸

Clause 12) Discrimination

Recommendation 1d) Strengthen the discrimination clause so that it recognises intersecting forms of discrimination, and the structural and systemic nature of discrimination.

VAWG is a cause and consequence of women's inequality, and in order to tackle it, the structural and systemic nature of gender inequality should be recognised in reporting on VAWG. However, it is also important to acknowledge that misogyny does not impact all women in the same way. Experiences of violence against women are informed not just by gender, but also by the parts of our identities which intersect with gender, such as race and ethnicity, disability, sexuality, age, transgender identity, and immigration status. For example, an elderly lesbian

⁴⁷ This is based on our engagement and recommendation from Scottish Women's Aid, who works with survivors of violence against women.

⁴⁸ Carrell, S., (2018) Salmond crowdfunding 'could put off sexual assault victims', [The Guardian](#)

woman, a Black disabled woman, an Asian trans woman, and a bisexual woman seeking asylum would all be affected by distinct interactions of social prejudice and oppression. Their experiences cannot be encapsulated unless all aspects of their identity are understood as mutually interactive. Responsible reporting will draw from this intersectional awareness, and will bring attention to the compounding impact of intersecting inequalities experienced by certain groups of women, as well as ensuring stories do not wrongly depict a homogeneity of women's experiences. When journalism does not draw from an understanding of how inequalities intersect, it underpins the further marginalisation of the experiences of already disadvantaged groups.

All cases of VAWG should be treated with seriousness, regardless of who the victim is. Minoritised and marginalised women deserve accurate and responsible reporting as all other women do.

Evidence base

Studies show that cultural stereotypes have a significant impact on Black and minoritised women's experiences of violence, their ability to report it and seek support. For example, Black women are often subject to racist stereotypes of hypersexuality and promiscuity.⁴⁹ This can lead to their accounts of sexual assault and rape being disbelieved and underreported, perpetuating the false image that only 'innocent' white women are subject to gendered violence.⁵⁰ In cases where minoritised women have insecure immigration status, we know that this status, including the fact that they may have no recourse to public funds, is often used as a tool of control by perpetrators to abuse their partners, and that the threat of deportation or detention for example creates barriers to migrant women seeking support.⁵¹

Studies suggest Black and minoritised women are less able to seek support or report abuse to authorities, following experiences of racism from agencies and concerns that their report may contribute to racist stereotyping.⁵² This means that Black and minoritised women may be more likely to remain in situations where they are being abused, and more likely to suffer from poor physical and mental health. Reporting must therefore avoid playing into racist tropes and implying that any form of violence against women is merely a part of any community's culture or religion.

Black and minoritised women face numerous intersecting inequalities that contribute to a higher risk of experiencing VAWG. Black women are also disproportionately 'victims' with women who identified with mixed/multiple ethnicities statistically more likely to have experienced partner abuse (10.1%) than any other ethnic group.⁵³ Black, minoritised and migrant women experience higher rates of domestic homicide and are 3 times more likely to commit suicide than other

⁴⁹ Davis, A.Y., (2001) *Women, Race and Class*. New York: Random House.

⁵⁰ Lykke, L. (2016) 'Visibility and Denial: Accounts of Sexual Violence in Race- and Gender-Specific Magazines' *Feminist Media Studies*

⁵¹ EACH (2012) *Asian Women, Domestic Violence and Mental Health*

⁵² Thiara, R., Roy, S., (2020) *Reclaiming Voice: Minoritised Women and Sexual Violence, Key Findings*. Imkaan

NSPCC (2008) "I can't tell people what is happening at home": Domestic abuse within South Asian communities: the specific needs of women, children and young people

⁵³ ONS, (2018) *Women most at risk of experiencing partner abuse in England and Wales: years ending March 2015 to 2017*

women in the UK.⁵⁴ Black and minoritised women are known to face significantly higher barriers to reporting sexual violence and domestic abuse, accessing refuges and other critical support. Research has shown that Black and minoritised women remain trapped in violent relationships for longer than white British women.⁵⁵ Factors such as immigration status, language challenges, and race-based discrimination have all been identified as additional barriers for Black and minoritised survivors to exit violent relationships. Black and minoritised women are more likely to report inappropriate professional responses from statutory and voluntary agencies, including responses based on cultural, ethnic and religious stereotypes.⁵⁶

Trans women are specifically targeted for hate crime, often in the form of sexual harassment or sexual assault. They experience sexist attitudes, discrimination and violence, as all women do, as well as experiencing an additional layer of discrimination for failing to conform to the gender norms expected of them. Research published by Stonewall in January 2018 showed that two fifths of trans people (41%) experienced a hate crime in the last 12 months, nearly half of trans people (48%) avoid using public bathrooms, one in four (25%) have experienced homelessness, two in five (40%) have adjusted the way they dress out of fear of harassment or discrimination and one in eight (12%) have been physically assaulted by colleagues or customers in the last year, simply for being trans.

2017 research carried out by King's College London in partnership with All About Trans looked at how media representation of trans people affects trans people themselves. 78% of those surveyed thought that coverage about trans people was inaccurate and when seeing negative media coverage, 69% felt unhappy, 78% felt angry, 69% felt bad about society, 49% felt excluded and 41% felt frightened.⁵⁷ The negative portrayal of trans people in the media⁵⁸ is particularly worrying because so many transgender children and young people attempt suicide — nearly half (45%). Reports should include information about gender identity only if it is relevant to the story. All transgender people should be treated with dignity and respect, including being referred to by their chosen name.

Public Interest

Recommendation 1e) the new IPSO Code should make it mandatory to include information about appropriate helplines and specialist support

Evidence base:

On average, high-risk victim-survivors live in abusive situations for 2.3 years and medium risk victims for 3 years before getting help⁵⁹. This time can be even longer for women from

⁵⁴ [UN \(2014\) UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. Statement at the conclusion of a country mission to the United Kingdom](#)

⁵⁵ [Vital Statistics. \(2010\). Ravi Thiara & Samanta Roy. Imkaan](#)

⁵⁶ [Gill, A.K. Virdee, G., \(2020\) Intersectional Interventions to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls in BME Communities](#)

⁵⁷ [Qiuling, L.,\(2018\) Breaking the Binary: Exploring the Role of Media Representation of Trans People in Constructing a Safer and More Inclusive Social Environment \(no longer available online, \[summary findings available here\]\(#\)\)](#)

⁵⁸ [Galop, \(2022\). Galop's statement on the release of the 2021-2022 Official Statistics for Hate Crime](#)

⁵⁹ [SafeLives \(2015\). Insights Idva National Dataset 2013-14. Bristol: SafeLives.](#)

marginalised groups.⁶⁰ Moreover, in 2017-2018, three-quarters of all adult service users who contacted Rape Crisis Centres wanted support around sexual violence that had taken place at least a year earlier and 42% were adult survivors of child sexual abuse. The stories of survivors who initiated the #MeToo movement were widely covered by the press worldwide. This increased reporting of sexual crimes by 10% following the first six months, and this effect lasted at least 15 months.⁶¹ Similarly, coverage of the Jimmy Savile scandal prompted an 80% increase in calls to the NSPCC helpline from survivors of child sexual abuse.⁶²

There are myriad reasons why women don't reach for help directly after experiencing violence,⁶³ but seeing the story of someone who has had a similar experience can help them to come forward and seek support and justice. However, Zero Tolerance's latest media monitoring (March 2023) found that only 19% of articles included helplines. The helplines referenced should be appropriate to the topics covered, the likely location of readership, and run by the specialist women's sector. For example, the helplines and support services detailed here.

⁶⁰ Thiara, R., Roy, S. (2020) Reclaiming Voice: Minoritised Women and Sexual Violence, Key Findings, Imkaan

⁶¹ Levy, R., Mattsson, M. (2019) , The Effects of Social Movements: Evidence from #MeToo

⁶² Ramesh, R., (2013) NSPCC says reports of sexual abuse have soared after Jimmy Savile scandal, The Guardian

⁶³ Ordway, D., (2018), Why many sexual assault survivors may not come forward for years, The Journalist Resource