

Nottinghamshire Sexual Violence Support Services

Response to the Review of the Editor's Code

Nottinghamshire Sexual Violence Support Services (Notts SVSS) is a charity which supports survivors of sexual violence aged 18 and above living in Nottingham/shire. Our range of services includes counselling and therapies, telephone helpline support, Independent Sexual Violence Advisor Service and a Survivors' Support Service for people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse.

We also campaign on issues which affect survivors of sexual violence, which includes our #NoMoreRapeMyths campaign. This campaign focusses on how sexual violence is reported in the media. This is important as what is said in the press directly impacts on survivors, how they understand their experiences and whether they choose to report or seek support. We are responding to the review of the Editor's Code as part of this campaign.

Points the Editor's Code should provide instruction on:

All articles dealing with sexual violence should include contact details for support organisations. These should be easily identifiable, ideally in a different font, at the end of the article.

It is widely understood that many people do not report or seek support directly after experiencing a sexual assault. Instead, a victim-survivor might use different coping strategies or look for information on similar experiences to try and understand what happened to them.

Articles that detail sexual abuse, sexual violence or rape can be triggering. It can prompt people to need support. Including support information is the only responsible route the press can take.

It is standard practice that helpline numbers are detailed after articles covering suicide. We know that [Level Up](#) are currently campaigning for this to be mandatory after reports on fatal domestic violence. According to [Rape Crisis England and Wales](#), sexual violence affects 1 in 4 women and 1 in 18 men, while 1 in 6 children have been sexually abused. [The ONS](#) reports that approximately 1 in 5 people aged 16 and over have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16.

These figures show that domestic abuse and sexual violence are prevalent in society and steps need to be taken to prevent this and direct people to support where possible. The inclusion of helpline numbers alongside all articles detailing suicide, domestic abuse and sexual violence should be mandatory.

There are several national numbers offering support with sexual violence, which include:

- The 24/7 Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Line
This is for all victims-survivors aged 16+ living in England and Wales and is managed by Rape Crisis England and Wales.
0808 500 2222. <https://247sexualabusesupport.org.uk/>
- Rape Crisis Scotland
08088 01 03 02 <https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/>
- National Male Survivor Helpline
0808 800 5005
- Galop UK (the LGBT+ anti-abuse charity) 0800 999 5428 <https://galop.org.uk/>
- Childline 0800 1111 <https://www.childline.org.uk/>

Use the correct terms for sexual violence – don't use the word 'sex' when 'rape' is what occurred

Working with and supporting survivors of sexual violence, we know that it is vitally important that sexual violence and rape is correctly named. Whenever the terms 'rape' and 'sex' are used interchangeably by the media this adds to the confusion about what happened. Similarly, when the abuse of teenagers by their teacher is described as 'sex' or a 'relationship' this undermines the seriousness of the abuse taking place. This lack of clarity minimises incidents and adds to the misconception that there is a grey area between rape and sex.

It is vital that the press, in covering such subjects, uses the correct terms to help enhance public understanding. The Editor's Code must insist that appropriate terminology is used when reporting on sexual violence.

Articles on sexual violence should not appear next to images or links which undermine the issue.

Often, particularly where newspaper content is online, articles covering sexual violence are placed next to content that includes sexually objectifying images, content and links.

Charities working to support survivors spend a lot of time raising awareness about the differences between sex and rape. We also talk about rape and sexual violence within the wider and enabling context of generalised misogyny, the objectification of women and commonplace incidents of sexual harassment.

The placement of articles detailing rape next to images and content which objectifies women not only hurts victim-survivors, it blurs the understanding of sex and rape and undermines the work of professionals working in the support sector.

While we would prefer that sexualised content did not have a place in the press, at the very least the Editor's Code should prevent such content being placed next to articles that detail sexual violence. Online press should have programming built in to prevent these conflicts.

Commenting under online stories should be turned off

Despite much campaigning, we know that people can still hold judgemental views, particularly on the subject of sexual violence. Where comments are left on, members of the public do post judgmental and threatening content. This can have the impact of feeding misinformation whilst making other victims/survivors feel guilty and judged.

Leaving comments on such articles provides no newsworthy aspect and can lead to trolling and online emotional abuse. Where news is shared to the press' own social media, comments for these articles should also be turned off to prevent general trolling, harassment and threatening behaviour.

The Editor's Code must specify that comments should be turned off for all news stories containing rape and/or sexual violence posted to websites and social media.

Rape myths, victim-blaming narratives and minimisation of incidents should be avoided.

Rape myths and victim-blaming narratives are all too often present in press reporting. These might put emphasis on how drunk a survivor was or how late at night they were out. Similarly, we will often hear reports of 'how out of character' it was for the perpetrator to carry out the attack or that they were respectable or a 'family man.'

We often see boys, who have been groomed by teachers, have their abuse described as 'a relationship', 'sex' or a 'romp.'

Victim-blaming narratives and minimisation of events make it more difficult for victim-survivors to feel able to report incidents and seek support, while at the same time creating a storyline that excuses perpetrators.

The Editor's Code should include a clause preventing the use of victim-blaming narratives, rape myths and the minimisation of incidents.

Articles covering court cases should provide balance across the reporting period.

Much of the reporting on the issue of sexual violence takes place as part of the coverage of cases going through the legal system. The current Editor's Code means that such coverage does not have to refer to previous days at court which can lead to an imbalance.

We often see articles which focus solely on the defendant's testimony reporting verbatim what they have said. This can include unchallenged rape myths. While we understand the importance of reporting accurately what is heard in court, where possible this should be balanced with what has occurred in previous days by referring to it directly in the text or by linking to a previous, relevant article.

We hope that you find this feedback into your review of the Editor's Code useful. We would be glad to work alongside you on issues relating to this to help you in your work ensuring that coverage of sexual violence by the press is responsible, accurate and appropriate.