



## NSVRC TIP SHEET

# Reporting on Sexual Violence: Tips for Journalists

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month, a time when many journalists cover sexual violence from a variety of news angles. Below are best practices and story ideas for writing about this complex societal issue that impacts one in five women and one in 71 men in their lifetime.

### INTERVIEW A BROAD RANGE OF SUBJECTS

- A wide range of stakeholders have a role to play in preventing sexual violence. Consider a diverse pool of sources, including law enforcement, community members, medical and mental health professionals, sexual violence prevention advocates, survivors, families, and perpetrators. Expanding sources is especially important given most sexual violence incidents are never reported to the police.<sup>a</sup>

### REPORT ON THE FULL SPECTRUM OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND RANGE OF PEOPLE AFFECTED

- Sexual violence is a broad term that encompasses more than intercourse without consent. Think about exploring stories involving all forms of sexual assault, including unwanted touching (fondling or groping), child sexual abuse, physically threatening verbal remarks, sexual harassment, voyeurism, and human trafficking. It's vital that policymakers and the public understand and address sexual violence in every form.
- Address diversity by including the range of people who are assaulted, who commit, or who are otherwise affected by sexual violence. For example, include survivors across the lifespan, survivors of color, male and female survivors, LGBT survivors, and other underrepresented voices.

### DISCUSS PREVENTION EFFORTS TO UNDERSCORE THAT SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS NOT INEVITABLE

- Writing about solutions, especially prevention strategies, can help shift perceptions of sexual violence from risky, random inevitabilities to a focus on rates, prevention, and causes of violence.
- Ask questions such as: How is the community working to prevent violence? Is it effective? What do local stakeholders think should be done? What would make those strategies work? Provide references to concrete and context-specific examples of programs, policies, and other measures.

## DESCRIBE THE CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AND RESILIENCE OF THOSE WHO LIVE THROUGH IT

- Discuss the consequences of sexual violence on victims, families, perpetrators, and community. Help the audience see beyond criminal justice and understand that sexual violence is also a public health and social justice issue.
- Highlight resilience and healing among survivors to avoid perpetuating the myth that sexual violence irrevocably ruins the lives of those who experience it. Explore the possibility of rehabilitation and reintegration for those who commit sexual offenses.

## PROVIDE RESOURCES IN ADDITION TO NEWS

- Provide readers with a call to action and resources to seek more information, such as hotlines, warning signs, and support groups.

## STATISTICS ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE U.S.

- One in five women and one in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives.<sup>b</sup>
- 46.4% of lesbians, 74.9% of bisexual women, and 43.3% of heterosexual women reported experiencing sexual violence other than rape during their lifetimes. 40.2% of gay men, 47.4% of bisexual men, and 20.8% of heterosexual men reported experiencing sexual violence other than rape during their lifetimes.<sup>c</sup>
- Nearly one in 10 women has been raped by an intimate partner in her lifetime, including completed forced penetration, attempted forced penetration, or alcohol/drug-facilitated completed penetration. Approximately one in 45 men has been made to penetrate an intimate partner during his lifetime.<sup>d</sup>
- 91% of the victims of rape and sexual assault are female, and 9% are male.<sup>e</sup>
- In eight out of 10 cases of rape, the victim knew the person who sexually assaulted them.<sup>f</sup>
- 8% of rapes occur while the victim is at work.<sup>g</sup>

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Dart Center For Journalism & Trauma:** [Reporting on Sexual Violence](#)
- **Columbia Journalism Review:** [The right way to write about rape](#)
- **Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls & Young Women:** [Reporting on Rape and Sexual Violence](#)
- **Know Your IX:** [Writing About Gender-Based Violence & Title IX: A Guide for Journalists & Editors](#)
- **The Poynter Institute:** [11 resources for responsibly reporting on rape](#)

## ABOUT NSVRC

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) is the leading nonprofit in providing information and tools to prevent and respond to sexual violence. NSVRC translates research and trends into best practices that help individuals, communities and service providers achieve real and lasting change. The center also works with the media to promote informed reporting. Every April, NSVRC leads Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM), a campaign to educate and engage the public in addressing this widespread issue. NSVRC is also one of the three founding organizations of Raliance, a national, collaborative initiative dedicated to ending sexual violence in one generation. The organization was chartered in 2000 by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

---

- <sup>a</sup> Rennison, C. M. (2002). *Rape and sexual assault: Reporting to police and medical attention, 1992-2000* (NCJ 194530). Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics: <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsarp00.pdf>
- <sup>b</sup> Black, M. C., Basile, K. C., Breiding, M. J., Smith, S. G., Walters, M. L., Merrick, M. T., ... Stevens, M. R. (2011). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 summary report*. Retrieved from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: [http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS\\_Report2010-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS_Report2010-a.pdf)
- <sup>c</sup> Walters, M. L., Chen J., & Breiding, M. J. (2013). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 findings on victimization by sexual orientation*. Retrieved from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: [http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS\\_SOfindings.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS_SOfindings.pdf)
- <sup>d</sup> Breiding, M. J., Chen J., & Black, M. C. (2014). *Intimate Partner Violence in the United States — 2010*. Retrieved from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: [http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/cdc\\_nisvs\\_ipv\\_report\\_2013\\_v17\\_single\\_a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/cdc_nisvs_ipv_report_2013_v17_single_a.pdf)
- <sup>e</sup> Rennison, C. M. (2002). *Rape and sexual assault: Reporting to police and medical attention, 1992-2000* (NCJ 194530). Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics: <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsarp00.pdf>
- <sup>f</sup> Miller, T. R., Cohen, M. A., & Wiersema, B. (1996). *Victim costs and consequences: A new look* (NCJ 155282). Retrieved from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/victcost.pdf>
- <sup>g</sup> Duhart, D. T. (2001). *Violence in the workplace, 1993-99*. Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics: <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/vw99.pdf>