

# REPORTING ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Not Your  
Ordinary Story  
Assignment

*Networks of Change*

**Mobilising** ))) MRA  
For Rights Associates امرأة

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## **INTRODUCTION**

- Reporting on VAW: Why a Guide for Journalists?
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# INTRODUCTION

## Reporting on Violence Against Women: Why a Guide for Journalists?



“We know you [journalists] are overworked, under pressure and very busy. But we also know that what you say matters. With every story on violence against women, there is an opportunity to stop it happening again.” -- *Zero Tolerance*<sup>1</sup>

Covering violence against women (VAW) is not an ordinary assignment for a journalist. It is a sensitive and complex issue involving deeply embedded social attitudes and unique challenges. Media has the power to shape conversations and people's perceptions about VAW. Journalists play an important role in ensuring that women have a voice in how their stories are told. Poor reporting can sensationalize the story and ignore the impact on the victim/survivor. Good reporting ensures that women's rights and wishes are respected and their safety is considered. [Networks of Change](#) and [Mobilising for Rights Associates](#) (MRA) came together to develop a resource for journalists across diverse media sectors as they take on the challenges of reporting on VAW. We set out to provide a practical guide in multiple languages for new and experienced journalists alike to explore the complex issues of covering VAW. We hope that writers, photojournalists, editors, media leaders, journalism schools and associations will find this guide a useful resource when you cover VAW.

### THIS GUIDE

promotes gender-sensitive, data-driven content that integrates human rights into reporting. It presents information to improve the understanding of VAW along with practical guidelines on ethical standards, best practices, appropriate terminology and conducting sensitive interviews. It also includes a [resource](#) section with carefully selected links that may be helpful to journalists and editors.

“Responsible media coverage can neither end nor resolve the issue of violence against women, but it can be instrumental in triggering public response and greater involvement in prevention activities. Violence against women is not a sporadic incident caused by a ‘crazy’ partner. It is a social phenomenon. Pressure exerted by the public and the media on the institutions, calling upon them to do their job, must be strong and incessant.”  
-- *UN Women*<sup>2</sup>

In creating the guide, Networks of Change and MRA adopted a “local listening approach.” We engaged with a multitude of voices through surveys, interviews, focus groups, a symposium series, roundtables and ongoing assessments of current coverage to identify areas of concern in reporting on VAW and ways to improve it. Our efforts embraced a grassroots participatory approach that included input from hundreds of individuals and our joint working groups of journalists, editors, media leaders, women’s groups and human rights advocates around Morocco. We also consulted with women victims/survivors of violence for their views on and experiences with the media. Further, we reached out to a number of journalism schools around the country to identify gaps, priorities and needs in their curricula related to reporting on VAW.

We integrated the results of these conversations into the guide to ensure it is responsive to the identified needs. This initiative is intended to produce original, locally responsive content and foster sustainable working relationships across the media and women’s rights sectors.

We produced our guide in the hope of engaging in constructive dialogue with the media about ways in which reporting on VAW can be improved. Journalists play a crucial role in shaping our world and how we think about and react to issues.

## GOALS

- **Improve sensitive, data-driven and human rights-based reporting** on VAW across diverse media sectors.
- **Increase knowledge and technical skills** among editors, journalists and journalism students to report accurately and ethically on VAW.
- **Strengthen relationships** between media, women victims of violence, NGOs and public service providers to increase the quantity and quality of coverage.
- **Enhance public dialogue** around VAW as a human rights issue and challenge norms and attitudes that perpetuate impunity for crimes of violence against women.

# How This Guide May Help You

We hope this guide helps you better understand the intricacies of reporting on VAW and gives you concrete and practical strategies to:

- Use accurate and sensitive language in your reporting
- Avoid trivializing and sensationalizing VAW
- Find resources to understand laws and services
- Conduct sensitive interviews
- Avoid coverage that reinforces stereotypes and finds excuses for the abuser

In addition to using this guide in a series of local and national training workshops in Morocco, we are distributing it widely to journalists, media professionals and outlets, journalism schools, women's rights groups and other organizations across the Middle East and North Africa region. It is available online and in hard copy. We encourage and appreciate readers sharing it with others.

*Networks of Change and Mobilising for Rights Associates*

## What Is Rights-Based Reporting?

We have written this guide using a rights-based approach to reporting that:

- Recognizes that women victims of violence are “rights-holders”
- Ensures that their voices are heard
- Enables them to play an active role throughout the experience

**Rights-based reporting** recognizes that violence against women:

<b>is a human rights violation</b>	<b>violates the principle of equality between men and women and is caused by this inequality</b>
<b>is the result of deep-rooted discrimination against women</b>	

**Rights-based reporting** recognizes that governments and public services, such as police, courts and policymakers, have an obligation to:<sup>3</sup>

Prevent	acts of violence against women
Protect	women from violence
Prosecute	perpetrators of violence against women
Punish	
Provide	appropriate redress, reparations and remedies to women victims of violence

**A rights-based approach** recognizes that governments have the obligation to ensure women’s rights to access justice through effective laws, quality courts that are available and accountable, and adequate remedies.<sup>4</sup> A rights-based-approach:

- Holds perpetrators responsible for causing VAW
- Holds governments responsible for providing solutions to VAW

**A victim-centered approach** to any interaction focuses on the rights, needs and concerns of and impact on the victim throughout the process.

<b>When interacting with service providers and journalists, women victims of violence have the right to:</b>			
<b>Privacy</b> ... so that no one else can overhear the conversation	<b>Confidentiality</b> ... so her information is not shared with others without her consent	<b>Choice</b> ... informed consent to anything concerning her	<b>Access</b> ... to services and information
<b>Safety</b> ... from potential risks and harms	<b>Dignity</b> ... through comfort and respect for autonomy	<b>Effectiveness</b> ... to achieve intended results	<b>Efficiency</b> ... without wasted time or effort



# Key Facts and Figures

## International

- The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that globally about **1 in 3 (30%) of women** have been subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by a non-partner in their lifetimes.<sup>5</sup>
- The WHO says most of this violence is intimate partner violence: “Worldwide, almost one-third (27%) of women aged 15-49 years who have been in a relationship report that they have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner.”<sup>6</sup>
- Globally as many as 38% of all murders of women are committed by intimate partners.<sup>7</sup> Women make up 82% of all victims of homicide perpetrated exclusively by an intimate partner.<sup>8</sup>
- 23% of women have reported having experienced online abuse or harassment at least once in their life.<sup>9</sup>
- **In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), 40% to 60% of women have experienced street-based sexual harassment.** Between 31% and 64% of men said they had carried out such acts.<sup>10</sup>
- Strong majorities of men in the MENA region believe it is their role to monitor and control the movements of the women and girls in their households.<sup>11</sup>
- Less than 40% of women worldwide who experience violence seek help of any sort.  
Less than 10% of those seeking help appealed to the police.<sup>12</sup>





30%

of women have been subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by a non-partner in their lifetimes.

27%

of women aged 15-49 years who have been in a relationship report that they have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner.

38%

of all murders of women are committed by intimate partners.

82%

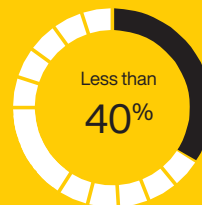
of all victims of homicide perpetrated exclusively by an intimate partner are women.

23%

of women have reported having experienced online abuse or harassment at least once in their life.



in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), 40% to 60% of women have experienced street-based sexual harassment.



of women worldwide who experience violence seek help of any sort.



of those seeking help appealed to the police.

# Morocco

- **More than 8 out of 10 (82.6%) women and girls aged 15 to 74 reported being subjected to at least one act of violence during their lifetimes**, 57% in just the preceding 12 months.<sup>13</sup>
- Women are most at risk for violence in the marital context (46.1% of women reported being subjected to violence from their husbands in the home in the preceding 12 months), followed by educational settings (22.4%), the family environment other than by a husband (18.6%), workplaces (15.1%) and public spaces (12.6%).<sup>14</sup>

## Most prevalent types of violence against women in Morocco



Source: HCP, 2019. Note: Experienced in the preceding 12 months.

- Among the women subjected to economic violence, 49% reported that their husbands prohibited them from working, 48.9% that their husbands refused to give them money for household needs, and 11.6% that their husbands took their money or withdrew from their accounts against their will.<sup>15</sup>
- **The overall cost of violence against women to households is estimated at 2.85 billion Moroccan dirhams**, 70% of that due to conjugal violence.<sup>16</sup>

## Low Effectiveness in the Legal System

Of all women subjected to physical violence...	...only <b>13%</b> take legal action or file a complaint to law enforcement or the justice system. <sup>i</sup>
Of all women subjected to sexual violence...	...only <b>3%</b> take legal action or file a complaint to law enforcement or the justice system. <sup>ii</sup>
Of all marital violence complaints...	...only <b>1.3%</b> of the perpetrators were arrested. ... <b>1.8%</b> were charged. <sup>iii</sup>
Of all women who sought help at the VAW units at courts of first instance or appeal...	...only <b>23%</b> benefited from legal aid ...only <b>4.6%</b> obtained a court hearing. <sup>iv</sup>
Crimes of violence against women are far less likely to be prosecuted than “morality crimes” such as sexual relations outside of marriage, adultery and sex work.	For example, in 2020, there were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>756</b> prosecutions for rape</li> <li>• <b>more than 13,000</b> prosecutions for sexual relations outside of marriage.<sup>v</sup></li> </ul>

Sources:

<sup>i,ii</sup> HCP, “Note sur les violences faites aux femmes et aux filles” (2019), [French](#), [Arabic](#).

<sup>iii</sup> HCP, “Enquête nationale sur la prévalence de la violence à l’égard des femmes au Maroc” (2009), [French](#).

<sup>iv</sup> Morocco Presidency of the Public Prosecution, Annual Report on the Implementation of the Penal Policy and the Improvement of the Performance of the Public Prosecutor (2018), [Arabic](#), [French](#).

<sup>v</sup> Morocco Presidency of the Public Prosecution, Annual Report... (2020), [Arabic](#).

# Before You Start...

## Key Terms and Concepts

While gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women (VAW) are often used interchangeably, we believe the more direct term for what we are addressing in this guide is VAW.

**Violence against women** is any act, omission or behavior, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm to or suffering by women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. It includes abetting or acquiescing to such violence and failing to prevent or stop the commission of such behavior.<sup>17</sup>

**Gender-based violence against women** is used as a more precise term that makes explicit the gendered<sup>18</sup> causes and impacts of the violence, referring to violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. The term frames the violence as a societal rather than an individual problem, based on women's subordinate status and unequal power relations between men and women.<sup>19</sup>

**Survivor** is used to describe the individual who was assaulted. Advocacy groups use this term largely to acknowledge the strength of an individual who endures trauma such as a sexual assault. Not every individual refers to themselves as a survivor.<sup>20</sup>

**Victim** is used to describe the individual who was assaulted. This word is most commonly used in the criminal justice system, media and by the general public. It emphasizes the fact that the person was subjected to a crime committed by a perpetrator.<sup>21</sup>

For this guide, we use the terms survivor/victim interchangeably and recognize that women subjected to violence may prefer one term over the other. In your reporting, we encourage journalists to use the term preferred by the individual.

# Understanding Different Forms of Violence

**Domestic violence** refers to physical, psychological, economic and sexual violence and coercive control, applied as an act or pattern of acts of assault, sexual coercion, torture, threats, neglect, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten a person by individuals with family relationships to one another and other members of the household.<sup>22</sup>

**Intimate partner violence** against women refers to any behavior by a husband or ex-husband, fiancé or ex-fiancé, boyfriend or ex-boyfriend, which causes or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm to or suffering by a woman, including acts of physical aggression, coercion, harassment, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, controlling behavior, and threats of such actions.<sup>23</sup>

**Economic violence** is characterized by denying women access to or control over basic resources, income, money, inheritance and economic security, including restricting women's right to work and access to employment.<sup>24</sup>

**Psychological violence** refers to any act or omission that damages the self-esteem, identity or development of the individual. It includes, but is not limited to, humiliation, threatening loss of custody of children, forced isolation from family or friends, threatening to harm the individual or someone they care about, repeated yelling or degradation, inducing fear through intimidating words or gestures, controlling behavior, and the destruction of possessions.<sup>25</sup>

**Sexual violence** is any sexual act or attempted sexual act, such as rape, sexual assault or any unwanted sexual contact by a person, regardless of their relationship with the victim, in any setting, without the free and voluntary consent of the other person to this contact.<sup>26</sup> Sexual violence is committed using a wide range of coercive behaviors in many different circumstances.

**Marital rape** is rape committed against a woman by her husband.

**Sexual harassment** refers to unwelcome physical, verbal and nonverbal behaviors of a sexual nature, or threats of such acts, whether a single occurrence or repeated.

**Sexual harassment in the world of work** involves a demand for sexual acts as a condition for gaining or remaining in employment (quid pro quo harassment), or creating a hostile, intimidating or humiliating work environment.<sup>27</sup> Such harassment may occur similarly in educational settings.

**Technology-facilitated violence against women** is the use of information, digital or communication technologies by someone to mistreat someone else, whether emotionally, psychologically, socially, economically, physically, sexually or otherwise, through for example, mobile phones and smartphones, the Internet, social media platforms or e-mails, that targets a woman because she is a woman or affects women disproportionately.<sup>28</sup>

**Violations of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights** are also a form of violence against women. These include forced sterilization, forced abortion, forced pregnancy, criminalization of abortion, denial or delay of safe abortion or post-abortion care, forced continuation of pregnancy, and abuse and mistreatment of women and girls seeking sexual and reproductive health information, goods and services.<sup>29</sup>

**Coercion** can be physical or verbal, and may come from the perpetrator's behavior, the circumstances or location of the violence, or the nature of the perpetrator's relationship to the victim. Coercion includes threats of or fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power, or taking advantage of a coercive environment.

<b>Consent is...</b>	an agreement between individuals to engage in sexual activity
	specific to each individual sexual act each and every time
	the presence of “yes” not the absence of “no”

<b>Consent is not implied by...</b>	a pre-existing relationship
	a lack of fighting or objecting
	consent in a previous encounter

<b>Consent cannot be given by someone who is...</b>	drunk	drugged	asleep
	incapacitated	underage	lacking mental capacity
	manipulated, coerced or compelled to say yes when she means no <sup>30</sup>		

# What About Violence Against Men?

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN BY FEMALE PARTNERS**

International research consistently shows that violence used by women is quantitatively and qualitatively different from that used by men. Statistics demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of acts of violence are committed by men against women. Whereas female violence is more likely to take place in the context of self-defense, male violence is more likely to lead to injury. Male violence against women is based on unequal gendered power relations.<sup>31</sup>

## **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN**

Gender-based violence against men refers to any act of violence directed against men because of their actual or perceived gender identity or expression, sexual orientation and/or non-masculine behavior.





## **WHAT CAN JOURNALISTS DO?**

- Challenges and Common Problems with Coverage of VAW
- Common Stereotypes and Myths
- How to Find Story Ideas
- Types of VAW Stories
- Finding Reliable Sources
- Understanding Victim/Survivor Behavior
- Why Is Violence Against Women an Underreported Crime?
- Interviewing Survivors of VAW
- The Importance of Words
- How Much Detail Should I Include?
- Visual Content
- Reporting Ethically on Violence Against Women

# WHAT CAN JOURNALISTS DO?

## Challenges and Common Problems with Coverage of VAW

Reports about VAW often fail to include context and trends, focusing solely on the incident of violence. Stories rarely include statistical information or analysis of the causes and impact of the violence. Some reports focus on the victim, often including unnecessary details and using victim-blaming language. Media coverage frequently provides justifications and excuses for the perpetrator's behavior. Discussions between local women's rights groups and journalists in Morocco revealed that media coverage of VAW often is limited to sensationalist one-off incidents or stories appearing only on special days recognized annually, such as International Women's Day on March 8 or the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on November 25.

Journalists play an important role in reporting on VAW. Your work is especially impactful in today's world of social media, given the speed with which stories are shared and the large audiences that can be reached. Journalists are in a position to influence public opinion and government policies. In addition, since stories are almost always digitized – regardless of the original format – they remain available online for research purposes and to support attempts to change public policies related to VAW.<sup>32</sup>

Reporting on VAW is not your ordinary story assignment. Journalists need to be aware of the effects trauma has on women who have been subjected to violence, be skilled in conducting sensitive interviews, and understand laws, public services and government obligations. The following sections address these issues to offer journalists guidance as you strive to improve your understanding and coverage of VAW.

**“Journalists and media people play an important role, not just in raising awareness about violence against women, but also in challenging the traditions and the stereotypes that allow it to continue.”**

*– a journalist from one of our local working groups*

# Common Stereotypes and Myths

*“Unfortunately, darija (Moroccan Arabic) is full of clichés and stereotypes,” says Khadija Boujanoui, president of the Parity Committee of the 2M television channel. She adds that all of the clichés and stereotypes used often in our language are conveyed insidiously by the media, and are found in fiction, in news, or merely in advertising.<sup>33</sup>*

It’s important for the media not to reinforce common stereotypes and myths about VAW and contribute to continued misunderstandings of the issue. Being aware of these stereotypes and myths affects everything from your choice of story, selection of sources, interview questions and language you use in reporting.

## Stereotypes

This content on stereotypes is based on materials developed by Elena Laporta Hernández<sup>34</sup> and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.<sup>35</sup>

**Stereotypes based on sex** are generalized views or misconceptions about the physical, emotional and cognitive attributes or characteristics possessed by men or women. For example: Men are aggressive; women are weak.

Stereotypes may impact assumptions about women or men as a group that then lead to false conclusions about individual people.

Some examples of stereotypes that impact how people think about VAW include:

Stereotype	Assumptions about men or women as a group	Conclusions about individuals
Men are heads of households <b>(a stereotype about roles that men should play)</b> .	Men hold ultimate power in interpersonal and family relations, and women are subordinate to them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A man may use violence to discipline his wife if she does not obey him.</li> <li>• A man may use violence or the threat of violence to maintain power in marriage and family relations.</li> <li>• The wishes and desires of a (violent) man should be prioritized over those of his wife and their children, including in legal proceedings (for example, child custody cases).</li> </ul>
Women should be chaste and modest <b>(a stereotype about sexual characteristics or behaviors of women)</b> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women should abstain from extramarital sex.</li> <li>• Women should dress and behave to avoid impropriety and indecency, especially to avoid sexual attention.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An unchaste woman has a propensity to consent to sex and must have consented.</li> <li>• A woman who has had prior sexual relations or is “immodest” is a less credible witness.</li> <li>• An immodest or unchaste woman “deserved” to be raped and is not “worthy” of criminal justice system intervention.</li> <li>• An immodest woman “provoked” sexual assault and must accept blame.</li> </ul>

Attention also should be paid to **compounded stereotypes**. This is when sex stereotypes are combined with another type of stereotype, such as those based on disability, age, sexual orientation, or ethnicity to produce unique stereotypes of subgroups of women or men. For example: “Disabled women are asexual,” or “Asian women are submissive.”

# Myths

*Some of the following is adapted from materials by the Interagency Gender Working Group<sup>36</sup> and the Violence Prevention Initiative.<sup>37</sup>*

*A myth is a widely held idea or belief that is false. Some common myths related to VAW include:*



**Myth: Violence only affects certain groups of women.**

Reality: This is not true. Violence against women has no boundaries. Research shows that it affects women from all backgrounds and socio-economic classes.

**Myth: Domestic violence only occurs in low-income, poorly educated, minority or dysfunctional families.**

Reality: Violence occurs in all socio-economic classes and all types of families. Low-income or otherwise vulnerable women may need to seek out public services or associations for assistance, and therefore are more likely to come to the attention of the authorities and the public eye.

**Myth: Domestic violence is usually an isolated incident.**

Reality: Violence is a pattern of behavior that gets worse and more frequent over

time. One study in Morocco found that in more than 60% of cases, intimate partner violence is characterized by an ongoing pattern of violent behavior lasting more than a year. One-time incidents of violence are the exception.<sup>38</sup>

**Myth: Sexual violence is more likely to be committed by a stranger and always occurs outside the home.**

Reality: The opposite is true. Research shows that women most likely know the person who commits the assault.<sup>39</sup> In Morocco, one study found that only 7% of perpetrators of sexual violence were strangers, and 81% of rapes occurred within a private home.<sup>40</sup>


**Myth: Women in violent relationships could easily leave if they really wanted to.**

Reality: Abused women are

faced with many barriers and obstacles to leaving a violent partner. These include threats to her and her children's physical safety, lack of alternative housing options, economic dependence on the abuser and threats of losing custody of her children.

**Myth: Men rape women because they can't control their sexual urges.**

Reality: Forcing another person to engage in a sexual act without their consent is not an act of sexual desire but of violence and aggression designed to gain power and control over another person. (Read more about "[Theories of Sexual Assault](#)" by The Advocates for Human Rights.<sup>41</sup>) Studies have shown that a significant number of sexual assaults are premeditated and planned in advance.<sup>42</sup>



**Myth: Violence against women is caused by the perpetrator's individual health issues such as mental illness or substance abuse of alcohol and/or drugs.**

Reality: Violence against women is a socially and culturally learned behavioral choice. Many men without these health issues are violent towards women; likewise, many men with these issues are not. Substance abuse may increase the severity of the violence and/or serve as an excuse used by the perpetrator to justify his actions. It may at times be associated with abuse, but it is not the cause of the violence.

**Myth: Violence against women is caused by relationship dysfunction; both parties are responsible, and the solution is couples counseling.**

Reality: Violence against women is caused by a belief system, held by men, that they have the

right to exercise power and dominance over women, and control their actions, thoughts and behaviors. It is characterized by a pattern of behavior that an individual uses to control or dominate his intimate partner through the systematic use of threats, intimidation and coercion to instill fear.

**Myth: Sexual assault and rape victims are always hysterical, emotional or crying after an attack.**

Reality: Sexual assault and rape victims may go through a wide range of emotions, behaviors and responses following an attack, and just because a victim does not outwardly appear emotional does not mean she is not traumatized or was not a victim of sexual assault.

**For more facts and myths, see [the online quiz on sexual violence](#) linked in the Resources section.**

# How to Find Story Ideas

While increasing media coverage of VAW is helpful, the appropriate selection of topics is equally important. The majority of reporting on VAW in Morocco focuses on physical violence, sensationalistic sexual assault or kidnapping cases. Most of it is produced after the violence has occurred and focuses on a particular case. Stories about VAW rarely treat it as a social phenomenon.

Finding ideas for VAW stories can be a challenge. Here are some tips:

- 1. Talk to victims/survivors, NGOs, lawyers and officials in related sectors like law enforcement, legal and health services.** Get in the habit of contacting sources regularly to chat off the record. Ask what issues they face. Find out about cases they are working on. Ask directly: What do you think is important for the media to cover?
- 2. Research.** Set up a [Google alert](#) with keywords such as: domestic abuse, violence against women or rape so you are notified when there is a new story. Keep an eye on stories in other countries. What topics are they covering? This could inspire you to work on similar ones in your country.
- 3. NGO reports and campaigns.** Follow international organizations and local community NGOs that work on VAW via Twitter and other social media. Keep an eye on reports they issue. Sign up for their newsletters when available.
- 4. Social media.** Are there any social media groups or pages dedicated to this issue? Pages created by victims/survivors? Join them if they allow it. Don't hide that you are a reporter.
- 5. Check comments on stories.** This may be one of the most underused sources for story ideas. Read the comments on stories about VAW when available on the media organization's website or their social media pages. There are many stories and potential sources in the comments section.
- 6. Your experiences and observations** will lead you to important stories. You hear from a friend that his colleague who has experienced sexual harassment in the workplace is having trouble reporting it. You work on a report about sexual harassment in the workplace or make it even more focused by addressing challenges with the reporting process.

# Types of VAW Stories

Here are some types of stories you can cover and examples of how others have done it

**News reporting** is straight reporting on something that's already happened or is happening. This includes reporting on an incident of violence like a rape, covering court proceedings, changes in laws, or producing stories about reports issued by organizations.

Example: "[Case law. From accused to victim: the astonishing turnaround of a rape case.](#)" This is a report (in French) on the sentencing of a rapist to ten years in prison. The report puts this in context by mentioning how difficult it is in such cases to prove non-consent in the absence of physical injuries.

**Feature stories and documentaries** involve in-depth coverage and extensive research and interviewing to present various layers and angles. Reporters usually have to pitch these types of stories to their editors or producers to get the extra time and resources needed to work on them.

Example 1: "[Femicide in Germany: A silent epidemic.](#)" This 17-minute report by France24 tackles the killing of women in Germany, which has the highest rates of femicides in Europe. The report addresses failures by police and shortcomings in German law.

Example 2: "[How many violent attacks and sexual assaults on women are there?](#)" This is not a typical feature. The BBC gives an overview of the issue of VAW through statistics and analysis of the government's response to the case of Sarah Everard, who was kidnapped and murdered by a police officer in March 2021.



**Profiles and interviews** of victims/survivors, activists and lawyers offer a chance to focus on a woman who has been subjected to violence and give her the time or space to tell her side of the story. It could also be used to let the audience know more about the work of a particular activist, lawyer or NGO.

Example: "[Virginia Giuffre: What we know about Prince Andrew's accuser.](#)" This BBC report is based on an interview with Virginia Giuffre, who says she was the victim of sex trafficking for Prince Andrew when she was a teenager and filed a lawsuit against him. (Prince Andrew settled the case for \$16 million in March 2022.)

**Investigations** involve extensive research and interviews by reporters digging for information that is unknown. The work of the investigative reporter leads to revealing new information, and it often has an impact for example by bringing people to justice, changing laws or regulations and raising awareness.

Example: "[Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades.](#)" The 2017 New York Times investigation into Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein is considered one of the most important such reports ever done. It ignited the #MeToo movement. Weinstein was convicted and imprisoned for rape and sexual assault. The reporters won a [Pulitzer Prize](#) and published a book.

**Unusual and unique angles** are sometimes sought by journalists. The focus can be on something not usually thought of in association with VAW. These stories are important as they draw attention to the many different ways VAW can impact a woman and society.

Example: "[The Hidden Epidemic of Brain Injuries from Domestic Violence](#)" tackles brain injuries in women survivors of domestic violence, an issue rarely talked about. It concludes that the rates of brain injuries among survivors of domestic abuse are much higher than for athletes or soldiers.

**Opinion pieces** about VAW by columnists or editorial boards adopt a particular viewpoint and are usually written by an opinion writer but sometimes by the editorial board of the media organization.

Example 1: "[The cost of domestic violence is astonishing.](#)" The piece points out the fact that a large number of men responsible for mass shootings in the U.S. had been accused of domestic abuse. The writers say it shows how society underestimates the effects of domestic abuse.

Example 2: "[The Guardian view on violence against women: focus on the perpetrators.](#)" This is an example of an editorial by the Guardian newspaper's editorial board. You will see these types of pieces when a publication's editors find that an issue is serious enough that publicizing their standpoint is necessary and important. This particular piece came following a series of murders along with an increase in domestic violence and sexual assaults.



# Finding Reliable Sources



*Content in this section is adapted from UN Women's "Media Coverage of Gender-Based Violence Handbook."<sup>43</sup>*

Finding reliable sources is often difficult, especially for sensitive stories like those about VAW. Some of the most common sources for journalists working on VAW include police reports, NGOs and, in some cases, victims of violence.

It is vital for journalists to get information from primary sources whenever possible. This means reading the actual law rather than quoting another news article or a lawyer mentioning the law, and interviewing the victim/survivor if she agrees instead of using a source who had spoken to her. Avoid second and third-hand sources. Use them to find out who or what the primary source is and go straight to it.

**Statistics:** In Morocco, the High Commission for Planning, the Presidency of the Public Prosecutor, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Solidarity, Social Integration and Family periodically issue reports including official statistics on VAW. (Their websites are listed in the "[Resources](#)" section.) Journalists should examine the data and, if helpful, identify trends related to violence against women.

**Laws:** In Morocco, both the General Secretariat of the Government and Ministry of Justice have the official texts of all laws available on their websites. (See the "[Understanding Public Agencies & Laws](#)" and "[Resources](#)" sections.)



**Non-governmental organizations:** NGOs in your local communities, and in particular women’s rights organizations, provide ongoing services to women survivors of violence. They are usually the first place where women seek assistance. NGOs also undertake long-term campaigns to broaden awareness of VAW and advocate for changes to eliminate it. As such, these organizations can provide important context on VAW, as well as suggest appropriate institutions and people to reach out to. (Check the lists of organizations providing direct assistance to women victims of violence in the [“Resources”](#) section.)

**Institutions:** The courts, prosecutors’ offices, local law enforcement agencies and healthcare services are also important sources of information. Other sources in Morocco include the local, regional and national committees for the support of women victims of violence (listed in the [“Understanding Public Agencies & Laws”](#) section) and the Ministry of Solidarity, Social Integration and Family.

**Specialists:** In addition to talking to the people involved in the specific case whenever possible, it is important for journalists to contact specialists to provide additional context and analysis. This may include doctors, psychologists, lawyers and social workers.<sup>44</sup>

# Understanding Victim/Survivor Behavior

*“Everybody reacts differently to violence and trauma. It is important to remember this when interviewing survivors, because no two reactions will be the same.*

*If you are looking for the ‘classic victim’ response, you will find that it does not exist, and you might miss out on the importance of a story because your interviewee does not conform to your idea of which emotions are ‘appropriate’ to the situation.”<sup>45</sup>*

## What is PTSD?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition occurring in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event. Many people who experience such events may have difficulties adjusting to life afterwards. When symptoms persist or worsen, the person may be suffering from PTSD.<sup>46</sup>

Journalists should be familiar with the concept of PTSD as women who have experienced violence could be suffering some of the symptoms of PTSD, and it may affect their behavior and the interview.

## Symptoms may include:

- Recurrent recollections of the event
- Avoidance of people and places that are reminders of the event
- Negative changes in thinking and mood and hyperarousal or reactivity<sup>47</sup>
- Inability to remember important details related to the traumatic event
- Blaming themselves for what happened to them<sup>48</sup>

# Why Is Violence Against Women an Underreported Crime?

*Statistics in Morocco show that violence against women is a significantly underreported crime. Some of the most common barriers to speaking out and reporting violence identified by victims are:*

- Inadequate information about, or confusing and inconsistent, policies, procedures and practices at public services
- Lack of financial means to pursue a legal case and/or support herself and her children
- Pessimism and skepticism about the effectiveness of justice-system interventions
- Threats to her physical safety and of retaliation made by the perpetrator against her and/or her children and family
- Having to go to court and testify about what happened – and the story being reported in the news
- Threats that everyone will find out what happened
- Threats of not being believed or of being blamed
- Threats of her family and friends ostracizing her
- Threats of being punished for illegal activities (such as sexual relations outside of marriage, drinking, drug use or sex work)

# Interviewing Survivors of VAW

Getting an interview with a woman who has experienced violence is not easy. Don't expect victims/survivors to agree to an interview right away. Connect with local NGOs supporting them. Don't ask the local authorities or officials to connect you to victims/survivors: that may put pressure on them to do the interview. Build a relationship with the survivor before doing the interview to work on gaining her trust. Offer to speak on background and off the record first if it makes her feel more comfortable.

Journalists who conduct interviews with victims/survivors need to do so with sensitivity and skill and treat the woman with dignity and respect. The guidelines in this section are meant to help you with that.

## **OBTAIN INFORMED CONSENT**

Informed consent means that the person being interviewed agrees to do the interview freely and without any pressure by anyone while fully understanding the consequences.<sup>49</sup>

Make sure the woman knows that she can refuse to do the interview. Provide her with thorough information in a language and form she can understand to ensure she knows what she is consenting to.

This involves:

- **Identifying yourself fully:** Tell the woman who you are, for whom you work, how the interview will be used and an approximate date when it will be published, including that it could be republished by other media. Make sure she understands that it will probably be shared on social media.

- **Discussing anonymity:**

The journalist should ensure the victim/survivor understands the potential consequences of publishing her name or image, which could include retaliation by the accused and his family, rejection by the community or loss of employment opportunities.

Most women have never worked with journalists and may not know that anonymity could be an option or feel confident enough to ask for it. If she does not bring it up, make sure you do.

Consider involving an NGO to ensure the victim/survivor understands her rights. If the woman requests anonymity, make sure before doing the interview that your editor and organization will agree to changing names and some details of the story.

- **If you are taking pictures or videos**, explain how and where they will be used and obtain her consent. If she agrees to the interview on the condition that her face not be shown, ensure that when you submit your story to another department – for editing or design, for example – this is clearly communicated and followed.
- **Explaining what information you want** and why it is important. You will most probably be asking her distressing questions. Make sure to take time to explain why you need to know this information – for example, so people can understand the effects of sexual assault on a person’s life.<sup>50</sup>
- **Ask how she would like to be identified** in your story. Would she prefer the word “victim” or “survivor” or something else altogether? (See the section [“The Importance of Words.”](#))

### **SAFEGUARDING THE INTERVIEWEE’S SAFETY** is of the utmost importance.

The safety of women who have been subjected to violence is often at risk. Here are some tips.

- **Jigsaw identification:** This is when the details in your story – such as location, age and family members – can be connected to deduce who the woman is even if you do not publish her name or show her face. Be careful not to include details that would make this possible.<sup>51</sup> Have someone read the story when you are done and ask them if they think it might be easy to identify the interviewee.
- **Contact details:** While it’s sometimes helpful to give the interviewee your contact information, explain that she could be at risk if your number is found with her. She could face retaliation for speaking to the media.<sup>52</sup>
- **Securing notes:** Sometimes a journalist changes the names of the person interviewed but writes the person’s real name in notes or electronic devices. This could put the interviewee in danger, since notebooks can be confiscated and computers or phones stolen. Make sure to store the information securely. For digital information, you can do so by encrypting files or using passwords.<sup>53</sup>
- **Safe space:** Conduct the interview somewhere safe and quiet where the victim/survivor feels comfortable. Avoid crowded and noisy places. One option is to conduct it at the office of the NGO supporting the woman. Offer her the option of being accompanied by a trusted support person of her choice.
- **Ask if she would prefer a female or male reporter** to conduct the interview if that is possible. Women subjected to violence may prefer to speak with a female reporter.

**LISTEN.** “The worst mistake a reporter can do is to talk too much”<sup>54</sup> Listen with attention and compassion. Don’t start with the most difficult questions. Don’t rush, and don’t interrupt to ask questions. Offer her a break if you feel she needs it. Women who have been subjected to violence are often traumatized, and telling their story may bring back memories. “Adopt an attitude of active, attentive and non-judgmental listening.”<sup>55</sup>

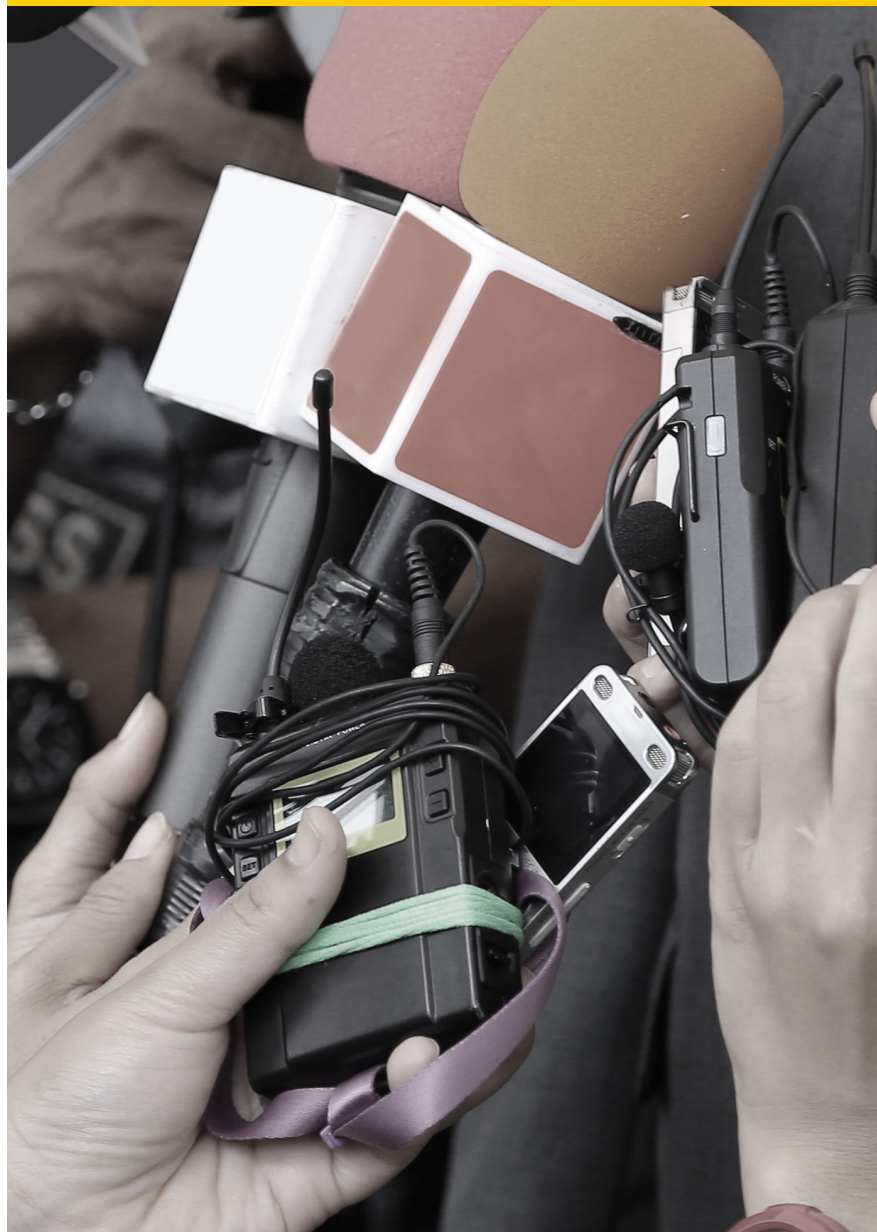
**BE EMPATHETIC.** Tell the victim/survivor that you understand how difficult this is for her.<sup>56</sup> Make sure you are not lecturing or trying to “educate” the woman on the phenomenon of violence against women – she has been living it firsthand.

**DO NOT IMPLY BLAME.** Take care not to use language that suggests to the woman that she was in any way responsible for what’s happened. “The interview must not turn into an interrogation.”<sup>57</sup> Open-ended, non-judgmental questions that give women the space to share their stories work best.<sup>58</sup>

**DON’T OFFER MONEY OR GIFTS** to convince a woman who has been subjected to violence to grant you an interview. This is a key ethical principle in journalism. It will affect the interview and could make it difficult for other journalists to get interviews. More important, doing this may result in women putting themselves in danger because they are in need of money. Similarly, don’t make promises that you’ll be able to help a woman with her case to convince her to give an interview.

**“The reporter explained how the interview will be conducted and told me I can stop whenever I wanted to. He heard my story first, before starting to record. He stopped the camera repeatedly to let me rest and repeated his questions. I didn’t feel any pressure throughout the interview.”**

*– a woman victim/survivor of violence about her experience being interviewed by the media*



# Examples of Questions to Ask Survivors in an Interview

Simple questions are best. Avoid asking long and complex questions. Don't pontificate.

1. Tell me your story.
2. How has what happened affected you?
3. Who are the people who helped you?
4. What resources/services were helpful?
5. What do you think is important for people to know?
6. What were the barriers to you coming forward?
7. What would you have wanted to have received as assistance?
8. Is there anything else you would like to say?

*Adapted from femifesto, "Use the Right Words"*





**Don't assume the victim lacks credibility if you find inconsistencies or contradictions** in her account. The woman might forget some of the difficult details. "Denial is a protection mechanism for the survivor that can go as far as amnesia." However, this respect and sensitivity towards the victim/survivor should not stop journalists from maintaining professional standards and verifying the information with other sources.<sup>59</sup>

**Avoid pressuring the victim to prioritize the issue over her own needs.** Telling the victim that she "should speak out to help other women and stop the violence," "has an obligation to break the silence and taboos," or "will feel better if she speaks out" and the like can place inappropriate pressure on her and implies judgment if she chooses not to share her story. Systemic-wide changes are the responsibility of the government, not the responsibility of an individual victim.

**End with an open question.** A good way to conclude an interview can be to ask the woman if she has anything to add. This could lead journalists to aspects previously not considered.<sup>60</sup>

**Close the interview courteously.** Take time to say goodbye. Thank her for her time. If you both have determined that it's safe, give the interviewee your contact information so she can reach you if needed, and be responsive if she calls back with questions or concerns.

**Consider providing referral information.** If you have not met the victim through an NGO, and she indicates that she would like some assistance, you can provide her with the contact information of an NGO or public service where she can seek help.

## Remote Interviews

In recent years, especially because of Covid-19, journalists have been doing more and more remote interviews. While it's understandably more convenient to do the interview this way, always opt for a face-to-face interview whenever possible. This is especially important with sensitive interviews such as those with women who have been subjected to violence.

The same guidance regarding interviews applies to remote interviews. It is essential that you obtain informed consent, which in this case will also include informing the victim/survivor if the interview is being recorded and how the recording will be used, especially if she requested anonymity.

Ensure the woman knows how to use the electronic platform and have a person to support her with technical issues if possible.

Safety remains a concern, even with remote interviews. You should educate yourself about [digital security](#) and give your interviewee guidance on secure communication and storing of information. Walk the woman through how to erase call logs and messages after the interview.

Manage your expectations. Accept that establishing rapport and making the woman feel comfortable enough to tell her story might take longer or not happen at the same level of depth as with in-person interviews.

# The Importance of Words

Language is essential in reporting and understanding VAW. “Words reflect subtle assumptions about responsibility, blame and agency as well as the very nature of the violence itself. And the very subtlety of language makes its impact on consumers insidious; intentional choices to use neutral language are both necessary and ethical in the effort to accurately communicate the nature of this violence.”<sup>61</sup>

In the end, journalists will have to tell the story in a way that their audience will understand. They might have to explain concepts and language, legal terms, and psychological issues.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, too often problematic and harmful language is used in reporting on VAW. It’s good practice for the media outlet to put thought into, discuss and agree on key terms for everyone to use when covering VAW. (This is discussed further in the section “[What Can Editors Do?](#)”) You can initiate having such guidelines at your media outlet.

Beware of Potentially Harmful Terms		
Avoid these problematic wordings	Why the wording may be harmful	Prefer these wordings instead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sexual <u>intercourse</u></li> <li>Sexual <u>relationship</u></li> </ul>	<i>Implies consent</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sexual <u>assault</u></li> <li><u>Rape</u> (if appropriate)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She <u>confesses</u> to having been <u>harassed</u>.</li> <li>She <u>admits</u> to having been <u>harassed</u>.</li> </ul>	<i>Gives the impression that the victim was in some way responsible</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She reports that she was <u>harassed</u>.</li> <li>She <u>states</u> that she was <u>harassed</u>.</li> </ul>
The <u>alleged</u> victim	<i>Seems to question the victim’s word</i>	The <u>reported</u> victim
The victim <u>did</u> the action against her will.	<i>Makes the victim/survivor the subject of the sentence as if responsible</i>	According to the police, the <u>assailant forced</u> the victim to do (the action).
<i>Above adapted from UNESCO/Anne-Marie Impe, “Reporting on Violence Against Women and Girls: A Handbook for Journalists”</i>		
<u>Alleged</u> to describe the incident of violence	<i>Reinforces the disbelief that a crime actually occurred</i>	The term “reported” is more neutral. It also indicates that a case is officially part of the justice system.
The accuser	<i>Suggests that the reported victim is harming the reported perpetrator</i>	The victim/survivor
The victim <u>claimed</u> to have been raped.	<i>Implies disbelief that the crime occurred</i>	The victim <u>reported</u> being raped.
<i>Above adapted from Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA), “Reporting on Sexual Violence”</i>		

Avoid these problematic wordings	<i>Why the wording may be harmful</i>	Prefer these wordings instead
<u>Domestic dispute</u>	<i>Frames the incident of violence as a private domestic or family problem and not a crime</i>	Domestic <u>abuse</u>
An abusive <u>relationship</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Places the blame on the relationship or dynamic rather than the abuser</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Suggests that both people are equally at fault.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Abusive partner</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Woman living with an abusive partner</u></li> </ul>
<u>Battered</u> woman	<i>Describes only physical abuse, overlooking other forms of abuse</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Woman who has experienced domestic abuse</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Survivor of domestic abuse</u></li> </ul>
<i>Above adapted from Zero Tolerance, "Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women"</i>		
<u>Historical</u> incident of sexual violence	<i>Tends to minimize the long-lasting impact of abuse</i>	State the specific date or period when the reported incident happened.
<i>Above adapted from Dart Center Style Guide</i>		
<u>Alleged</u> rapist, perpetrator	<i>Implies disbelief that a crime actually occurred</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Reported</u> rapist, perpetrator, offender</li> <li>▪ In subsequent references, you can use the person's name or "the accused." If there is a trial, use "defendant." If convicted, use "convicted."</li> <li>▪ Directly state who says he did it. For example, "Samira says Yasser raped her on July 15."</li> </ul>
<u>Defending his honor</u>	<i>Seems to justify the abuse by the perpetrator. Even if he says that he was "defending his honor" or someone else says it's why he committed the violence, you should avoid including this in your report unless absolutely necessary, such as if you are reporting on a trial and this is being used by the defense.</i>	Describe what he did.

# Questions on Terminology

## Survivor or Victim?

Survivor of violence refers to a woman who has experienced violence. Sometimes people prefer to use “survivor” instead of “victim” because it implies resilience.

On the other hand, others prefer to use the term “victim” because it recognizes the fact that women who have experienced violence are indeed victims of a crime punishable by law. In addition, the term victim recognizes that there is a perpetrator who needs to be held accountable for his acts.

Sometimes people combine the two terms into “victim/survivor.” If your report includes an interview with the woman who had been subjected to violence, ask her how she would like to be described.

## Fears or Threats?

Frequently people refer to the victims’ “fears” to explain her actions and behavior. For example: “She did not report the rape because she was afraid of her family’s reaction.” This language suggests that the problem is psychological and individual, and that interventions need to focus on the woman “overcoming” them.

The term ignores the fact that women are subjected to real threats to their safety, physical and mental integrity, freedom and basic survival – threats made by the perpetrator and his entourage, her family and even by public officials. Interventions should target these threats, not the individual woman. For this reason, the term “threats” is preferred to “fears.”

## Knowledge or Information?

Frequently people refer to the victims' "lack of knowledge" of laws and procedures as one reason for not reporting violence. This language suggests that the problem is women's "ignorance," and that interventions need to focus on "educating women." This distracts from the fact that it is the government's responsibility to provide information to women in accessible and understandable formats and languages. Interventions should target public services communications, not the women. For this reason, the term "information" is preferred to "knowledge."

## Aggressor or Victim?

When law enforcement responds to domestic violence incidents, they may not be able to tell at first glance who is the abuser and who is the victim. Abusers often tell false stories and even try to pass themselves off as victims. Law enforcement may wrongfully conclude that the violence was mutual and both parties are at fault.<sup>63</sup> Journalists likewise need to be careful not to draw such improper conclusions: Power dynamics of ongoing abuse in a relationship mean that women frequently act in self-defense.



# How Much Detail Should I Include?

Journalists often struggle with this issue. The details related to the attacker, including their actions and behavior during, before and after the incident, are almost always relevant to the story. On the other hand, details about the victim/survivor are almost always irrelevant. Information about her habits, appearance and how she dresses always runs the risk of blaming her. Details about her education and literacy level, economic situation, age, social position and family status may imply causation or lead to stereotyping.

The focus should be on the specifics of the violence, the aggressor and the response of the public services. By including details about the victim/survivor, you also run the risk of giving your audience a false sense of security. They might think they will be safe since they do not fit the description of the victim/survivor and will remain safe if they do not behave similarly.<sup>64</sup>

**Avoid including the following details related to the victim/survivor, as they can lead to victim-blaming or finding excuses for the violence:**

*Adapted from MNCASA*

- Information about her physical appearance or clothes
- Whether or not she reported immediately (or at all) to the police
- If she initially said “yes” and then said “no”
- Whether or not she fought back or called for help (A common reaction to trauma is non-resistance or silence due to frozen fear or immobility)
- Had no physical injuries (This is the case in the majority of sexual assaults)
- Was a sex worker, was drunk or using drugs
- Had a history of mental illness
- Met or talked with the offender after the assault or did not leave after the incident
- Details about time and place that may be irrelevant and imply judgment. For example, simply state the neighborhood or street the crime occurred rather than “outside of a bar known to be of ill repute.”

**Avoid including the following details about the person who committed or is suspected of committing the violence unless necessary:**

- His alcohol or substance abuse
- That he has mental health issues
- His poor childhood and difficult situation
- His economic or employment status – whether low (“The poor man is stressed from being unemployed.”) or high (“He has such a high position that it’s not possible.”)
- How much he “loved” the victim and felt jealous
- That he felt rejected because the victim turned down invitations or marriage proposals
- That he expressed remorse and regret afterwards

# Victim-Blaming Language

Source: [Chicago Taskforce](#)<sup>65</sup>



**EXAMPLE** This quotation is from a [2011 New York Times article](#): “It [has] just destroyed our community,” said Sheila Harrison, 48, a hospital worker who says she knows several of the defendants. “These boys will have to live with this the rest of their lives. ... Where was [the victim’s] mother? What was her mother thinking?” said Ms. Harrison, one of a handful of neighbors who would speak on the record. “How can you have an 11-year-old child missing down in the Quarters?”<sup>66</sup>

**PROBLEM** These quotations place all of the responsibility and blame for the victim’s rape (and potential destruction of the offenders’ reputations, which shouldn’t even be a factor) on her mother.

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## **ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE**

It’s possible to fill a story with detail and not include victim-blaming statements that harm the individual survivor and perpetuate rape culture.



# The Dangers of Mediation and Donation Appeals

## **Don't offer to mediate.**

A journalist's role is to report on events, not become part of them. In some cases in Morocco, media outlets have attempted to mediate between or reconcile victims of violence with their abusers.

Journalists and media outlets do not have the professional skills or knowledge to do so; most often this interference harms the victims by suggesting that the victim is partly responsible, promoting abuser impunity, subjecting the woman to revictimization and placing her at risk of further violence.

## **No donation appeals.**

Media outlets sometimes include appeals by victims of violence for donations or assistance, for which journalists ask the women to provide contact information publicly. This takes a charity-based approach to the issue (rather than a rights-based approach) and places the women at risk of public harassment and threats.

# Visual Content

Every story needs good images. Finding pictures for VAW stories is more challenging because of the sensitivity of the issue and victims/survivors often asking for anonymity.

## What Kind of Visual Content Should Be Avoided?

**Photos/videos of the victim/survivor, the perpetrator or their children.** Revealing the woman's identity can put her at risk. If you are granting anonymity, ensure that blurring images, scrambling voices or filming silhouette-style is foolproof. Little things like a ring or a piece of furniture can easily give away the identity of the woman.<sup>67</sup>

**Stock images of beaten and bruised women or sexualized women** give the wrong impression that domestic abuse and VAW is only physical. When young, abled women are used in such pictures, they reinforce the myth that VAW only affects certain types of women and wouldn't happen, for example, to older or disabled women.<sup>68</sup> They also portray women as being helpless. Likewise, sexualized photos of women used in sexual assault or kidnapping cases can communicate victim-blaming and "provocation" of the perpetrator.

**Sharing violent videos and images** could harm the victim/survivor. Just because footage of the abuse is available does not mean it should be published or shared. For example, if a victim/survivor of sexual assault was filmed, posting the video of the assault can shame her and put her in danger, especially if her identity becomes known.<sup>69</sup> Journalists can choose not to show the video, especially when it is graphic, and to describe it to the audience instead.

These videos/images pose a myriad of challenges. First, you have to verify their authenticity. There are numerous verification tools available. In many cases it is also difficult to get informed consent from those filmed, in which case the journalist has to assess consent and risks. The website Witness gives practical and helpful tips in their guide "Ethical Guidelines: Using Videos in Human Rights Reporting and Advocacy."<sup>70</sup>

## What Kind of Visual Content Should be Used?

Photographs of representatives of institutions in charge of the issue of violence against women should be shown in the media more often. Their increased visibility may increase their sense of responsibility for what they are (or are not) doing. Contact information for public services and centers providing assistance to victims should be included in every story about VAW.<sup>71</sup>

Statistics about violence against women may be shown as an infographic, a useful tool to present complicated procedures and percentages in a simple form. They also provide information about the social context and the underlying drivers of violence beyond the one specific incident.<sup>72</sup>

Be creative in coming up with solutions. Taking a picture of a marketplace or a public area is safer than taking a picture of the woman's street or home, which might be identifiable to people who know her or the neighborhood.<sup>73</sup>

# Reporting Ethically on Violence Against Women

Basic reporting principles underpin a journalist's code of conduct throughout assignments. These principles come into play prominently when covering VAW, as reporters may be tasked with putting the best interests of the victims first and embrace a no-harm strategy.

*Content for this section has been adapted from UNFPA's "Reporting on Gender-Based Violence in the Syria Crisis." We have substituted VAW (violence against women) for GBV (gender-based violence).*



## ACCURACY

Getting the facts right is at the core of all journalism. The language you use in presenting the facts is important. Be specific when mentioning the crime and avoid using understated or softened language. (For specific examples, refer to the section "[The Importance of Words.](#)")



## FAIRNESS

Fairness is especially important when speaking to women who have experienced violence. Reporters have a duty to protect potentially vulnerable sources. In this context, the concept of "informed consent" is particularly important. The person you interview should be made fully aware of the consequences of appearing in the media. Many VAW survivors who have spoken "on the record" later faced a range of problems resulting from being identified, including attacks and community rejection. Inform your interviewee of these potential risks.



## IMPARTIALITY

It is not the job of a reporter to judge or discriminate. It is particularly important to ensure that you do not mention details that can be interpreted as focusing blame on the victim. If you mention the clothes worn at the time of an attack, for example, or other aspects of a survivor/victim's appearance, this can be seen to imply judgment of them.



## DUTY TO INFORM

It is important to distinguish between what is “in the public interest” and what is “of interest to the public.” Some stories feature high-profile figures and contain personal details. This tends to treat the subject in a sensationalist way to create a buzz with no useful information for VAW survivors or facts for the public.



## RESPECTING PRIVACY

Ethical journalism means respecting the privacy of both VAW survivors and their families. Be aware of “jigsaw identification” when granting anonymity.



## PROTECTING SOURCES

Journalists protect their sources. This is particularly important when it comes to VAW as communities have been known to shun those who have spoken openly about VAW. In some cases, so-called “honor crimes” have been carried out in retribution for speaking out. Journalists should also extend this protection to people who help with the story, such as fixers, translators, drivers and interviewees.



## DO NO HARM

As a general rule, journalists should be guided by the principle of “Do No Harm” when reporting on VAW. This includes showing sensitivity and respect for privacy to women who have experienced trauma, while balancing the public’s right to information. Keep in mind that interviewees may not have had prior experience in dealing with the media.

# 100

# tips

**for Reporters  
Working on VAW  
Stories**

1

**Don't do reports about VAW only when violence has been committed.**

Are there circumstances that foster harassment, such as unfair gender policies in companies and organizations, inadequate conditions in workshops, public spaces and public transport? Investigate them.<sup>74</sup>

2

**Provide information about the social context or the underlying drivers of violence.** What does this individual case reveal about the general culture, the exploitation and objectification of women?<sup>75</sup>

3

**Do reports about other forms of violence against women,** not just physical violence, sexual assaults or kidnappings.

4

**Follow up on the case until the end.** Report on all stages. Do stories about the impact this violence has on women and society as a whole.

5

**Use precise language.** "Rape or assault is not 'sex.' A pattern of abuse is not an 'affair'...trafficking in women is not to be confused with prostitution [sex work]."<sup>76</sup>

6

**Include contact information for services** at the end of every story for victims of VAW who would like to seek help. For example, add: "Are you or someone you know experiencing some form of violence? You can reach out for help to (insert a website and/or phone number)."

7

**Include a link to the original reports** issued by the government or an NGO, or if it's not available, provide information on where to find it or how to contact the appropriate service.

8

**Investigate institutional responses to violence against women.** "Are they appropriate? Do victims have adequate protection? How are they treated in police stations when they report a crime? Are police officers trained to understand the multiple forms of abuse? Do they respond in a timely and appropriate manner? Are survivor support services adequately resourced?"<sup>77</sup>

9

**Don't use generic images** depicting blood, bruises or brutality.<sup>78</sup>

10

**Practice solutions journalism.** Report on programs and initiatives to prevent or address different forms of VAW.<sup>79</sup> Be wary of programs that place pressure and responsibility on individual women by focusing on "self-defense classes" or ways women can "protect themselves" from violence.

# 3

## **WHAT CAN EDITORS DO?**

- The Key Role of Editors
- Considerations for Editors

# WHAT CAN EDITORS DO ?

## The Key Role of Editors

There are many individuals involved in creating a story. Even if a journalist writes an article using language that is accurate and includes context, they may not have the last say in every detail of the final production. Social media managers make decisions on what captions to post. Photojournalists capture the images that accompany a story.<sup>80</sup>

Overall, editors make the final decisions on what gets published and aired and its final format. They decide on the headlines and lead-ins, the size and position of the story, and placement of on-air segments. Most important, editors are instrumental in choosing how VAW is approached in their outlets.

Editorial policy influences the way gender roles are presented and can reinforce stereotypes. For example, using a stereotypical portrayal of women as a “weaker sex” and men as “macho protectors” reflects the very social values that erroneously define domestic violence as a common part of marriage.<sup>81</sup>

On the other end of the spectrum, adopting gender-sensitive editorial policy contributes to raising awareness and educating the public that violence against women needs to be disclosed and eliminated.<sup>82</sup>

Editors are instrumental in choosing the right approach to VAW and in portraying it as a social problem rather than a sensationalistic horror story. Editors also need to support journalists who are working on VAW stories, especially when problems arise as they cover such a sensitive and complex topic.



**“Time and resources are essential,”**  
*said a reporter and columnist for a leading Moroccan publication.*  
**“Without moral and professional support, a journalist will be led to abandon the cause.”**





# Considerations for Editors

*Reporters need editors “to step in and assist in resolving the inevitable problems such as being refused access to places or institutions [and] sources retracting their statements at the last minute,” said a journalist in Morocco. “The managers – editor-in-chief, publisher, director – must listen to the teams and find solutions.”*

- **Approach the topic of violence against women comprehensively.** When reporting on specific cases of violence, have your reporters follow the event from beginning to end, including, when applicable, the legal penalty imposed on the perpetrator.

Assign stories not only on specific cases, but also on the phenomenon of VAW. Encourage and assign journalists to pursue in-depth reports on, for example, the work done by institutions and NGOs. In this way, VAW is perceived as an issue worthy of analysis and investigative reporting and presented as a community issue, rather than as a one-off individual domestic problem.

- **Don’t use sensationalistic headlines and narratives.** Violence against women should not be used to boost circulation or ratings. Headlines are especially important, as they are often the most prominent feature of a story.



**“Young man kills mistress for refusing to marry him.”**

*This was the headline in one of the newspapers. The victim is referred to as “mistress,” signaling that there was a sexual relationship outside of marriage and leading to victim-blaming. The headline also suggests that the reason for the killing was her refusal to marry the killer.*

- **Consider content placement.** Where stories appear in the media relates directly to conventional expectations. As such, content about violence against women often appears in the crime section of newspapers or gets buried before the broadcast end credits or at the bottom of the organization’s website. VAW is an important societal problem. Place stories about VAW on the front page; dedicate a whole page to different reports related to the topic; include it as one of the first segments in a broadcast.
- **Support content specialization.** Assign the topic of violence against women to journalists who are knowledgeable or experienced in reporting on it, and to women reporters, whenever possible, especially if it involves interviewing the survivor.

Specialization enables journalists to develop contacts with their sources and build mutual trust with local service providers, NGOs and public institutions. From this, they can readily obtain reliable information, provide better coverage and follow up on stories with increased efficiency. Over time, journalists become more knowledgeable about the issues and know how to approach and interview survivors of violence.

- **Provide training opportunities.** It is important for members of your media outlet to be well versed on responsible reporting practices. You may wish to **share this guide or others with your co-workers** or **provide staff training** on the topic of reporting on VAW. Refer them to peers who have experience reporting on the topic. Perhaps start with your editorial staff and those who have approval on what is aired or published as the first priority for this type of training.
- **Remind reporters to protect a woman’s privacy.** A media outlet’s philosophy of respect for the individuals covered in their reporting is a tone set by the leadership within those outlets.



“The editors and [media managers] must orient [their] reporters to methods of . . . protecting personal data, verification of information and the individual’s right to their image,” said a Moroccan TV host and editor in charge of talk shows. “It is their responsibility to explain good practices on this subject to the [reporting] teams and encourage adopting them.”

- **Create a style guide to help reporters use appropriate terms.** Editors should ensure that their outlets have a style guide with a glossary of terms to use and terms to avoid when covering VAW. This will guide reporters on appropriate vocabulary to use to describe sensitive topics. Use of style guides may be incorporated in staff trainings on the topic.
- **Monitor online comments.** In today’s online media environment, many outlets allow – and often invite – readers’ comments on news stories. Many times, these comments are not reviewed. If your media allows comments, consider adopting a policy for reviewing them and procedures for removing insensitive and inappropriate material.

*In part, the above content was adapted from UN Women’s [“Media Coverage of Gender-Based Violence Handbook”](#) and from [“Guidelines on Media Reporting on Violence against Women”](#) by Journalists against Violence against Women, 2019 and 2021 editions. For the full text, please consult these sources.*

### At a Glance

- Report on the incident from beginning to end.
- Don’t use sensationalistic headlines.
- Don’t bury VAW stories where they won’t be noticed.
- Encourage reporters to become specialized.
- Make protecting privacy a priority.
- Provide reporters with training.
- Create a style guide.
- Monitor online comments.

# 4

## **UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC AGENCIES AND LAWS**

- Responding to VAW: The Role of Public Agencies
- Understanding the Chain of Services in Morocco
- Good Practices in Public Services' Response to VAW
- The Laws: International Human Rights Standards on VAW
- The Laws: Moroccan Legal Framework on VAW

# UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC AGENCIES AND LAWS

A journalist reporting on VAW should have an understanding of the processes by which public agencies respond to VAW and the chain of services available to victims, as well as a good working knowledge of the laws that cover VAW. This should not be a deterrent to taking on VAW stories. This guide summarizes and simplifies the processes in the following tables. The [Resources](#) section has links to the laws and contact information for the agencies involved.

## Responding to VAW: The Role of Public Agencies

Journalists armed with an understanding of the various roles that public agencies play in the system are better able to sharpen their interviewing techniques with agency personnel and obtain information more efficiently. In addition, if a journalist better understands what service providers are entrusted to do under formal procedures or should be doing under good practices standards, then they can better report on the positive or negative impact on the victim/survivor as a result of the services or lack thereof.



SERVICE PROVIDER	ROLE
<p><b>Social workers</b> in law enforcement, public hospitals and courts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide information and counseling</li> <li>▪ Coordinate with and facilitate access to public services for the victims</li> <li>▪ Accompany victims in procedures and follow up on the case</li> </ul>
<p><b>Law enforcement</b> (police or gendarmes)</p>	<p><i>Criminal cases</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Collect preliminary information from the victim and draft a written complaint</li> <li>▪ Accompany the victim to public health services</li> <li>▪ Undertake preliminary intervention with the suspect and conduct an investigation per the instructions of the public prosecutor</li> <li>▪ Coordinate with local women's groups for shelter for the victim</li> <li>▪ Provide protection for the victim as ordered by the prosecutor or judge</li> </ul> <p><i>Family code cases</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Accompany the woman to return to her home upon instructions from the public prosecutor</li> </ul>
<p><b>Hospital medical personnel</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct medical examinations and provide treatment</li> <li>▪ Issue medico-legal certificates and reports</li> </ul>
<p><b>Office of the Prosecutor</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Issue instructions to law enforcement</li> <li>▪ Per the results of the preliminary investigation, close the file, conduct further investigation, or prosecute the case</li> </ul>

# Understanding the Chain of Services in Morocco

Women victims of violence face numerous obstacles when navigating public services. Understanding these procedures can help journalists better understand their experiences and assess the system's response.

## 1. Medical Certificate.

In Morocco, the designated doctor in charge of the violence against women unit in the designated hospital must issue a medical certificate detailing the injuries and estimating the period of incapacity resulting from the violence.

- Women frequently go to a VAW unit at a law enforcement station or court first, only to be told to go to the hospital VAW unit to get the required certificate and then return.

## 2. Written Complaint.

A written complaint must be attached to the medical certificate.

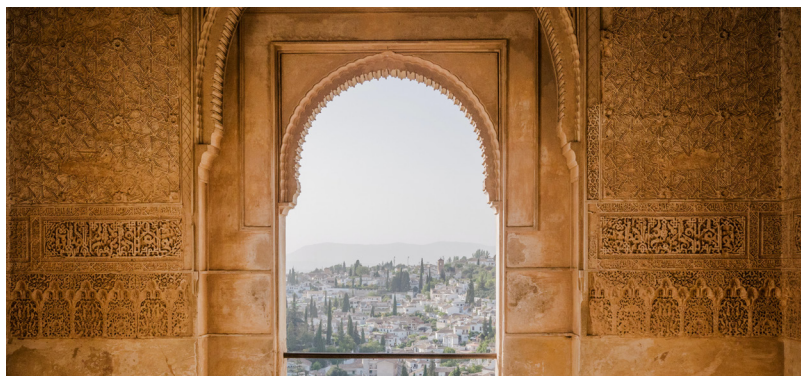
Women often draft the complaint themselves, frequently seeking assistance from either a public scribe (for a fee) or a local NGO.

- As one option, women may file a complaint with the prosecutor at the VAW unit at the court. In this case, the prosecutor refers the complaint by mail or other administrative means to the appropriate law enforcement agency for investigation. In practice, women's rights associations report that women often hand-deliver the complaint from the court to the law enforcement themselves to speed up the process.

- As a second option, women may file a complaint directly with the local law enforcement (police or gendarmes), which according to official procedures should take the woman's statement and produce a written report, interview the alleged perpetrator to take his statement and produce a written report, and then send the file to the prosecutor for further action.

In reality, law enforcement often hesitates to accept complaints without instructions from the prosecutor, according to women's rights organizations. For this reason, the preference among most women and the NGOs supporting them is to file a complaint directly with the prosecutor, who then orders law enforcement to investigate.

- 3.** If the case is prosecuted, the case is then referred to the appropriate criminal chamber (misdemeanor or criminal).



# Good Practices in Public Services' Response to VAW

*Adapted from a training session by Helen Rubenstein of Global Rights for Women<sup>83</sup>*

## How Journalists Can Assess Public Services Response in VAW Cases

Public services in law enforcement, health care and the justice system must meet “due diligence” obligations when responding to violence against women. To assess the adequacy of public services, journalists may find it helpful to keep the following questions in mind:

### **What should be the main goals of public services' interventions in VAW cases?**

- Stop the violence and prevent any future violence
  - not repair the relationship between the parties
- Hold perpetrators accountable for their actions
- Affirm women's human rights to security and equality



## What specific obligations and good practices are common to all public services – law enforcement, health care and the courts?

### All public services must:

<p>Take steps to <b>stop</b> the violence</p> <p><b>Protect</b> victims from any future violence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Determine the gravity of the situation and continually assess the risk of repeated violence</li> <li>▪ Ensure coordinated security and support</li> <li>▪ Prevent contact between victims and offenders at hospitals, courts and law enforcement offices</li> <li>▪ Ensure that women are free from the risk of intimidation, retaliation and re-victimization</li> <li>▪ Avoid suggesting reconciliation or mediation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Respond</b> thoroughly and without delay</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide services to victims even if they are unwilling to file or participate in a criminal complaint</li> <li>▪ Provide victims with adequate and timely information about their rights, support services, legal assistance, and the steps in the medical and legal process, in a language and a form they understand</li> </ul>
<p>Provide ongoing <b>updates</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Update women on the follow-up to their complaint, the charges brought, the general progress of the investigation or procedure, their role in it and any decisions made</li> <li>▪ Communicate and coordinate with other public officials and agencies</li> </ul>
<p>Ensure that victims have access to <b>services</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Link her with health services, legal and psychological counseling, financial assistance, safe housing, education, training and job search assistance</li> <li>▪ Ensure facilities are accessible, comfortable, private and convenient in location and times</li> <li>▪ Ensure professionals of the same gender as the victim are available if the victim prefers</li> <li>▪ Provide accurate contact information for the appropriate public official for follow-up</li> </ul>
<p>Favor letting the victim stay in <b>their house</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Give preference to the perpetrator leaving</li> <li>▪ Do not force the victim to go to a shelter unless necessary to ensure her safety</li> </ul>
<p>Avoid <b>blaming</b> the victim</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do not tell her that she should have acted differently</li> <li>▪ Do not suggest that she is responsible for the violence</li> </ul>

*Adapted from Rubenstein, "Best Practices in the State Response to Violence Against Women"*

## What obligations and good practices are specific to certain sectors?

<b>Health care services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Free services, examinations, treatment and certificates</li> <li>▪ Confidential information and records</li> <li>▪ Comprehensive information about examinations and treatments</li> <li>▪ Consent obtained from the victim for examinations and treatments</li> <li>▪ A detailed report that includes both physical and psychological harm, the circumstances surrounding the injuries, and the victim's attitude, behavior and statements</li> </ul>
<b>Law enforcement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interview the woman and perpetrator separately</li> <li>▪ Interview children, neighbors and other witnesses</li> <li>▪ Note if there have been previous incidents of violence</li> <li>▪ Take pictures at the scene and collect physical evidence</li> <li>▪ Identify who is the aggressor and who acted in self-defense</li> <li>▪ Write a detailed report that includes a description of the crime scene, the victim's attitude and behavior, the perpetrator's attitude and behavior, and a description of any injuries</li> <li>▪ Provide the written report to the prosecutor</li> <li>▪ Investigate even without the cooperation of the victim</li> </ul>
<b>Office of the public prosecutor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prepare an evidence-based prosecution that includes the police report, the medical report, follow-up with the victim, previous reports of violence, witness statements, statements made to others, and photographs of injuries</li> <li>▪ Issue an order of protection and take all other protective measures provided for in the law (See the section "<a href="#">Moroccan Legal Framework on VAW</a>" for a detailed list of these).</li> <li>▪ Try to avoid the victim's withdrawal by meeting with her early in the process, keeping in touch and keeping her informed of her case</li> <li>▪ If the victim withdraws her complaint, investigate the reasons, especially to detect threats or pressure from the perpetrator</li> <li>▪ Carry out an investigation even without the cooperation of the victim</li> </ul>

*Adapted from Rubenstein, "Best Practices in the State Response to Violence Against Women"*

For checklists and more detailed protocols to assess public services' responses to VAW, see the "[Resources](#)" section or visit <https://mrawomen.ma/language/fr/nos-ressources/guides-pratiques-pour-ong-activistes-et-avocats>.)

# THE LAWS

## International Human Rights Standards on VAW

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) defines discrimination against women as: “Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, and cultural or any other field irrespective of their marital status.”

### How is violence against women defined in international human rights law?

<p><a href="#">The CEDAW Committee’s General Recommendation No. 19</a> defines VAW as:</p>	<p>A form of <b>discrimination</b> directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Such violence seriously inhibits women from enjoying rights and freedoms on the same basis as men.</li> </ul>
<p><a href="#">The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women</a> (DEVAW) defines VAW as:</p>	<p>Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, <b>physical, sexual or psychological</b> harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Such violence violates women's rights and fundamental freedoms.</li> </ul>
<p><a href="#">The UN Committee Against Torture’s General Comment No. 2</a> defines VAW as:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A form of <b>torture</b> based on gender prohibited by international human rights law</li> </ul>

### What are governments’ obligations under international human rights law related to violence against women?

<p><a href="#">CEDAW Committee General Recommendation 35</a> says governments have an obligation to use “due diligence” to combat VAW</p>	<p>Specifically to: Take positive measures to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Prevent</b> violence against women</li> <li><b>Protect</b> women from violence</li> <li><b>Prosecute</b> the perpetrators of violence</li> <li><b>Punish</b> the perpetrators of violence</li> <li><b>Provide</b> remedies and reparations for women victims of violence</li> </ul>
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# Moroccan Legal Framework on VAW

## What does the Moroccan Constitution say about violence against women?

According to Article 22 ([English](#); [French](#); [Arabic](#)) of the Constitution, “the physical or moral integrity of anyone may not be harmed, in any way, under any circumstance, and by any party, private or public. No one shall inflict on another, under any pretext whatsoever, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatments or infringements of human dignity.”

How does Moroccan law define VAW and its forms?	
<b>Violence against women</b>	Any material or moral act or omission thereof based on gender discrimination that results in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm to a woman
<b>Physical violence</b>	Any act or omission thereof that affects or may affect the physical safety of a woman regardless of the aggressor, aggressor’s means or place of perpetration
<b>Sexual violence</b>	Any statement, act or exploitation that may affect the inviolability of the woman’s body whether such statement, act or exploitation is for sexual or business purposes, and regardless of the means thereto
<b>Psychological violence</b>	Any verbal assault, coercion, threat, negligence or deprivation in the intent (i) to affect the dignity, liberty or serenity of a woman; or (ii) to threaten or intimidate her
<b>Economic violence</b>	Any act or omission thereof, regardless of its financial or economic nature that causes or may cause prejudice to the economic or social rights of a woman
As defined in Law 13-103 on the Elimination of Violence against Women, Article 1 <a href="#">English</a> ; <a href="#">French</a> ; <a href="#">Arabic</a>	

## What acts of violence within the family are illegal under Moroccan law?

Declared a crime under Moroccan law:	Under Penal Code, article
For a husband to intentionally <b>abandon his pregnant wife</b> for more than two months with no good reason	479
<b>Non-payment of court-ordered financial support</b> to a spouse	480
<b>Expulsion from the marital home or refusal to permit the expelled spouse to return home</b>	480-1
<b>Marriage coerced by threats or violence</b> The sentence is doubled if perpetrated against a woman because of her gender.	503-2-1
<b>Willful squandering of property</b> by a spouse <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to inflict harm on the other or the children</li> <li>▪ or to circumvent Family Code provisions, especially relating to financial support, housing, rights from a divorce, or property division</li> </ul>	526-1
Not a crime under Moroccan law:	Under Penal Code, article
<b>Theft between spouses</b> only gives rise to civil remedies.	534
<i>The Penal Code is available in <a href="#">French</a> and <a href="#">Arabic</a>.</i>	

## What do Moroccan laws say about sexual violence?

What do Moroccan laws say about sexual violence?		Under Penal Code, article
<b>Public indecency/ public exposure</b>	Are crimes	483
<b>Rape</b>	▪ Defined as “the act whereby a man has sexual relations with a woman against her will”	486
	▪ Sentence is increased if the victim was pregnant or a virgin	486, 488
<b>Marital rape</b>	Not explicitly criminalized in the Penal Code	None
<b>Honor or passion defense</b>	Homicide and assault and battery are excused when committed by a spouse surprising the other in an adulterous act or by the “head of the household” discovering “illicit carnal trade” in his house	418, 420

## What do Moroccan laws say about sexual harassment, technology-facilitated violence and defamation?

The crime of	is defined as	Under Penal Code, article
<b>Sexual harassment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ when someone abuses their authority to harass another by using orders, threats, coercion or any other means with the aim of obtaining favors of a sexual nature or</li> <li>▪ “persistent” harassment in public or other spaces by words, acts or signals of a sexual nature for sexual purposes</li> </ul>	503-1, 503-1-1
<b>Technology-facilitated violence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “written letters, phone or electronic messages, records or images of sexual nature for sexual purposes” or</li> <li>▪ when someone intentionally captures, records, broadcasts or disseminates someone’s private or confidential information or statements or pictures while in a private place without their prior consent, or broadcasts or disseminates false allegations or statements aiming thereby to harm someone’s private life or reputation</li> </ul>	503-1-1, 447-1, 447-2
<b>Gender-based vituperation and defamation against a woman</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vituperation is “any outrageous expression, term of contempt or invective which does not contain the imputation of any fact.”</li> <li>▪ Defamation is “any allegation or imputation of a fact which undermines the honor or the consideration of the person or of the body to which the fact is imputed.”</li> </ul>	442, 443, 444-1, 444-2

## What circumstances lead to higher penalties for crimes against women in Morocco?

For the crimes	The sentence is increased	Under Penal Code, article
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Intentional assault and battery resulting in no more than 20 days incapacity</li> <li>▪ Intentional assault and battery resulting in more than 20 days of incapacity or permanent mutilation or disability</li> <li>▪ Involuntary homicide</li> </ul>	<p>If committed against:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ any woman because of her gender</li> <li>▪ any pregnant woman if her pregnancy is evident or known to the perpetrator</li> <li>▪ any woman with a disability or known to have mental incapacity</li> <li>▪ any ascendant, custodian, spouse, fiancé</li> <li>▪ any person under the guardianship or authority over the perpetrator</li> <li>▪ a divorced spouse</li> <li>▪ in the presence of one of the children or one of the parents</li> </ul>	400-404
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Willfully refraining from providing assistance to a person in danger</li> <li>▪ Facilitating suicide</li> <li>▪ Threats to commit a crime against persons or property</li> <li>▪ Kidnapping, detention or sequestration</li> </ul>	<p>If committed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a spouse, fiancé or divorcé</li> <li>▪ an ascendant, descendent, sibling or custodian</li> <li>▪ a tutor</li> </ul> <p>Or against</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a minor</li> <li>▪ a person with disabilities</li> </ul>	431, 407, 429-1, 436-1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sexual harassment</li> <li>▪ Technology-facilitated violence</li> </ul>	<p>If committed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a work colleague</li> <li>▪ someone in charge of order or security of public places</li> <li>▪ A spouse or ex-spouse, or a fiancé</li> <li>▪ an ascendant or someone who has authority over the victim</li> </ul> <p>Or against:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a woman because of her gender</li> <li>▪ a minor</li> </ul>	447-3, 503-1-1, 503-1-2

## What rights do women victims of violence have under Moroccan law?

<i>Women have the right to</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>In accordance with</i>
<b>Information</b>	Crime victims must be informed of their rights to file a civil action and all other legal rights.	This must be indicated in the written report (procès-verbal) by the judicial police or the prosecutor.	Code of Penal Procedure Article 82-4
<b>Protection</b>	The prosecutor or the investigating judge may take <b>protective measures</b> during the preliminary investigation phase after filing of a criminal complaint to protect the victim, their family or their property.	<p>These may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ providing the victim with a phone number to call at any time to request protection</li> <li>▪ personal protection by law enforcement</li> <li>▪ a change of residence</li> <li>▪ non-divulgence of information about their identity</li> <li>▪ specialist medical examinations and treatment</li> <li>▪ any other measure considered to be an effective guarantee of protection</li> </ul>	Code of Penal Procedure Article 82-5, 82-5-2  Penal Code articles 61, 88-1, 88-3, 323-1
	In addition, the following measures shall be immediately implemented in cases of violence against women:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ returning the child to the parent who has custody</li> <li>▪ warning the perpetrator to not commit violence and obtaining his pledge to refrain from such violence</li> <li>▪ informing the perpetrator that he cannot dispose of common property</li> <li>▪ referring the victim to hospital centers for treatment</li> <li>▪ placing the woman if she wishes in a residential shelter</li> </ul>	



## What rights do women victims of violence have under Moroccan law?

<i>Women have the right to</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>In accordance with</i>
	<p><b><i>Personal protective measures</i></b></p>	<p>May include prohibiting the convict from communicating with or approaching the victim and loss of legal custody of children</p>	<p>Code of Penal Procedure Article 82-5, 82-5-2</p> <p>Penal Code articles 61, 88-1, 88-3, 323-1</p>
	<p><b><i>Protection orders</i></b> may be issued in cases of a conviction or if a prosecution has been initiated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prohibiting perpetrators of harassment, assault, sexual abuse or violence against women from contacting, approaching or communicating with the victim</li> <li>▪ Violation of a protection order is a crime</li> </ul>	
<b>Closed hearings</b>	In cases of violence or sexual violence against a woman	Upon her request	Code of Penal Procedure Article 302

## What do Moroccan laws say about the role of other service providers?

Type of services	Role	According to
<b>Medical professionals</b> summoned by the court	are obligated to give their testimony in cases of violence by one spouse against the other or against a woman	Penal Code Article 446
<b>Associations</b> working on VAW	may be a party to a civil action for remedies for injuries caused, upon the written permission of the victim	Code of Penal Procedure Article 7
<b>Units for support of women victims of violence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ provide services such as reception, listening, support, orientation and accompaniment</li> <li>▪ may be based within courts of first instance and appellate courts; central and decentralized services in charge of justice, health, youth and women; the General Directorate of National Security; and the High Command of the Royal Gendarmerie</li> </ul>	Law 103-13 on the Elimination of Violence against Women
<b>National committee for the support of women victims of violence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ensures coordination and communication</li> <li>▪ provides feedback on regional and local action plans</li> <li>▪ monitors work of and reviews reports from the regional and local committees</li> <li>▪ helps establish mechanisms to improve the management of the units and the committees</li> </ul>	Law 103-13 on the Elimination of Violence against Women
<b>Regional and local committees for the support of women victims of violence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ established at the level of each appellate court and first instance court judicial district</li> <li>▪ prepare regional and local action plans</li> <li>▪ ensure communication and coordination at the regional or local level</li> </ul>	Law 103-13 on the Elimination of Violence against Women

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**RESOURCES**

# RESOURCES IN ENGLISH

These resources include a list of organizations, websites, publications, media outlets and other sources of information. We have organized them by their languages of origin and included hyperlinks wherever possible for digital users. Many of these resources provided inspiration for our guide and helped shaped its content. We hope our users will find them useful in learning more about responsible reporting on violence against women.

## **NGO Contact Lists**

Mobilising for Rights Associates (MRA): [List of Associations \(NGOs\) Contacts](#) (French)

MRA: [Coronavirus resources for women victims of violence](#) (French and Arabic)

## **Resources in English**

### ***International Resources***

Council of Europe: [Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (Istanbul Convention)

Every Woman Treaty: [Every Woman Global Treaty to End Violence Against Women](#)

UN Women: [Ending violence against women](#)

World Health Organization (WHO): [Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018](#)

WHO: [Global Database on the Prevalence of Violence Against Women](#)

Netflix: [Unbelievable](#) (television series about how victim/survivors are often doubted)



## ***Journalism Resources***

Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma: [The Dart Center Style Guide for Trauma-Informed Journalism](#)

The Dart Centre Europe: [Reporting on Sexual Violence: A Dart Centre Europe Tip Sheet](#)

femifesto + collaborators: Use the Right Words: Media Reporting on Sexual Violence in Canada

Journalists against Violence against Women: [Guidelines on Media Reporting on Violence against Women](#)

Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault:  
[Reporting on Sexual Violence: A Guide for Journalists](#)

The New York Times: [How We Describe Sexual Assault: Times Journalists and Lawyers Respond](#)

Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic violence: [Telling the Full Story: An Online Guide for Journalists Covering Domestic Violence](#)

UNICEF: [Responsible representation and reporting of violence against women and violence against children: Guidelines for media professionals](#)

UN Women: [Media Coverage of Gender-Based Violence Handbook](#)

Witness: [Using Videos in Human Rights Reporting and Advocacy](#)

Zero Tolerance: [Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women](#)

## ***Morocco Resources***

Government of Morocco: [Law 103-13 on the Elimination of Violence against Women](#) (English translation)

Government of Morocco: [Law 27-14 on combating trafficking in persons](#) (English translation)

International Commission of Jurists: [Obstacles to Women's and Girls' Access to Justice for Gender-based Violence in Morocco](#)

## مراجع إعلامية

- [القانون رقم 13.88 المتعلق بالصحافة والنشر](#)
- [النقابة الوطنية للصحافة المغربية: الميثاق الوطني لأخلاقيات الصحافة](#)
- [النقابة الوطنية للصحافة المغربية: ملخص تكميلي لتقرير حول واقع الصحافة بالمغرب مارس 2019/ مارس 2021](#)
- [الهيئة العليا للاتصال السمعي البصري: نصوص مرجعية قرارات فردية، مساطر وغيرها](#)
- [لجنة المناصفة والتنوع بالقناة الثانية: ميثاق القناة الثانية لتحسين صورة المرأة](#)
- [لجنة المناصفة والتنوع بالقناة الثانية: الدليل العملي لمكافحة التمييز في وسائل الإعلام](#)

## مراجع دولية

- منظمة الصحة العالمية: [تقديرات معدلات انتشار العنف ضد المرأة، 2018](#)
- لجنة القضاء على جميع أشكال التمييز ضد النساء العنف الجنساني ضد المرأة: [التوصية العامة رقم 19](#)
- لجنة القضاء على جميع أشكال التمييز ضد النساء العنف الجنساني ضد المرأة: [التوصية العامة رقم 35 الصادرة تحديثًا للتوصية العامة رقم 19](#)
- مجلس أوروبا: [اتفاقية مجلس أوروبا للوقاية من العنف ضد النساء والعنف المنزلي ومكافحتها](#) (إسطنبول 2011)
- منظمة شركاء للتعبئة حول الحقوق (امرأة): [المبادئ الأساسية والممارسات الفضلى لكيفية تعامل مختلف السلطات مع العنف الممارس ضد النساء](#)
- منظمة شركاء للتعبئة حول الحقوق (امرأة): [بطاقة الرصد والتتبع لكيفية تعامل مختلف السلطات مع العنف الممارس ضد النساء: الشرطة](#)
- منظمة شركاء للتعبئة حول الحقوق (امرأة): [بطاقة الرصد والتتبع لكيفية تعامل مختلف السلطات مع العنف الممارس ضد النساء: النيابة العامة](#)
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- اللجنة الدولية للحقوقيين: [معيقات ولوج النساء والفتيات إلى العدالة في قضايا العنف المبني على النوع الاجتماعي في المغرب](#)
- منظمة ويتنس هي منظمة دولية تعمل على تدريب ودعم الناس لاستخدام الفيديو في الكفاح من أجل حقوق الإنسان: [موارد ويتنس](#)

## مراجع مغربية

- [قانون محاربة العنف ضد النساء](#)
- [القانون الجنائي المغربي تحيين 2021](#)
- [قانون المسطرة الجنائية تحيين 2019](#)
- [قانون مكافحة الإتجار بالبشر](#)
- [المنذوبية السامية للتخطيط: مجموعة دراسات وأرقام حول المرأة المغربية في أرقام بالفرنسية والعربية](#)
- رأي المجلس الاقتصادي والاجتماعي والبيئي: [القضاء على العنف ضد الفتيات والنساء: استعجال وطني](#)
- رئاسة النيابة العامة: [تقارير، إحصائيات حول السياسة الجنائية بالمغرب](#)
- وزارة التضامن والإدماج الاجتماعي والأسرة: [وثائق، دراسات، تقارير وإحصائيات حول العنف ضد النساء بالمغرب](#)
- وزارة العدل: [نصوص قانونية، اجتهادات قضائية، تقارير، آراء وإحصائيات](#)
- الأمانة العامة للحكومة: [نصوص قانونية، الجريدة الرسمية، نشرة الاتفاقيات الدولية وغيرها من الوثائق حول العنف ضد النساء](#)
- البرلمان المغربي: [مشاريع ومقترحات القوانين](#)

## **Ressources Internationales**

Organisation Mondiale de la Santé : [Violence à l'égard des femmes, estimations pour 2018](#)

ONU Femmes : [Mettre fin à la violence à l'égard des femmes](#)

Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies aux droits de l'homme : [Rapporteuse spéciale sur la violence contre les femmes, ses causes et ses conséquences](#)

Conseil de l'Europe (COE) : [Convention du Conseil de l'Europe sur la prévention et la lutte contre la violence à l'égard des femmes et la violence domestique](#) (Convention d'Istanbul)

Comité pour l'élimination de la discrimination à l'égard des femmes (CEDAW) : [Recommandation générale n° 19](#)

CEDAW : [Recommandation générale n° 35](#)

Assemblée générale des Nations Unies : [Déclaration sur l'élimination de la violence à l'égard des femmes](#)

## **Ressources Journalistiques**

Haute Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle du Maroc (HACA) : [Contribution à la lutte contre les stéréotypes fondés sur le genre et à la promotion de la culture de l'égalité hommes-femmes à travers les médias audiovisuels](#)

HACA : [Les stéréotypes fondés sur le genre à travers les spots publicitaires : Analyse de 138 spots télévisuels](#)

Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication du Maroc : [Guide pour lutter contre les stéréotypes sexistes dans les médias au Maroc](#)

Comité Parité et Diversité 2M : [Charte 2M pour la valorisation de l'image de la femme](#)

Comité Parité et Diversité 2M : [Manuel pratique de lutte contre la discrimination dans les médias](#)

COE : [Combattre les stéréotypes de genre et le sexisme dans les médias](#)

COE : [Encourager la participation du secteur privé et des médias à la prévention de la violence à l'égard des femmes et de la violence domestique](#)

## **Ressources Maroc**

Haut-Commissariat au Plan du Maroc : [Publications HCP : Violence à l'égard des femmes](#)

Conseil Economique Social et Environnemental du Maroc : [Avis: Éliminer la violence à l'égard des filles et des femmes : Une urgence nationale](#)

Secrétariat Général du Gouvernement : [Textes juridiques, journal officiel, bulletin des accords internationaux et autres documents sur la violence à l'égard des femmes](#)

Ministère de la Solidarité, de l'Insertion Sociale et de la Famille :

[Publications traitant de la question féminine](#)

[Chambre des représentants](#)

[Portail Juridique du Ministère de la Justice](#)

[Loi 103-13 relative à la lutte contre les violences faites aux femmes](#)

[Loi 27-14 relative à la lutte contre la traite des êtres humains](#)

[Code pénal marocain](#)

[Code de la Famille marocain](#)

L'Association Marocaine de lutte contre la Violence à l'Égard des Femmes : [Guide : Les cellules de prise en charge soutien aux femmes et enfants victimes de violences](#) (en arabe et français)

## **Mobilising for Rights Associates (MRA) Resources on VAW**

Online Quiz

- In English: [Myth or Fact? Sexual Violence against Women in Morocco](#)
- En français : [Mythe ou Fait ? Violences Sexuelles Faites aux Femmes au Maroc](#)
- بالعربية: [العنف الجنسي ضد النساء في المغرب، خرافة أم حقيقة؟](#)

Videos about VAW

“Tea and Consent”

- [Animated version with Arabic narration and subtitles in English and Arabic.](#)
- [Live-action version in Moroccan Arabic](#)
- Discussion sheets: [In English](#) ; [بالعربية](#) ; [en français](#)

“[L'agression de M. Jamal](#)” (The Assault of Mr. Jamal) in Arabic/ [بالعربية](#)

“[Violences sexuelles : Mythes et Réalités](#)” (Sexual Violence: Myths and Realities) micro-trottoir (vox pop) in Arabic/ [بالعربية](#)

“[Avec ou sans contrat de mariage, il faut le consentement](#)” (With or without a marriage contract, you need consent) pièce de théâtre sur le viol conjugal (theatrical play on marital rape) in Arabic/ [بالعربية](#)

“Protection Pas Prison” (Protection Not Prison)

- [Clip vidéo en arabe, sous-titrée en français et en arabe](#)
- Discussion sheets [in English](#) ; [بالعربية](#) ; [en français](#)
- Fiches de plaidoyer (advocacy sheets) [بالعربية](#) ; [en français](#)

## **Action Research Reports on Violence against Women in Morocco**

Violences facilitées par la technologie faites aux femmes (Technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women) [بالعربية](#) ; [résumé en français](#) ; [in English](#)

Violences faites aux femmes par un partenaire intime (Intimate partner violence against women) [بالعربية](#) ; [résumé en français](#) ; [in English](#)

Violences sexuelles faites aux femmes (Sexual violence against women) [بالعربية](#) ; [résumé en français](#) ; [in English](#)

Aperçu des violences basées sur le genre et de la résilience (GBV and gender resilience outline) [بالعربية](#) ; [en français](#) ; [in English](#)

“Transformer les obstacles en opportunités : la réponse aux violences faites aux femmes pendant la pandémie COVID-19 au Maroc” (Transforming obstacles into opportunities: The response to violence against women during the COVID pandemic in Morocco) [بالعربية](#) ; [en français](#) ; [in English](#)



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