

Guide to good media practice in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence



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Translated by Portuguese IMPRODOVA Team.

"It is precisely because domestic violence is so counterintuitive that the media need to continue to tell these stories. However, we journalists need training so that we do not continue to make the usual mistakes. We cannot accept journalists examining a woman's behaviour to explain why she was murdered or injured. We cannot accept that journalists make excuses for men who killed their families as if they had been pressured to do so."

Jess Hill, journalist of The Guardian

How crimes of violence against women and domestic violence are dealt with by the media is decisive for how they are understood and interpreted by the public:

- The frequency with which incidents are reported,
- The emphasis placed on them, the information included or omitted,
- The words used to describe what happened,

all these factors make a difference in the social understanding of violence.

The role of the media in the field of violence against women and domestic violence is decisive,

- Not only because it makes visible crimes that are, today, still often wrongly regarded as belonging to the private and relational sphere,
- But also because it influences the possibilities of reaction and building a fairer, more secure, more attentive society.

Is the person who has been informed of the crime more capable than before of recognising the signs of violence if he or she encounters them? He/she knows what to do? He/she understands better the dynamics of escalation of abuse and how to prevent it?

Tolerance towards violent behaviour and the aggressor is zero, and the message that needs to be conveyed is one of total support for women and children victims. We also know that violence against women and domestic violence is inseparable from the reasons that have reproduced it over time:

- Relationships of subordination,
- Power asymmetries and gender stereotypes

that penalise girls and women at all stages of life.

This document presents objectives that reinforce the informative and empowering role of the media in this context, in an initiative that we promote with the media, with the Media Regulatory Authority (ERC) and with the Union of Portuguese Journalists (SPJ).

Rosa Monteiro, Secretary of State for Citizenship and Equality



GOALS

GOAL 1: To frame the crime of domestic violence as a violation of human rights based on historically unequal power relations between women and men and gender stereotypes; at the same time, to privilege informative contents that allow debate on the theme as a structural issue of society, inscribed in gender inequalities.

It is essential to underline that the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, recognises that

- *"Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men that have led to domination and discrimination of women by men", and that*
- *"The structural nature of violence against women is gender-based, and violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms through which women are kept in a position of subordination to men".*

Examples of international recommendations for domestic violence treatment by the media:

- Framing as gender-based violence;
- Avoid individualised explanatory factors;
- Invite experts in the field to clarify the topic;
- Provide accurate information about this type of crime (statistics, results of scientific studies, others);
- Avoid blaming victims;
- Avoid apologising the aggressor people.

GOAL 2: To adopt an approach oriented to the problem of violence against women in public and private spaces and not to the event, using concepts adjusted to the phenomenon and an impartial and rigorous language, based on facts and not on assumptions, avoiding the risk of generating in the aggressors the effect of imitation.

Examples:

- Avoid detailed descriptions of the crime;
- Avoiding the *show off* of the domestic violence events;
- Preventing the construction of the news as an "incident", avoiding the tragic individual aspects, and exploring the issue in depth;
- Do not use the term "crime of passion";
- Avoid the romanticisation of violence.

GOAL 3: To avoid informative contents that justify, excuse or establish causal relationships through the presentation of

- Personality traits,
- Behaviours or socio-cultural condition of the victim and the aggressor,

so as not to accentuate the insecurity and vulnerability of the victims.

Examples:

- Avoid finding factors (e.g., jealousy, alcohol consumption, unemployment) that mitigate the guilt of aggressors;
- Avoid finding factors that place victims in a situation of discredit;
- Avoid speeches that reinforce the impunity of aggressors.

GOAL 4: Make other forms of violence against women and domestic violence visible by avoiding limiting domestic violence to marital homicides and attempted homicides and by contributing to de-occultation, prevention and understanding of the phenomenon.

- Extend the spectrum of news beyond murder, which, having a substantial news value, does not necessarily reflect the different experiences of violence.
- Focus on the “non-sensationalistic” aspects of violence, including its most common forms and not just the most extreme cases.

Examples:

- Sexual harassment;
- Social violence;
- Violence against children;
- Sexual violence;
- Trafficking in persons;
- Economic violence;
- Female genital mutilation;
- Psychological violence.

GOAL 5: To protect the right to privacy of the victims and minors involved, without using references to marital, family or social life, including photographs and indications of the place of residence, school or other environment, detrimental to their well-being and potentiating their suffering.

Example:

- Avoid the use of information that identifies victims, considering, among other factors, the possibility that they may be intrusive to the victims themselves or the reference persons involved (e.g., children).

GOAL 6: To present cases and testimonies of victims who have broken the cycle of violence against women and domestic violence and regained control of their lives, as well as of good institutional practices and civil society organisations in preventing the phenomenon and protecting victims.

Examples:

- Report positively, referring to success stories, protective measures and strategies for victims and penalising measures and strategies for aggressors;
- Referring to good practices;
- To privilege the perspective of the surviving people.

GOAL 7: Include in the informative contents on violence against women and domestic violence the dissemination of information lines and protection and support mechanisms for victims, public resources and specialised services available, training for the request for support, and mobilising to denounce the crime.

Examples:

- Supporting or complementing any news about violence against women and domestic violence with footer information with existing helplines;
- Provide information on victim support structures/services;
- Giving information about rights;
- Criminalising violence;
- Emphasise the public nature of the crime of domestic violence.

GOAL 8: Promote awareness that the new digital environment has exacerbated some of the existing problems and presents new challenges.

Example:

- To report, in the terms mentioned above, on issues such as trafficking on social networks for sexual purposes, easily accessible violent pornography, online intimidation, silencing of women, body shaming, and so on.

GOAL 9: Promote a general understanding of the phenomenon of violence against women and domestic violence by integrating the theme, where possible, not only in information programmes but also in the field of entertainment and fiction, as well as through the development of campaigns.

GOAL 10: Integrate and promote gender equality and non-discrimination in all content produced to fight against social representations and practices that underlie inequalities between men and women.

