

Covering sexual assault

Social stigma and discomfort combined with shame or reluctance on the part of a survivor make rape and sexual assault difficult topics to cover, even for the most seasoned reporter. Following are 5 tips chosen by BARCC staff from **Reporting Sexual Assault: A Guide for Journalists**, published by the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence.

1. **Provide information** about local resources and where survivors can go for help.

2. **Balance** the victim's right to privacy with the public's right to know.

3. **Judge** when details are needed for public safety and when they only serve to re-traumatize the victim or reinforce myths about the victim's role in the attack.

- * **Details about the attacker are relevant:** physical description, how access was gained, whether a weapon was used, and if additional physical violence was involved.

- * **Details about the victim's private life are NOT relevant,** habits, sexual history or physical appearance, for example, do not contribute to the public's safety and usually lead to victim blaming.

4. **Carefully choose words and phrases** to avoid furthering the notion that the victim is culpable for the crime. Consider using alternative terms like:

- * "victim" instead of "Innocent victim"— all crime victims are innocent.

- * "reported rape" instead of "rape allegation". The word "allegation" is not a neutral term and strongly implies doubt.

- * "acquaintance rape" instead of "date rape". "date rape" is often broadly used in cases where the victim knew the perpetrator, not just when the assault occurred "on a date".

5. **Reflect trends and realities** of sexual assault, including the frequency with which it occurs, and the frequency with which it is committed by an acquaintance as opposed to a stranger. Go to www.barcc.org/information/statistics for up-to-date statistics.

Download the full guide at http://www.barcc.org/assets/pdf/Journalists-a_guide.pdf

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