

*Reporting On*  
**RAPE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

A Media Toolkit  
for Local and National Journalists  
to Better Media Coverage

Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls & Young Women

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# WHY A MEDIA TOOLKIT ON RAPE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

The Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls & Young Women was founded to develop a comprehensive, citywide approach to ending violence against girls. Established in fall 2009, the Taskforce unites stakeholders from across Chicago to address the question: What conditions need to exist locally and statewide to end violence against girls and young women?

The Taskforce has become a central space to bring together practitioners and other stakeholders with the goal of developing a comprehensive strategy to end violence against girls and young women. The Taskforce has released papers and data analyses to develop the field and draw attention to the issue, brought together hundreds of organizational representatives in discussions, raised the issue with public officials such as the Cook County Women's Commission, and begun to build a stronger infrastructure for supporting girls' safety in Chicago.

In 2011, we convened to discuss how the Taskforce could continue to raise the issue of violence against girls in the public discourse. We decided that producing a Media Toolkit to disseminate to members of the press was not only necessary for helping address the ever-deepening stigma around rape and sexual violence, but a critical and timely resource to address the pervasiveness of rape culture in society. This Toolkit provides concrete facts about the issue of violence against girls and young women; suggestions about issues to be covered regarding violence against girls, including the Taskforce's recommendations of how to end violence; and information about key organizations.

# WHAT IS RAPE CULTURE?

**“Rape culture is a set of values and beliefs that provide an environment conducive to rape... The term applies to a generic culture surrounding and promoting rape, not the specific setting in which rape is likely to occur.”**

—A. Ayres Boswell and Joan Z. Spade

[\*Fraternalities and Collegiate Rape Culture: Why Are Some Fraternalities More Dangerous Places For Women?\*](#)

“[I]n other words, rape culture refers neither to physical locations where rape is deemed likely to occur, does occur and/or has occurred, nor to the specific details of particular rapes: rather, it refers to a culture – that is, a set of values, beliefs, rituals, social codes, language, laws and art – which can be said to promote sexual violence, and particularly sexual violence against women as perpetrated by straight men. Note that this argument neither automatically nor universally implies the existence of a direct causal link between specific cultural artifacts and incidences of rape (though this is certainly possible); nor does it contend that every participant in that culture is or must be a rapist. What it does describe is a culture where rape is trivialized, where both the abuse and sexual objectification of women is normalised, and where, as a result, the sexual abuse of women is more likely to happen.” ([Foz Meadows, 2012](#))

# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IS INTERSECTIONAL

We believe that girls experience multiple and intersecting forms of violence. We believe that marginalized groups of young women experience interlocking oppressions such as racism, ableism, homophobia, classism, along with sexism. These multiple forms of oppression contribute to the increased vulnerability of marginalized girls to violence. We need to look at the complexities of the ways in which girls and young women experience abuse in order to adequately comprehend the context in which gender-based violence exists.

On our website we have organized five different categories that detail through data and analysis how gender-based violence is intersectional. The categories include: (i) [Sexual Violence](#) (ii) [Violence and Education](#) (iii) [Reproductive Justice and Violence](#) (iv) [Violence and Criminalization](#) (v) [Teen Dating Violence](#), and we also want to direct you to the [Law Enforcement and Violence](#) toolkit published by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. For a more comprehensive explanation and detailed data such as statistics, suggested actions, and policy recommendations, please refer to the aforementioned sections or our website: [www.chitaskforce.org](http://www.chitaskforce.org).



Photo Credit: [Paul Chorian](#)

# HOW THIS TOOLKIT SERVES AS A RESOURCE FOR JOURNALISTS

[The Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls and Young Women](#) saw a need to create a Media Toolkit that addresses common issues stemming from how media currently structures news around rape and sexual violence, and how journalists can better report on these issues. [The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma](#) outlines some of the overarching sociocultural, political, psychological and linguistic challenges on how news currently shapes these matters in their tip sheets titled [“How News is Framed”](#) and [“The Effects of News Frames.”](#) Below are some of the most prominent issues referenced in their tip sheets:

- **Lack of context:** Many news stories feature provocative or salient aspects of an event, ignoring overarching patterns or risk factors for particular events (Blood, Putnis, & Pirkis, 2002).
- Newspapers generally do not provide context and statistical information (Dart Center).
- There is evidence, albeit limited, that both trauma-related and non-trauma-related news tend to lack context (e.g.,

ignoring overarching patterns of risk, historical and cultural interpretations of events, social patterns of violence, and links to broader social concerns) (Dart Center).

- **Lack of context exists across various traumatic events** portrayed in the news (e.g., violent crime, war, terrorism, etc.). No studies to date have made direct comparisons across traumatic events pertaining to context. Future studies should examine similarities and differences in coverage across differing events (Dart Center).
- **Studies use different definitions for various frames, creating confusion about what is needed to improve news delivery.** It would be helpful to use common nomenclature in order to improve knowledge of news delivery (Dart Center).
- **Contextual News Coverage: The Public Health Model of Reporting.** The public health model of reporting promotes incorporating broader contextual and statistical information into single-event stories. This approach gives attention to

“interactions among the victim, the agent of injury or death, and the environment” (Thorson, Dorfman, & Stevens, 2003).

- Use of the public health model to frame news stories may shift the consumer’s perception of crime and violence from a sense of risky, random inevitabilities to a focus on base rates, risk factors, and potential prevention strategies (Thorson, Dorfman, & Stevens, 2003). Such a frame is posited to promote greater public awareness of the context for crime and violence (i.e. when, where, and how it is likely to happen) and, in turn, increase support for public health and preventative measures.
- A study involving 89 college students comparing public health framing to traditional episodic framing showed that readers of the public health frame placed more responsibility on society’s role/social conditions in crime and violence problems (Coleman & Thorson, 2002).

One of the most salient ethical codes of newsgathering is to maintain neutrality when reporting. However, as this research highlights, keeping a balanced viewpoint remains a challenge. Though we agree that fairness and accuracy are ethical considerations that journalists need

to maintain, we also strongly believe that neutrality is a goal that can never be fully achieved: it is an ideal we aim towards. This is evidenced by the high percentage of articles written on rape and sexual violence that focus their inquiries and investigations on the victims, without asking critical questions or further investigating the perpetrator. Similarly, these articles help perpetuate rape myths by incorporating superfluous descriptions that are dependent upon victim-blaming language. For example, as opposed to focusing on a perpetrator’s actions - why did the perpetrator rape the young woman? - most articles tend to pivot on what survivors wear at the time of rape, which only serves to reaffirm a widely held notion that the victim is to blame. And we all know that rape is not caused by what one wears, but because someone makes a choice to rape another person.

All of us involved in the fight to end rape and sexual violence know the difficulties in communicating what we see, hear and witness when working with survivors to a more general audience. Whether we are direct service advocates or legal representatives or reporters, when we sign on to report on rape and sexual violence issues, we also become signatories to the underlying ethical sensitivities that help us honor accuracy in telling these real life stories.



The role that journalists play in reporting rape and sexual violence is an imperative one. Through reporting, a journalist has the power to persuade and/or influence public opinion and policy, in addition to social perspective. If reported truthfully and accurately, articles can serve as a catalyst for positive change on a local, national and even international level, thus helping shift a culture of rape towards a culture of non-gender-based violence.

Today, more than ever, how we report on rape and sexual violence matters. Given how rapidly social media is evolving and the accelerated pace at which news stories are delivered, shared, and read, articles no longer remain a page in a newspaper that only reaches a limited audience and gets archived shortly thereafter. Today's stories are digital, and as a result, remain accessible and available for online searches. These stories can have a good or bad global impact depending on how they are being reported. They serve as resources for research and as evidence for public policy persuasion. However, if not accurately written and contextualized, these stories can cause additional harm to the victims by bringing about public shame and victimization, and can function to disempower survivors from their own voices. They can help perpetuate negative gender stereotypes

and social beliefs that further advance the social acceptance of rape culture. For this reason, delicate awareness on the issue of rape and sexual violence and a diligence in reporting can help paint more broader and truthful pictures of the realities: what sexual violence is, what the trends are, what contributes to sexual violence, and how we can all help end it both for men and women.

The goal of this Media Toolkit is to help local and national journalists better report on issues of rape and sexual violence. We want to thank The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma for allowing us to include their tip sheet on sexual violence below. We hope that it serves as a critical resource for those reporting on the issue and that the content in this toolkit serves as a practical guide.

# REPORTING ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

## QUICK TIPS ON COVERING SEXUAL VIOLENCE, FROM PREPARATION TO WRITING THE STORY

*From The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma*

**Reporting on sexual violence demands special care and increased ethical sensitivity. It requires specialised interviewing skills, understanding of the law, and basic awareness about the psychological impact of trauma.**

Sexual violence could be physical or psychological and perpetrated against men, women or children of any age. It includes rape, which is known to be one of the most deeply traumatic experiences any human being can undergo. Talking about such an event is usually associated with very high levels of distress — during re-telling survivors may even re-experience some of the same emotions they felt at the time of being attacked. Consequently, journalists need to take special care, if they are to avoid compounding their interviewees' distress. Sexual violence has broader effects too: the impact can ripple out to those involved tangentially, such as family members and loved ones or even witnesses to the act. When used as a weapon of war, how

a whole community relates to itself or neighbouring groups can be profoundly altered.

## PREPARATION AND APPROACH

**Brief yourself thoroughly on the likely impacts and causes of sexual violence.** Research local conditions and circumstances. But once you have done your research, leave it at the door. It doesn't matter how much knowledge you have on the topic, you can never predict how a particular individual experienced the events that happened to them.

**Get the language right. Rape or assault is not “sex.”** A pattern of abuse is not an “affair”. Rape or sexual assault is in no way associated with normal sexual activity; trafficking in women is not to be confused with prostitution. People who have suffered sexual violence may not wish to be described as a “victim” unless they choose the word themselves. Many prefer the word “survivor”.

**Respect a potential interviewee's right to say no.** Nobody should ever be forced to talk in detail about an event as traumatic as rape. Not everybody is in the right place to speak.

- If there is a local expert or a support organisation involved in the case, consider asking them if speaking to the media is likely to make things worse.
- However sensitive a male interviewer is, in the majority of cases a female victim is likely to feel safer when interviewed by another woman; if that is not possible, a female colleague should be on hand.
- Be fair and realistic. Don't coerce, cajole, trick or offer remuneration, and don't suggest that giving an interview will bring more aid / military intervention.

**Ask yourself whether approaching someone risks compromising his or her safety and privacy.** In some societies, just being suspected of having been raped, can lead to humiliation, being ostracised, and even to further violence. Tread carefully and think about how and where you meet a potential source.

- Identify yourself clearly and never pretend not to be a journalist. Explaining the type of story you're planning to write is likely to help build trust between you and the interviewee and result in better work.

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

**Set good ground rules.** Violent and abusive acts take control and power away from people, and so it is important to create a sense of safety during the interview. Try involving the interviewee in the decision-making: ask them if they can recommend a safe location and time.

- If you are using a translator, brief them on the fundamentals described here. Broadcast journalists should consider recording the interview in the interviewee's own language and keeping the crew to a minimum.
- Let your interviewee know at the outset how much time it is likely to take. Cutting somebody short while they describing a traumatic experience without prior warning can cause deep hurt.

**The secret to good interviewing is active, non-judgmental listening.** That sounds simple, but it is a skill that requires time and effort to develop.

**Don't underestimate how your own reactions to traumatic detail can influence the conversation.** If you are finding the material challenging, acknowledge that silently to yourself, and bring your focus back to what is being said. Usually just trying to listen a little harder, and observing the other's facial expressions, body language, etc, helps. (The time to process the personal impact on the journalist is after the interview.)

**Sexual violence is associated with high degrees of self-blame, guilt and shame.** For this reason, avoid any language that might imply the interviewee is responsible in some way. Be careful of asking "why" questions - they are favoured by interrogators.

**Don't be surprised if accounts only make partial sense.** Frequently, survivors of sexual violence 'shut down' emotionally: their recall may become fragmentary, and in some cases they may even block out an event entirely. Incomplete and contradictory accounts are not prima facie evidence of deception, but rather of the struggle interviewees may experience in making sense of what happened to them.

**Never say you know how they feel — you don't.** Instead, you could say, "I appreciate how difficult this is for you."

**End the interview well.** After you have addressed the issues you need for your report, ask them if they would like to add anything else. And most importantly, make sure you bring the conversation back into the here and now and to the discussion of things that the interviewee finds safe.

**Make yourself available for contact after your report is published or broadcast.** If you say you'll let them have a copy or a recording of what you write/broadcast, keep that promise.

## WRITING IT UP

**Again, think about the language.** Sexual violence is both deeply personal and something that has wider public policy implications.

- When describing an assault, try to strike a balance when deciding how much graphic detail to include. Too much can be gratuitous; too little can weaken the survivor's case.
- During conflict, rape by combatants is a war crime. Describing it as an unfortunate but predictable aspect of war is not acceptable.

**Anticipate the impact of publication.** Journalists have a responsibility to do everything they can to avoid exposing the interviewee to further abuse or undermining their standing in the community.

- Consider letting survivors read portions of your story before publication, as it can lessen the impact of public exposure and help catch factual errors. After reading - and seeing evidence of your intentions - they may decide to share more of their story with you.
- Tell the whole story. Sometimes media identify specific incidents and focus on the tragic aspects of it, but reporters do well to understand that abuse might be part of a long-standing social problem, armed conflict, or part of a community history. Finding out how individuals and communities have coped with the trauma of sexual violence in the longer term may add helpful insight.
- If appropriate, direct the interviewee, viewers or readers to relevant resources and information about sexual violence. Links to these can be found on the Dart Centre website.

**Re-check whether you risk compromising a source's anonymity.** In the final report, have you left clues that might inadvertently identify the individual? Job, age and location may allow for jigsaw identification. Faces or clothes may need to be obscured in photographs or film.



Photo credit: [Alex E. Proimos](#)

# LANGUAGE AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Language is integral to our understanding of gender-based violence – 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. Here are some problematic yet common uses of language to describe sexual and domestic violence.<sup>1</sup>

## NOTE: USE OF “VICTIM” AND “SURVIVOR”

“There are cultural narratives or vocabulary for consensual heterosexual sex and for stranger rape but none for the more typical cases in which the assailant is known by the victim.” (MacMartin 2002)

## NOTE: USE OF THE WORD “ALLEGED”

We understand that the word alleged fits within the tenant of ethical and professional journalism, in addition we understand it is a journalist’s duty to abide to the law by utilizing the term “alleged”

when covering crime, rape and/or stories involving sexual violence. However, we want to bring to your attention the fact that there are positive and negative ways of employing the term, and different options for describing the “substance of the allegation.” Read on:

“The best way to use the words “allege,” “alleged” and “allegedly” is not to use them at all. Instead, have your scripts reveal who is making the claim by using phrases such as “police say” or “prosecutors say” followed by the substance of the allegation.” ([Newsript.com, 2012](#))

“When legal charges have been filed against an individual, that individual becomes accused of the behavior detailed in those charges. The individual can then be described as an ‘accused rapist,’ ‘accused murderer,’ ‘accused embezzler,’ and so forth.”

“Occasions do exist for the use of “allege,” “alleged” or “allegedly.” When claims are made concerning an individual but no legal charges have been publicly filed, and the source of the claims is complicated to identify, then “alleged” becomes an acceptable option for describing the individual and the claims. For example, a community group

<sup>1</sup> Murphy, W. “The Need for Accurate Language in Penn State Coverage,” *The Crime Report*, 23 November 2011, Viewpoints. The ‘Common Use’ section of this Media Toolkit was highly informed by the work of Wendy J. Murphy and Rape Victim Advocates.

holds a press conference calling for the firing of the deputy chief of police. Earlier that week, three former civilian employees of the police department told a newspaper reporter that they have heard the deputy chief use racial slurs. The reporter was investigating a tip that the deputy chief had recently faced a closed-door, disciplinary hearing with the public safety director and the civil service commission.” ([Newsript.com](http://Newsript.com), 2012)

## 1. COMMON USE: “[VICTIM] ADMITS, CONFESSES”

**Examples:** “Naomi Judd Admits She Was A Victim of Child Abuse At Age 3” ([Starpulse.com](http://Starpulse.com), 2011)

First sentence in the same story: “Veteran country star Naomi Judd has confessed to suffering her own abuse hell as a child, shortly after her actress daughter Ashley revealed all about her own trauma in her new memoir.”

**Problem:** Both “admits” and “confesses” imply responsibility and shame, removing the victim’s agency in their recovery and implicating the victim in the violence.

**Alternative language:** Reports, Shares, Reveals

## 2. COMMON USE: “WAS RAPED”

**Problem:** The use of passive tense in this way does two things: first, it makes the rapist invisible; second, it fails to make explicit that there was a person responsible for sexually assaulting the victim.

Examples: “Occupy Cleveland’ Protester Alleges She Was Raped” ([CBS Cleveland](http://CBS Cleveland), 2011)

**Alternative language:** “Occupy Cleveland Protester Reports a Man Raped Her.” The goal is to use accountable language that focuses attention on the person committing the crime.

## 3. COMMON USE: VICTIM BLAMING LANGUAGE

**Example:** This quotation is from a [2011 New York Times story](http://2011 New York Times story): “‘It’s 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?’”

**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.

**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.

## 4. COMMON USE: “UNHARMED”

**Examples:** “Missing Norristown woman found unharmed now claims she was kidnapped, raped.” ([The Times Herald, 2012](#))

**From 1983:** “Police say the attendant...was released unharmed in less than an hour,” the news account stated.

**Problem:** Often when reporting about domestic or sexual violence, journalists will describe the victim or children who were exposed to the violence as “unharmed” to mean that they were not physically

injured. However, such usage dismisses both the physical nature of the violence (even if there were no physical injuries) and the deep, traumatic harm caused by such violence.

**Alternative language:** Journalists have a responsibility to accurately portray the emotional, spiritual, and physical harm that rape causes its immediate and peripheral victims. Rape is a physical violation that always leaves scars, even if others can’t see them.

## 5. COMMON USE: “DOMESTIC DISPUTE”

Example: “The Charlotte-Mecklenburg police said what appeared to be a potential kidnapping in south Charlotte on Tuesday was a domestic dispute.” ([WCNC, 2012](#))

**Problem:** A dispute is akin to a disagreement or argument; it implies equal power. Intimate partner violence, on the other hand, is a serious, cyclical pattern of abuse and unhealthy behavior meant to control an individual. Referring to such incidents as “domestic disputes” takes away from its seriousness. It also implies an isolated incident, rather than a pattern of abuse.

**Alternative language:** Intimate partner violence



## 6. COMMON USE: SUPERFLUOUS DESCRIPTIONS OF VICTIMS/SURVIVORS THAT LEAD TO VICTIM BLAMING

**Example:** “Residents said she dressed older than her age, wearing makeup and fashions more appropriate to a woman in her 20s. She would hang out with teenage boys at a playground, some said.” ([New York Times](#), 2011)

**Problem:** Providing subjective examples like this do not contribute at all to the story, perpetuate the idea that the victim/survivor somehow asked for it or brought it on herself, and unintentionally discredit the violence against her. It takes the responsibility away from the assailant(s) and portrays the victim as a catalyst to the rapes.

**Alternative language:** There is simply no need to include such details! Nobody asks to be raped, no matter their previous experience, way of dressing, or personal choices.

## 7. COMMON USE: “ENGAGING IN”

**Example:** “The Federal Bureau of Investigations (“FBI”) arrested the assistant cruise director of the Norwegian Star cruise ship for engaging in sex with a 16 year old passenger and possessing child pornography.” ([Cruise Law News](#), 2012)

**Problem:** The word “engage” is defined as “to bring together” or “to induce to participate.” The implication in such language is that the victim was an active participant who was causally involved in making the crime happen, rather than a recipient of the unilaterally harmful conduct of another. Words that imply any active responsibility on the part of a child obscure the offender’s exclusive moral and legal culpability.

In addition, describing rape in terms typically used for pleasurable and consensual acts minimizes and hides the true violence of an assault, makes it difficult for the reader to comprehend the acts as unwanted violations, and allows society to rationalize, justify and excuse sexual violence (Bavelas & Coates, 2001).

**Alternative language:** It’s important to recognize the use of force used by perpetrators, and the lack of consent given by survivors.

Specifically in the above example, since 16-year-olds are legally unable to provide consent to sexual acts.

## 8. COMMON USE: “SEXUAL ACTIVITY/ASSAULT/MOLEST”

**Examples:** “Walker called her into an office that had a cot in the back, sat on the cot, and suggested ‘with his hand gestures’ that she engage in sexual activity with him.” ([South Bend Tribune, 2012](#))

“An Air Force drill sergeant accused of serial sexual assault repeatedly sent texts and photos to one victim...” ([Chicago Tribune, 2012](#))

“I’m not a serial killer,” said McKinley, who said she was sexually molested until she turned 12. “That’s his choice.” ([LA Times, 2012](#))

**Problem:** “Sexual activity,” “sexual assault” and “molest” are vague terms that tell us nothing about the actual crime, making it impossible for the public to understand what happened, or to know how to feel about the harm done and whether the reactions of responsible adults, law enforcement officials, etc., have been appropriate.

**Alternative language:** “An affidavit filed to support the search warrant said that several men raped the girl...”

## 9. COMMON USE: “FONDLE”

**Example:** “Woman Fondled Outside of Marshalls” ([Fairfax City Patch, 2012](#))

**Problem:** “Fondle”, as a verb, is defined as “to handle, stroke or caress lovingly.” As a noun, the word refers to “affectionate play (or foreplay without contact with the genital organs).” The term conveys the idea that child sexual abuse is pleasant and gentle, which undermines our ability to see the behavior as harmful criminal activity.

**Alternative language:** Groped

## 10. COMMON USE: “PERFORMED ORAL SEX”

**Example:** “The final witness on Thursday said he performed oral sex on Sandusky almost every time he stayed overnight, sleeping all but one time on a water-bed in the basement. Asked why he did not resist when Sandusky forced him to perform oral sex, he said, ‘What was

I going to do? He's a big guy, way bigger than me.” ([The Chicago Tribune, 2012](#))

**Problem:** Saying “performed oral sex” portrays the victim as the aggressor and paints a scene where the offending adult is barely present, and only a passive recipient of the child’s affirmative actions. The child as primary actor thus absorbs moral and legal responsibility for the actions of a violent adult. Alone, the word “perform” offers a near circus-like description of the child’s role in causing rather than receiving harm.

Clearly, a child enduring the violence of another does not “perform” a sex crime on himself. Indeed, he cannot even lawfully consent as a passive participant and the law is clear in every jurisdiction that the adult bears 100 percent of the blame. Words that shift responsibility away from the offender mitigate the offender’s exclusive responsibility for his actions.

**Alternative language:** “Asked if he forced his penis into her mouth, Capt. Krenitsky responded...”

## 11. COMMON USE: “ORAL SEX,” “ANAL SEX,” “ANAL INTERCOURSE”

**Example:** “A pair of border guards allegedly had oral sex while watching a Cirque du Soleil show — and then attacked a woman who complained.” ([Daily Mail, 2012](#))

“A perverted Brooklyn science teacher resigned after he allegedly asked a female student if she ‘ever had anal sex.’” ([NY Daily News, 2012](#))

**Problem:** The phrases “oral sex,” “anal sex” and “anal intercourse” are similarly problematic in that they literally define actions that involve mutual pleasure and enjoyable stimulation of sex organs. These erotic terms bring criminal behavior discursively into the range of everyday, often pleasurable, human activity.

This necessarily prevents the public from appreciating the fact the victim experienced fear, disgust, objectification and blurs an important line between sexual pleasure and criminal violence.

Words both reflect and generate cultural ideas about sexual violence. Consumers of words passively take in and unconsciously attribute language to their understanding of human behavior. This becomes an internal narrative that creates social norms and expectations.

When language used to tell stories about sexual violence is vague, needlessly erotic and/or implies that the victim bears some of the blame, the constructed story creates harmful ideas about offender responsibility and the reality of victims' suffering.

In criminal cases involving children in particular, it is critically important to use factually correct terminology that assigns complete responsibility to the offender because children lack legal capacity to consent.

**Alternative language:** Thus, for example, rather than “anal sex,” a reporter could say, “the offender penetrated the child’s anus with his penis.” Instead of “the child performed oral sex,” a reporter could say, “the offender pushed his penis into the child’s mouth.”

## COMMON USE: “SEX SCANDAL”

**Example:** “A military jury Tuesday was to begin hearing the case of an Air Force sergeant who faces the most serious charges in a widening sex scandal at a Texas base.” ([The Seattle Times, 2012](#))

**Problem:** [Mary Elizabeth Williams of Salon.com](#) explains: “When the media uses the word ‘sex’ within a story about something where there are alleged victims of assault, it’s a semantic failure on an epic scale. It diminishes crime. It sensationalizes it. It removes the distinction between a normal, consensual act and violence. Sure, you could say that sex is an element of those stories. But you’d be missing the part about force and pathology. It’s like calling armed robbery a ‘shopping scandal.’ It’s lazy and it’s dumb and it’s hurtful to victims. Rape and abuse are not sexy.”

**Alternative language:** No situation involving rape or sexual violence should be referred to as a scandal. We suggest employing language that accurately describes the nature of the violence.

## ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE-BASED RESOURCES

[“Watch Your Language: Presenting Domestic Violence in News Reports”](#)

[“The Need for Accurate Language in the Penn State Coverage”](#)



Photo credit: D.Sharon\_Pruitt

# BAD REPORTING

Utilizing the tactics outlined in the Language and Gender-Based Violence section of this Toolkit, we have compiled articles from notable and popular news sources that illustrate writing that could be deemed as problematic or oppressive. This section provides specific examples that could be improved upon by undertaking a more survivor centered, nuanced and complicated approach to the issues surrounding rape and sexual violence.

## EXAMPLE ONE

**Article Title:** “Vicious Assault Shakes Texas Town”

**Source:** [The New York Times](#)

*Important Note:* This article was published on March 8, 2011 and received a lot of critical attention from mainstream media (such as *The Huffington Post*) and feminist blogging sites (like *Feministing*) about the lack of balance in the story. The *NY Times* editor sided with outraged readers and they re-wrote and re-published the article providing quotes from the victim’s family and friends. This is a very important and high profile example of victim-blaming in reporting

and illustrates the complexities of “objectivity,” which often sides with perpetrators within a rape culture.

- This article is a prime example of bias and unbalanced reporting. The reporter focuses the entire story on three things:
  1. How the gang-rape of an eleven year old girl brought major distress to a community.
  2. The wide-spread concern for the perpetrators’ futures.
  3. Placing blame on the victim’s parents for the rape of their child.
- The title fails to acknowledge the gang-rape of the victim.
- The title of the article is further sustained by the content of the story, which continues to hierarchize the effects of the gang-rape on the community: “The case has rocked this East Texas community to its core and left many residents in the working-class neighborhood where the attack took place with unanswered questions.”

- “Among them is, if the allegations are proved, how could their young men have been drawn into such an act?": The reporter assumes that the perpetrators were not acting intentionally, but instead were drawn to their acts. Here is a similar quote from the article: “The students who were arrested have not returned to school, and it is unclear if they ever will.”
- The first quote provided centers the experience on the perpetrators, not the victim. “These boys have to live with this the rest of their lives.” What about the 11-year-old victim who has been viciously gang-raped?
- There is inherent victim-blaming language in this report. In the first full paragraph on page two, the reporter describes the residents’ perspective of the victim — an 11-year-old girl — as: “she dressed older than her age, wearing makeup and fashions more appropriate to a woman in her 20s. She would hang out with teenage boys at the playground.” How is this information relevant to a violent gang rape?
- The quote, “Where was her mother? What was her mother thinking?” further illustrates the victim-blaming rhetoric.
- The reporter uses vague language to describe the gang rape. He utilizes “assault” a total of seven times and also describes the rape as a “sex act”: “There the girl was ordered to disrobe and was sexually assaulted by several boys in the bedroom and bathroom.” And, “They then went to the abandoned mobile home, where the assaults continued.” Also, “Some of those present recorded the sexual acts on their telephones...”
- The reporter of this article spends a significant amount of time describing the poverty of this town. This information is irrelevant and contributes to problematic assumptions that gang rapes only happen in “poor” parts of town.

## EXAMPLE TWO

**Article Title:** “Hotel Maid Who Accused DSK of Sexual Assault Goes Public With Story”

**Source:** [CNN](#)

*Important Note:* Reports that Dominique Strauss-Kahn (DSK) attempted to rape a hotel maid came to light in May 2011. The majority of mainstream media outlets that covered the case described the alleged attempted rape as a “scandal,” a blow to DSK’s career, while

kindly painting him as a “charismatic” harasser (as opposed to an abuser). This type of reporting is a solid example of how unfair and unbalanced reporting helps influence the due process and decision of a trial. In this case, Naffisatou Diallo’s testimony was discredited, as was the violence done to her. Since this story broke, two other women have come forward accusing DSK of rape.

- “Alleged experience” understates the victim’s experience and trauma with sexual violence. Another way of phrasing this could have been: “Over the weekend, Diallo broke her silence and spoke with members of the media about ***the accused rapist’s actions***.” “Accused rapist’s actions” would have been a more legitimate phrase since Diallo had — at this point — commenced her legal actions against DSK. For more information on the term “alleged,” please see our note in the Language and Gender-Based Violence section of this Toolkit.
- This short piece finishes with the phrase “Diallo... joins... to address the questions circulating about her credibility” and does not question the credibility of DSK.

## EXAMPLE THREE

**Article Title:** “Hotel Maid Accusing Strauss-Kahn of Rape Reportedly Worked as Prostitute”

**Source:** [Fox News](#)

- The article is peppered with superfluous and irrelevant descriptions, beginning with the title. Whether the victim is a former prostitute or not is immaterial to her reported rape.
- The reporter proceeds to include speculative characterizations of the victim that function to discredit the violence that was committed against her and her right to fair and due process: “...the 32-year-old woman had committed a host of minor frauds to better her life in the U.S. since arriving in the country seven years ago, including lying on immigration paperwork, cheating on her taxes, and misstating her income so she could live in an apartment reserved for the poor.”



## EXAMPLE FOUR

**Article Title:** “NY man with a hard past gets 25 years”

**Source:** [Huffington Post](#)

- The story is centered around the experiences of the perpetrator, not the victim.
- The victim’s family is blamed for the rape of their 10 year-old daughter: “But the relatives nonetheless asked Croote to watch the child after school one afternoon, authorities said.”
- The perpetrator’s past is used as an explanation (and perhaps reason) for violently assaulting a young girl: “Croote’s own life story is horrible.”
- The victim’s assault and rape is mentioned in one sentence, the rest of the article is about Croote’s troubled past.
- The reporting takes the side of perpetrator.

## EXAMPLE FIVE

**Article Title:** “Justice Department probes University of Montana Student Rape Reports”

**Source:** [The Chicago Tribune](#)

- There is no context provided as to why the Justice Department opens an investigation on the University of Montana, the police department, and prosecutors, other than there has been “a general heightened awareness of sexual assault activity on campus.”
- The phrase “sexual assault activity” diminishes the seriousness of the investigation and describes it as an everyday occurrence not worthy of serious attention. The fact that the numerous cases brought forth are not isolated incidents, but are part of a larger college campus rape culture, demands that this news be accurately detailed. The employment of such a phrase is of concern, particularly when in the following paragraph the reporter cites 11 student-related incidents.
- Victims’ stories are completely invisible in this report, yet the reporter manages to include a statement that two of the

players accused say they are innocent. Because the entire article is based on cases citing rape and/or sexual violence that has caught the attention of the Justice Department, the article should include more information on who and why the victims are reporting.



Photo Credit: [Wayne Wilkinson](#)

# GOOD REPORTING

Utilizing the tactics outlined in the Language and Gender-Based Violence section of this Toolkit, we have compiled articles from notable, popular and varied news sources that illustrate writing that adheres to the rules of fair and balanced reporting, from journalists that employ accurate language, contextualize events and terminology, and use public health model frames. This section provides specific examples that also undertake a more nuanced, survivor-centered frame to the issues surrounding rape and sexual violence.

Though we only include a few examples of good reporting, we urge journalists to look at the work of the following reporters for further examples of neutral and balanced news coverage: Elizabeth Brackett (*WTTW-TV Chicago Tonight*), Megan Carpentier (*Raw Story, Jezebel*), Allison Cuddy (*WBEZ*), Cassandra Gaddo (*TCW*), Jeff Kelly Lowenstein (*Hoy, The Dart Society*), Dawn Turner Trice (*The Chicago Tribune*), Megan Twohey (*Thomson Reuters*), and Mary Elizabeth Williams (*Salon*).

## EXAMPLE ONE

**Article Title:** “Stop Calling It a Sex Scandal”

**Source:** [Salon](#)

- Analyzes how inexact language sensationalizes violence and rape: “when the media uses the word ‘sex’ within a story about something where there are alleged victims of assault... It diminishes crime. It sensationalizes it. It removes the distinction between a normal, consensual act and violence. Sure, you could say that sex is an element of those stories. But you’d be missing the part about force and pathology. It’s like calling armed robbery a ‘shopping scandal.’”

**Article Title:** “After 22 years, Justice and Hope”

**Source:** [Today’s Chicago Woman](#)

*Important Note:* This article is an excellent reference for how journalists should conduct and frame questions for interviews with survivors of rape or sexual violence.

- The reporter uses accurate language from the outset: “In 1984, 17-year-old Liz Seccuro was brutally raped while unconscious by a fellow student at the University of Virginia.”

- The questions the reporter poses in her interview are relevant and refrain from inconsequential details: “Your rapist, William Beebe, served a little over 5 months in jail. Do you feel like it — the prosecution, the trial, the media coverage — was worth it? Why?”

## EXAMPLE TWO

**Article Title:** “As Sandusky trial progresses, what story are the media telling about child sexual abuse?”

**Source:** [BMSG](#)

*Important Note:* Rebecca Womack provides a tremendous analysis of the Sandusky trial and how media can and should cover news stories on rape and sexual violence.

- The reporter highlights how contextualizing a story leads to better reporting: “...journalists told a broader story this time, looking beyond Sandusky — an individual perpetrator — to

the larger social and cultural context for abuse. They explored Penn State’s negligence and pointed to the need for greater institutional accountability.”

- Emphasizes the crucial impact that employing accurate language has on the story: “The language she uses to describe child sexual abuse is more explicit than is typical in reporting on this issue. This is a good thing, since specificity helps convey the serious nature of the crime: ‘Sexual abuse’ is vague in comparison to the allegation that Sandusky ‘forced [boys] to give and receive oral sex, and attempt anal sex.’”
- Points out how a reporter can keep a neutral stance on a news article while bringing prevention into the frame: “Some articles even put forward specific ideas about how to prevent child sexual abuse in the future.”

## EXAMPLE THREE

**Article Title:** “Rape Culture in Gaming”

**Source:** [Shattersnipe](#)

*Important Note:* There is currently much debate surrounding how gaming culture contributes to rape culture. In many instances, reporting on rape and sexual violence is happening outside the sphere of mainstream media by advocates, scholars, and public thought intellectuals. Although this example is written by a blogger and not a reporter, this article presents a balanced outlook, with clear and precise definitions for the uninformed reader that also make a case for understanding how gender-based violence unfolds in digital spheres.

- The author expands upon the definition of rape culture by recognizing its complexities, and how it extends beyond the commonly held notion that rape culture refers to the physical space where a rape occurs: “rape is not the sole expression of rape culture... it refers to a culture — that is, a set of values, beliefs, rituals, social codes, language, laws and art — which can be said to promote sexual violence, and particularly sexual violence against women as perpetrated by straight men.”

- By employing precise language such as, “she has been threatened with rape, with death and with violence, and had her Wikipedia page vandalised with images of graphic pornography,” the author is acknowledging the abuse being committed against the victim, despite the fact that it is not physical.
- “How many of Sarkeesian’s attackers use rape language when gaming? How many of them have inferred that because it’s apparently OK to talk about raping other players in-game, it’s OK to issue rape threats against women out of game?” These types of questions shift the reader’s focus to the perpetrators’ actions and motives.

## EXAMPLE FOUR

**Article Title:** “Rapists Rape Because They Like Raping (The Dominique Strauss-Kahn Example)”

**Source:** [\*The Raw Story\*](#)

- The title of the article and the story itself focuses on the perpetrator.
- “Dominique Strauss-Kahn has been legally accused of rape” factually explains the event by using exact language.
- Includes statistics that help contextualize the perpetrator’s actions and behavior within a broader rape culture.



Photo Credit: [Devon Buchanan](#)

# STATISTICS

## DISCLAIMER ABOUT STATISTICS

“We want to emphasize here that the controversy over the prevalence estimates of rape is critical to address because we are talking about individual experiences. When rape prevalence is denied, or when rape is merely labeled “bad sex,” then the voices of rape victims are stifled, and their experiences denigrated. In the end, the data debate marginalizes rape victims, discounts their suffering, and encourages sexual assault. Furthermore, the effects on police officers, prosecutors, judges, and juries have been deleterious to handling rape cases aggressively as a violent crime.” ([CounterQuo, 2012](#))

## DEFINITIONS

There is a range of acts that fall under the category of ‘sexual violence’, yet there is no cultural or legal accepted agreement on a single definition. Therefore, different statistics on the prevalence of rape and other forms of sexual violence are utilized by varying people, often without clearly specifying what exactly was being measured. Our culture continues to grapple with tough questions about what constitutes “real” rape and “real” sexual violence”; in addition,

different people define the problem differently, using a variety of data based on their definitions of sexual violence.

## PROBLEMATIC ESTIMATES OF RAPE

Rape is an astoundingly underreported crime. Many studies that compile reports only made to law enforcement are subsequently used by the media to estimate rape prevalence, greatly underestimating the amount of rapes that actually occur. Reports to police agencies are not an accurate reflection of rape prevalence. It’s important to note that up until this year, the FBI has used an incredibly limiting definition of “rape”; inevitably this limits the accuracy of their reports. Starting in January 2013 the FBI will start to gather reports of any kind of penetration of another person, regardless of gender, without the victim’s consent, and will also include a broader definition of rape ([FBI, 2012](#)). In addition, sexual violence is widespread in the United States. Despite how effective our research may be, findings will never fully and appropriately represent the heavy toll of this violence, the recurring impacts of victimization, and the lifelong process toward health and healing.

## RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Survivors might be reluctant to report their victimization experience to researchers, particularly ones unknown or recently introduced to them. Underserved and at-risk persons (those who are involved in the sex trade, without stable homes, in long-term abusive relationships, in prison, hospitals, nursing homes, mental health institutions, drug treatment facilities or other controlled environments) might not have access to a telephone, stable address, or resources that support them in identifying their assault. Since men and women in these settings are at higher risk of sexual assault their exclusion from the research is important to note. In addition, we must remember the inconsistency in our culture's definitions of "rape" and "sexual violence"; these discrepancies might play a role in accurately reporting survivors' experiences.

There is also far less research done surrounding sexual violence within male and LGBTQ-identified communities. Lack of research paired with cultural stigmas create a culture that does not support survivors to report their assault and in turn, does not provide adequate resources to them. On the other hand, it's crucial to be critical of population-specific research surrounding sexual violence. Often explanations about these studies lack contextual insight.

Most recently, the New York Times reported about the high rates of sexual violence among women in American Indian communities. The author attributes these high rates to a "breakdown in the family structure, a lack of discussion about sexual violence and alcohol abuse" ([New York Times, 2012](#)). Yet what the article fails to mention is that the majority of survivors are raped by men from outside the reservation ([NPR, 2007](#)).

Journalists have many responsibilities when publishing work surrounding sexual violence. Ensuring the clarity of statistics' contexts is just one piece of the much larger puzzle.

## CHICAGO AND ILLINOIS STATISTICS

- In 2009 there were 5,316 rapes reported to police in Illinois ([Illinois State Police Crime Report, 2010](#)). *Note: this statistic only records "criminal sexual assault" reports. This does not include sexual abuse.*
- In 2009 there were only 1,272 arrests made as a result of criminal sexual assault reports. ([Illinois State Police Crime Report, 2010](#))



- More than 70% of sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows. ([CDC, 2011](#))
- In 2010, 18,349 adult, adolescent and child survivors of sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and sexual harassment were served by the sexual assault crisis centers and hotlines of ICASA. ([CDC, 2011](#))
- In 2011, 551 victims/survivors were supported in the ER by Rape Victim Advocates. ([RVA 2012](#))
- In 2010, approximately 930,000 women were raped in Illinois. 2,526,000 women were victims of sexual violence other than rape. ([CDC, 2011](#))

## NATIONWIDE STATISTICS ON RAPE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- Nearly 1 in 5 women have been raped in their lifetime while 1 in 71 men have been raped in their lifetime. ([CDC, 2010](#))
- An estimated 21,840,000 women in the United States have experienced rape in their lifetime. ([CDC, 2010](#))
- An estimated 1,270,000 women in the United States experienced rape in the last year. ([CDC, 2010](#))
- An estimated 53,174,000 women in the United States were victims to other forms of sexual violence in their lifetime. ([CDC, 2010](#))
- An estimated 1,581,000 men in the United States have experienced rape in their lifetime. ([CDC, 2010](#))

- An estimated number of 25,130,000 men in the United States were victims to other forms of sexual violence in their lifetime. ([CDC, 2010](#))
- In 2010, only 13.8% of rapes were committed by a stranger (about 1 in 7 victims.) Half of victims (50.4%) were raped by an acquaintance, while 43.0% were raped by an intimate partner. ([Archambalt and Lisak, 2009](#))
- In 2010, 686,000 women were raped by an Intimate Partner. ([Liz Claiborne, Inc. and Family Violence Prevention Fund study on teen dating violence, June 2009](#))
- Nearly 1 in 10 women in the United States has been raped by an intimate partner in her lifetime. ([U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000](#))
- 54% of all rapes go unreported. (Chen, Black, and Saltzman 2011) Important to note: This statistic varies tremendously given the source. For example: “only between 16% and 19% of rapes are reported to the police.” ([National Center for Policy Analysis, 1999](#))
- 2% - 8% of police reports of rape are proven false. ([RAINN, 2012](#))
- Nearly 1 in 3 teens who have been in relationships have experienced the most serious forms of dating violence and abuse including sexual abuse, physical abuse, or threats of physical harm to a partner or self. ([Campbell, 2006](#))
- Only 6% of rapists will ever spend a day in jail. 15 of 16 rapists walk free. ([Aosved and Long, 2006](#))
- Survivors who have the assistance of an advocate in the emergency room report less distress from their medical experience, have significantly fewer negative interpersonal interactions and are more likely to have a police report taken. ([Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault, 2009](#))
- Research shows that the all forms of oppression are interrelated and connected to the acceptance of rape myths, with sexism having the highest overlap. Sexual violence can be combated with information, education and action. Confronting sexism, prejudice and oppression affects the power dynamics that feed into our rape culture. ([Chicago PD, 2010](#))

- 1 in 3 women around the world will be raped, beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime.

([UNIFEM report, 2003](#))

*Important disclaimer about this statistic:* Unfortunately, this statistic has been repeated to read, “1 in 3 women will be raped [insert time frame here].” This manipulation is incredibly harmful and though its origin cannot be traced, the “1 in 3” movement has repeatedly found itself on advocacy websites, counseling groups, and the like. Correct and current research finds much lower prevalence of lifetime sexual assault; exaggerating this statistic is harmful to the movement, to the resources we provide, and to all survivors.

to keep this in mind while interpreting statistics in relation to rape/sexual assault as they do not accurately portray the prevalence of sexual assaults in the U.S.

- 3,158 military sexual assaults were reported in 2010. However, the Department of Defense estimates that the actual number of sexual assaults that occurred in the military was closer to 19,000. ([SWAN, 2012](#))
- Approximately 55% of women and 38% of men report that their assailant sexually harassed or stalked them prior to the incident of rape or sexual assault. ([SWAN, 2012](#))
- Military sexual trauma is the leading cause of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among women veterans. ([SWAN, 2012](#))
- 39% of homeless women veterans screened positive for Military Sexual Trauma (MST). ([SWAN, 2011](#))
- In 2010, 108,121 veterans screened positive for MST and 45.7% of these survivors were men. ([SWAN, 2012](#))

## RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MILITARY/ MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

Rape, sexual assault and sexual abuse are the most underreported crimes in the U.S. According to the Justice Department’s [National Crime Victimization Survey](#), 46% of rapes/sexual assaults are unreported to the police. In the case of rape/sexual assault in the military, that number is even higher with 86.5% of rape/sexual assault cases are unreported (Department of Defense, 2011). It is important

- Women and men in the military experience difficulty receiving disability compensation for MST-related PTSD. Evidence indicates that men receive higher rates of compensation than women. ([SWAN, 2012](#))
- 80% of active duty members reported hearing offensive speech, derogatory names, and jokes and remarks about non-heterosexual service members. ([SWAN, 2011](#))
- 37% of active service members reported having witnessed or experienced an event or behavior of harassment based on perceived sexual orientation. ([SWAN, 2011](#))
- 26% of transgender veterans have experienced physical assault and 16% have been raped. ([SWAN, 2011](#))

— only the reported ones. Most victims' rights organizations use a combination of statistics from the Department of Justice and surveys in order to get a more accurate count of incidents of these crimes. The Chicago Police Department publishes quarterly statistical reports, but unfortunately the Circuit Court of Cook County does not (however, you may write to them to obtain statistics).

- One in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime. ([National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2007](#))
- The majority (73%) of family violence victims are female. Females were 84% of spousal abuse victims and 86% of abuse victims at the hands of a boyfriend. ([U.S. Department of Justice, 2005](#))
- Boys who witness domestic violence are twice as likely to abuse their own partners and children when they become adults. ([National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2007](#))
- Females who are 20-24 years of age are at the greatest risk of nonfatal intimate partner violence. ([National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2007](#))

## LOCAL AND NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STATISTICS

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assaults crimes are the most underreported and there is a reliance on police and justice department data that often does not reflect the actual amount of incidents

- Most cases of domestic violence are never reported to the police. ([National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2007](#))
- In 2011, the Chicago Police Department received 188,977 domestic-related calls. ([Chicago PD, 2011](#))
- Of those 188,977 calls in 2011, 152,751 resulted in arrests. ([Chicago PD, 2011](#))
- According to a [2008 Chicago Tribune article](#) about domestic violence convictions, only about 17% of domestic violence cases in Cook County resulted in a conviction.

- In 2009, 33 percent of Illinois high school students reported having been in a physical fight at least one time during the previous 12 months. More than 10 percent of Illinois students (11.5 percent) reported having been in a physical fight at their school. ([U.S. Department of Education, 2010](#))
- In 2010, 7.4 percent of American students reported being physically forced to have sexual intercourse against their will. # Nine percent of Chicago students reported being physically forced to have sexual intercourse against their will. ([CDC, 2010](#))
- A recent U.S. study found that nearly one in six adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 surveyed were sexually victimized in the past year, and more than one in four had been sexually victimized during their lifetimes. ([U.S. Department of Justice, 2009](#))
- Ninety-six percent of people who sexually abused a child were male, and more than three-quarters of perpetrators were adults. Family members were the perpetrators in 34 percent of law enforcement reports against juveniles. ([U.S. Department of Justice, 2000](#))

## ON YOUTH

- There are 23,438 sex offenders registered in Illinois. Of those, 1,992 are juvenile sex offenders. ([Illinois State Police, 2011](#))
- In 2010, 18,349 survivors of sexual assault and sexual harassment were served by the sexual assault crisis centers and hotlines of the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault. ([Illinois Attorney General, 2009](#))

- Girls are abused three times more often than boys. Boys are more likely to die or be seriously injured by their abuse.

([U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1996](#))

- Sexual, physical, and verbal abuse before the age of 18 are all correlated with higher runaway rates. Children who are sexually abused are more than twice as likely to run away from home (17 percent of sexually abused children vs. 7.9 percent of those who were not sexually abused).

([National Runaway Switchboard, 2011](#))

- Across the country, women age 12 or older endure an average 131,950 completed rapes, 98,970 attempted rapes, and 135,550 sexual assaults each year. ([YWCA, 2010](#))

## IN CUSTODY

- From 1992 to 2002, there was a 173% increase in the number of women in Illinois state prisons. ([Civic Research Institute, 2006](#))

- Over half of the women committed to the Illinois Youth Center at Warrenville between 1993 and 2002 had experienced either physical or sexual abuse before their incarceration. ([ICJIA, 2003](#))

- Nationally, the number of female prisoners rose at twice the rate (4.8 percent) of the number of male prisoners (2.7 percent). ([U.S. Department of Justice, 2007](#))

- In a 2007 survey of American inmates, the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that 60,500 inmates held in federal and state prisons had been sexually abused in the previous year alone. ([Just Detention International, 2009](#))

- A 2006 study found that nearly 75 percent of male and 57 percent of female prison rape survivors were sexually abused more than once, and 30 percent of survivors endured six or more assaults. ([Struckman-Johnson, 2006](#))

## PREVALENCE OF RAPE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AMONGST QUEER AND FEMALE-IDENTIFIED (TRANSGENDER WOMEN) PERSONS

One of the major misconceptions of intimate partner violence within the queer community is that it does not happen. This is simply not true. In addition to same sex intimate partner violence being under-reported, survivors are often forced to confront homophobia when reporting the incident or even when talking about it with friends and family. This complicates the process to recovery and healing when information on this issue is difficult to find, and even more difficult to find reputable sources that are affirming and supportive of LGBTQ survivors.

Another complication is that rape can be used as a weapon for a hate crime. From the National Center for Victims of Crime: “Unfortunately, incidents of anti-gay violence also include forcible rape, either oral or

anal. Attackers frequently use verbal harassment and name-calling during such a sexual assault. Given the context of coercion, however, such technically homosexual acts seem to imply no homosexuality on the part of the offenders. The victim serves, both physically and symbolically, as a “vehicle for the sexual status needs of the offenders in the course of recreational violence.” (Harry, 1992)

It is imperative to break the myth that intimate partner violence does not exist within the LGBTQ community, and reporting on the issue, in a way that supports survivors, is a way to provide visibility and support. For more information on gendered racist sexual violence please see: [Incite National Sexual Assault Toolkit](#).

# LOCAL AND NATIONAL RESOURCES

The Taskforce brought together dozens of organizations throughout 2010 to help determine what it will take to end violence against girls and young women in Chicago. Though we desire to provide a complete published list of all of the organizations that serve as fundamental resources, we are unable to. However, we urge you to look at our online page to see which organizations have collaborated and/or endorsed the Taskforce's projects and recommendations, and to learn about their important work.

## [A Long Walk Home](#)

Founded in 2003, A Long Walk Home, Inc. (ALWH) is a 501 (c) non-profit that uses art therapy and the visual and performing arts to end violence against girls and women. ALWH features the testimonies and art by survivors and their allies in order to provide safe and entertaining forums through which the public can learn about healing from and preventing gender violence.

## [Between Friends](#)

Between Friends is a non-profit agency dedicated to breaking the cycle of domestic violence and building a community free of abuse.

## [Broadway Youth Center](#)

The Broadway Youth Center is a program of Howard Brown Health Center and our community partners, offering comprehensive services to youth, ages 12-24 including a safe space for young people experiencing homelessness.

## [Catharsis Productions](#)

Catharsis Productions reduces interpersonal violence by producing artistically innovative and research supported programming that challenges oppressive attitudes, transforms behavior, and inspires communities to create a world without violence.

## [Center on Halsted](#)

Center on Halsted is the Midwest's most comprehensive community center dedicated to building and strengthening the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community. More than 1,000 community members visit the Center every day, located in the heart of Chicago's Lakeview Neighborhood.



### **Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation**

CAASE addresses the culture, institutions, and individuals that perpetrate, profit from, or support sexual exploitation. Our work includes prevention, policy reform, community engagement, and legal services.

### **Chicago Battered Women's Network**

The Network is a collaborative membership organization dedicated to improving the lives of those impacted by domestic violence through education, public policy and advocacy, and the connection of community members to direct service providers.

### **Chicago Women's Health Center**

Chicago Women's Health Center a unique collective working together to provide affordable, compassionate and collaborative gynecological and mental health care to women and trans people in the Chicago area. Our health care providers, counselors and health educators share a strong commitment to the vision our founders imagined in 1975 when they formed CWHC: A world in which all people have access to comprehensive, affordable and sensitive health care.

### **Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence**

The Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) is a not for profit, membership organization that works to eliminate violence against women and their children by promoting the eradication of domestic violence throughout Illinois; ensuring the safety of survivors, their access to services, and their freedom of choice; holding abusers accountable for the violence they perpetrate; and encouraging the development of victim-sensitive laws, policies and procedures across all systems that impact survivors.

### **INCITE!**

INCITE! is a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and our communities through direct action, critical dialogue, and grassroots organizing.

### **Pillars**

Pillars keeps our communities healthy and strong by providing quality, comprehensive, community-based social services for over 10,000 individuals and families annually in 36 communities who are facing challenges and crisis. Pillars utilizes a community wraparound approach, offering a wide spectrum of fully-integrated services that

collectively offer the strongest possible safety net. Fees are collected on a sliding scale. Many services are bilingual and all are provided without regard to race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, income level, gender, age, or disability.

### **Mujeres Latinas En Accion**

Mujeres Latinas en Acción empowers Latinas through providing services which reflect their values and culture and being an advocate on the issues that make a difference in their lives.

### **RAINN**

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization and was named one of "America's 100 Best Charities" by Worth magazine. RAINN created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline (800.656.HOPE and online.rainn.org).

### **Rape Victim Advocates**

RVA is an Illinois not-for-profit organization made up of many individuals with two primary goals: to assure that survivors of sexual assault are treated with dignity and compassion; and to affect changes in the way the legal system, medical institutions and society as a whole respond to survivors.

### **Roger's Park Young Women's Action Team**

The YWAT is a youth-led, adult-supported social change project that empowers women to take action on issues that affect their lives (particularly issues of violence against girls and young women). The YWAT believes that girls and young women should be free from violence. We believe that through collective action, consciousness-raising, and organizing we can end violence against girls and young women.

### **The Voices and Faces Project**

The Voices and Faces Project is a national documentary project created to give voice and face to survivors of sexual violence, offering a sense of solidarity to those who have lived through rape and abuse while raising awareness of how this human rights and public health issue impacts victims, families and communities.

### **Women, Action, Media!**

WAM! connects and supports media makers, activists, academics and funders working to advance women's media participation, ownership and representation. Our work is part of an advocacy movement for gender justice in media.

## YWCA

The YWCA is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all.

## Young Women's Empowerment Project

The Young Women's Empowerment Project (YWEP) is a member based social justice organizing project that is led by and for young people of color who have current or former experience in the sex trade and street economies. Everybody who is on staff and has decision making power at YWEP was once a member here and is between the ages of 12-24 years old.



Photo credit: [Thomas Leuthard](#)

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