

# Reporting Sexual Violence: Recommendations to Journalists

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These recommendations will help reporters tell an accurate, newsworthy story, in combination with the most up-to-date New Zealand statistics, and a list of experts in sexual violence who are happy to provide media commentary.

**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.

## Good news reports.....

### 1. Describe sexual violence accurately

- ⤴ Avoid euphemisms and common misconceptions
- ⤴ Provide accurate information about:
  - ⤴ the severity of sexual violence and the impacts on survivors
  - ⤴ sexual violence as a broad and prevalent social problem
  - ⤴ laws which protect against child sexual abuse and adult sexual assault



### 2. Discourage sexual offending

- ⤴ Describe sexual offending behaviour patterns accurately
- ⤴ Provide contact details for specialist agencies who work with people with harmful sexual behaviour, so they can get help to stop this behaviour
- ⤴ Do not make excuses for sexual violence or give undue weight to those who do
- ⤴ Tell prevention stories of sexual violence being stopped by community members
- ⤴ Describe accurately cases where the Police choose not to charge someone accused of sexual offences. They have not been “cleared” of rape or child sexual abuse



### 3. Respect and support survivors of sexual violence

- ⤴ Encourage survivors to seek help and report sexual violence
- ⤴ Provide contact details for survivor support agencies to protect and help survivors and their families
- ⤴ Avoid victim-blaming language which increases social stigma and shame for survivors
- ⤴ Use graphic content warnings to protect and help survivors and their families



Our media audit revealed six key areas where news reporting of sexual violence could be more accurate. To increase accuracy, contact the experts over the page.

### **1: Sexual violence is not “just sex”**

Sexual violence is a crime, and is harmful to survivors, their families and our communities. Sexual violence does not involve consent.

### **2: It is rare for a survivor to lie about being raped**

New Zealand Police categorise 8% of sexual violence cases reported to them as false complaints, which is lower than many other crimes.<sup>1</sup> Sexual violence is the fifth most common offence in New Zealand, but most survivors do not tell anyone because of fear, shame and beliefs they will be blamed.

### **3: Violent stranger danger sexual violence is rare**

Most sexual violence involves pressure, coercion and threats, often by people known to the survivor, and often in their own home or the home of the accused. The use of weapons is unusual. Sexual abuse or rape does not always leave physical injuries.

### **4: Unfortunately, rapists do not stand out**

People who perpetrate sexual violence come from all racial, cultural, age and socio-economic groups. They are more likely to be male. Reporters cannot expect they will be easily identifiable as rapists in the rest of their lives, where they may well be good employees, neighbours and family members.

### **5: Being raped is worse than being accused of rape**

Experiences of sexual violence can be extremely traumatic for survivors. Media articles often focus on the consequences faced by those accused of sexual violence rather than impacts on survivors. This can make the consequences for the accused – even when they are found guilty – seem unfair or too severe.

### **6: Sexual violence has no excuses**

Most sexual violence is perpetrated by people known to the survivor. The responsibility for sexual violence lies with the perpetrators of the crime. Sexual violence happens when one person decides what they want is more important than what the other person wants.

**Sexual violence** can include any sexual act, attempted sexual act, sexual harassment, sexual coercion and sexual contact with force.

**Lack of consent is crucial to sexual violence.** Physical resistance or protest is not required to prove lack of consent.

**Child sexual abuse** is involving a child or young person in sexual activities, touching them in a sexual way, or using a child for sexual gratification. Children cannot give consent to sexual activities under the age of 16 years.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Women’s Affairs (2009), *Attrition in the New Zealand Criminal Justice System*.

# Expert Commentary

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These sexual violence experts are happy to give media comment from a range of perspectives:

## Te Ohaakii a Hine – National Network Ending Sexual Violence Together

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- **Te Owai Gemmell**  
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- **Tania Blomfield**  
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## Survivor Advocates

- **Louise Nicholas**  
National Survivor Advocate  
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- **Ken Clearwater**  
Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse Trust  
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## National Rape Crisis

- **Andrea Black**  
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## New Zealand Police

- **Detective Inspector Tusha Penny**  
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## Doctors for Sexual Abuse Care

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## Research - Sexual Offenders

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## Research - Sexual Violence Survivors

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# New Zealand Facts and Figures

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## Sexual violence is common

- 1 in 3 women and 1 in 10 men report they experience unwanted and distressing sexual contact over their lifetime. Much of this will be child sexual abuse<sup>2</sup>

## Sexual violence is serious

- Common impacts on survivors include flashbacks; avoiding people, places or things that remind you of what happened; sleep disturbances; hypervigilance; and frequent 'zoning out'. Sexual violence is correlated with almost every indicator of deprivation and poor health<sup>3</sup>
- Girls who experience child sexual abuse are more likely to be re-victimised as adults<sup>4</sup>
- Sexual offences have the most negative impacts on victims of all crimes<sup>5</sup>
- Sexual violence is the most costly crime per incident to individuals and society. New Zealand Treasury estimate the costs to the New Zealand economy at \$1.2 billion each year<sup>6</sup>

## Sexual violence is most likely to be committed by someone you know<sup>7</sup>

- More than 1 in 3 sexual offences are committed by current partners; 1 in 4 by friends; 1 in 10 committed by boyfriends; and 1 in 20 by a work colleague<sup>8</sup>
- Just 16% of adult sexual violence reported to the Police is perpetrated by strangers.<sup>9</sup>
- 90% of child sexual abuse is committed by someone known to the family

## Sexual violence can be perpetrated by, or against, anyone regardless of age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or ability

- Adult sexual assault is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women. Figures reported to New Zealand Police indicate 99% of adult sexual violence is perpetrated by men.<sup>10</sup>

## New Zealand Police believe they are aware of only 10% of sexual violence<sup>11</sup>

- Sexual violence is the fifth most common offence in New Zealand, but the crime least commonly reported to New Zealand Police<sup>12</sup>
- Most survivors do not report sexual violence because of fear, shame and beliefs they will be blamed. Cases in the criminal justice system are the tip of the iceberg.

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<sup>2</sup> Mayhew, P. and Reilly, J., (2007), Ministry of Justice, *The New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey 2006*.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Justice (2009), *Te Toiora Mata Tauherenga – Report of the Taskforce for Action on Sexual Violence*.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs, (2012), *Lightning Does Strike Twice: Preventing Sexual Revictimisation*.

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Justice (2010), *The New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey: Main Findings Report*.

<sup>6</sup> Roper, T. and Thompson, A., (2006), *Estimating the costs of crime in New Zealand in 2003/04*, New Zealand Treasury Working Paper 06/04.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Justice (2006), *The New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey: Main Findings Report*.

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Justice (2009), *Te Toiora mata Tauherenga – Report of the Taskforce for Action on Sexual Violence*.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs (2009), *Attrition in the New Zealand Criminal Justice System*.

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs (2009), *Attrition in the New Zealand Criminal Justice System*.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Justice (2009), *Te Toiora mata Tauherenga – Report of the Taskforce for Action on Sexual Violence*.

<sup>12</sup> Mayhew, P. and Reilly, J., (2007), Ministry of Justice, *The New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey 2006*.