

Press Kit for Media Professionals: Reporting on **Domestic Violence**

Dear Media Professional:

The South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (SCCADVASA) is committed to advancing a society in which domestic violence is not tolerated. As a member of South Carolina's media, you can help as you report on this crime in our state.

This press kit provides domestic violence resources, facts, and tips on interviewing survivors of domestic violence. Unfortunately many myths about domestic violence are still prevalent in our culture and society and those myths may stand in the way of victims and perpetrators of this crime from getting the help they need. Domestic violence is not a "family matter" nor is it a "private issue."

As we have sadly seen this past year, domestic violence is very dangerous, and can lead to injury and homicide to the victim, the perpetrator, and even additional friends or family members. Victims and perpetrators of domestic violence can be young or old, straight or gay, wealthy or poor — it is a crime that doesn't discriminate.

By educating yourself on the dynamics and facts about domestic violence in South Carolina and the nation, you can help inform and educate the public about this crime and help advance a society that will not tolerate domestic violence.

SCCADVASA is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization and is the only organization of its kind addressing sexual violence issues statewide. SCCADVASA represents the 23 direct service domestic violence and sexual assault advocacy programs statewide. SCCADVASA provides training and resources, and fosters a sense of community and statewide support.

SCCADVASA believes that through social change we can influence attitudes, beliefs and standards that will change people's behavior from ignoring, excusing, condoning and even encouraging domestic violence to taking action, intervening, and promoting respect, safety and equality.

Thank you for your help in increasing public awareness and education.

Regards,



Sara Barber
Executive Director

What is Domestic Violence?

The National Domestic Violence Hotline identifies domestic violence as a repetitive pattern of behaviors to maintain power and control over an intimate partner. These are behaviors that physically harm, arouse fear, prevent a partner from doing what they wish or force them to behave in ways they do not want. Abuse includes the use of physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional abuse and economic deprivation. Many of these different forms of abuse can be going on at any one time.

Batterers use a variety of tools and behaviors to maintain power and control over their partners. Types of abuse include, but are not limited to (National Domestic Violence Hotline):

Physical Abuse

- Pulling your hair, punching, slapping, kicking, biting or choking you
- Using weapons to threaten to hurt you, or actually hurting you with weapons
- Trapping you in your home or keeps you from leaving
- Preventing you from calling the police or seeking medical attention
- Abandoning you in unfamiliar places

Emotional Abuse

- Calling you names, insulting you or continually criticizing you
- Trying to isolate you from family or friends
- Threatening to hurt you, the children, your family or your pets
- Humiliating you in any way
- Blaming you for the abuse

Financial Abuse

- Giving an allowance and closely watching how you spend it or demanding receipts for purchases
- Preventing you from viewing or having access to bank accounts
- Forbidding you to work or limiting the hours that you can work
- Using funds from children's savings accounts without your permission
- Living in your home but refusing to work or contribute to the household

Sexual Abuse and Coercion

- Forcing or manipulating you into to having sex or performing sexual acts
- Involving other people in sexual activities with you against your will
- Ignoring your feelings regarding sex
- Forcing you to watch pornography
- Purposefully trying to pass on a sexually transmitted disease to you

It is important to focus stories on the actions of the batterer, rather than on those of the victim. Focusing on the victim's behavior or other details takes the attention away from the true cause of the domestic violence--the perpetrator's choice.

Characteristics of Batterers

- Batterers feel entitled to use coercive tactics and violence against their partners.
- Batterers will often claim to be the victim and will blame the true victim for the violence.
- Batterers are not out of control, but rather batter to control.
- Batterers often appear very personable, calm, kind, even sympathetic.
- Quick to commit, need to be in a relationship
- Excessively jealous
- Exhibit controlling behavior, often claiming that it is for their partner's own safety
- Have unrealistic expectations or demands
- Keep their partner isolated from family and friends

Domestic Violence is about much more than physical violence. Perpetrators will use many tactics to maintain control over the victim. These tactics include:

Using Intimidation

- Making her afraid by using looks, actions, gestures
- Smashing things
- Destroying her property
- Abusing pets
- Displaying weapons

Using Emotional Abuse

- Putting her down
- Making her feel bad about herself
- Calling her names
- Making her think she's crazy
- Playing mind games
- Humiliating her
- Making her feel guilty

Using Isolation

- Controlling what she does, who she sees and talks to, what she reads, where she goes
- Limiting her outside involvement
- Using jealousy to justify actions

Minimizing, Denying and Blaming

- Making light of the abuse and not taking her concerns about it seriously
- Saying the abuse didn't happen
- Shifting responsibility for abusive behavior
- Saying she caused it

Using Children

- Making her feel guilty about the children
- Using the children to relay messages
- Using visitation to harass her
- Threatening to take the children away

Using Male Privilege

- Treating her like a servant
- Making all the big decisions
- Acting like the “Master of the Castle”
- Being the one to define men’s and women’s roles

Using Economic Abuse

- Preventing her from getting or keeping a job
- Making her ask for money
- Giving her an allowance
- Taking her money
- Not letting her know about or have access to family income

Using Coercion and Threats

- Making and/or carrying out threats to do something to hurt her
- Threatening to leave her, to commit suicide, to report her to welfare
- Making her drop charges
- Making her do illegal things

Domestic Violence in South Carolina

In 2014, SCCADVASA's domestic violence member organizations across the state provided shelter to approximately **2,729 individuals**. They also provided non-shelter services-including counseling, court advocacy, and support services- to about **15,786 individuals**, and answered over **20,993 hotline calls**.

The Attorney General's office has noted that more than **36,000 victims** report a domestic violence incident to law enforcement statewide annually. This is staggering considering that many victims never call or make a report to law enforcement.

South Carolina ranks **second in the nation** for women killed by men according to the Violence Policy Center. Of the homicide victims who knew their offenders, **68%** were murdered by a husband, common-law husband, ex-husband, or boyfriend.

Domestic Violence Nationally

One in 4 women have been the victims of severe physical violence by an intimate partner, while **1 in 7 men** have experienced the same.

Domestic violence is the leading cause of injuries to women age fifteen to forty-four, more common than auto accidents, mugging, and cancer combined. (*U.S. Surgeon General*)

Female intimate partners are more likely to be murdered with a firearm than all other means combined (*Violence Policy Center*)

The costs of intimate partner rape, physical assault and stalking exceed \$5.8 billion each year — nearly \$4.1 billion of which is for direct medical and mental health care services.

On average, 3 women are killed by a current or former intimate partner every day. (*Bureau of Justice Statistics*)

Females ages 18 to 24 and 25 to 34 generally experienced the highest rates of intimate partner violence.

30 to 60% of perpetrators of intimate partner violence **also abuse children** in the household.

One in 10 high school students has experienced physical violence from a dating partner in the past year.

Ten Important Things to Remember About Domestic Violence

- The batterer's use of violence is a **choice**.
- Batterers continue to use violence because they are often not held accountable.
- Many batterers repeat their pattern of abuse and control in all of their past and future intimate relationships.
- Men are critical in the movement to end violence against women. Holding other men accountable will help reduce domestic violence rates.
- A batterer's manipulation and violence often escalates when the victim attempts to leave. Most domestic violence murders occur after the victim has separated—or attempted to separate—from the batterer.
- Leaving will not necessarily keep children away from the violent parent. 70% of batterers who fight for custody will win.
- Leaving does not ensure the victim's or the children's safety.
- Domestic violence is not caused by the victim's behavior, batterer's illness, or by genetics.
- Although witnessing domestic violence as a child may contribute to the propensity to batter as an adult, it is not a cause. Many children who grow up in abusive homes do not batter as adults.
- Domestic violence is not caused by the batterer's culture, anger, the use of alcohol or drugs, financial struggles, or by stress. Violence is a choice the batterer makes.

Covering Domestic Violence

Attitude, tone and expressions of concern

When approaching victims of violence or catastrophe, remember to switch gears out of investigative reporter mode. Investigating a scandal or corruption often requires being relentless and finding the courage to ask the toughest questions. But when dealing with victims of violence or catastrophe, getting a good story - or getting the story at all - may well depend on your ability to develop rapport and trust.

Correct Language

The language you use is important. Media helps shape public opinion. Your reporting contributes to your readers' understanding of what domestic violence is, whom it affects, and how a community responds to the issue. When reporting on domestic violence cases, avoid language that:

- trivializes (lovers' quarrel, hubby, gal pal);
- sensationalizes (jealous rage, love triangle, love gone wrong);
- implies the violence was mutual if it wasn't (i.e., domestic dispute turned violent);
- attributes the violence to some outside circumstance (i.e., he had been drinking a lot before the attack or he was upset over their recent break-up) – correlations can be appropriate, but avoid implications of causation;
- blames the victim (i.e., If she had left, she would still be alive);
- is not clear regarding the context of the violence. Use the phrase "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence" in your reporting.

If you include quotes in your story (i.e., from family, friends, or neighbors) that contain problematic language, also include quotes from a domestic violence expert to help dispel popular myths and misconceptions about domestic violence.

Understanding Sources

Who you use as sources is important. Reporters often use police as primary sources in domestic violence stories. Neighbors, friends, and family members are often used as well. Domestic violence advocates, however, are not often used as sources despite the fact that they can offer important insight into domestic violence stories.

Police as sources:

- Follow up with them as the case progresses to be sure you are getting up-to-date information.
- Police are limited in what they can say and usually can only speak about the incident at hand, not any previous abuse.

• Neighbors, friends, and family members as sources:

- They are often biased due to their relationship with the victim or offender.
- Despite their biases, their statements about the couple or the relationship between the victim and offender are often presented as fact. While they can provide their opinions regarding history and context, as with any opinions, they should not be presented as fact.

• Domestic Violence advocates as sources:

- Can provide information about services available in your area.
- Can help explain dynamics that might seem inexplicable to others (i.e., why an abuser is friendly to neighbors but abuses his intimate partner).
- Can help you put the case you are reporting on into context.

Interview Questions

When questioning a victim of domestic violence, please consider the following:

- Do not refer to the domestic violence as a “relationship problem.” Domestic violence is a tool that a batterer uses to keep a victim under his/her control. It is not a mutual way of handling problems in the relationship.
- Do not focus on why the victim of the domestic violence did not leave, but on why the batterer continued to choose to abuse.
- In addition to physical trauma, individuals who have been victims of domestic violence may feel guilty or responsible for the abuse, question their own judgment, and/or feel betrayed.
- Sexual violence between married spouses is a crime and can be one of the means by which a domestic violence perpetrator dominates and humiliates his or her victim.

For example, avoid questions about:

- What the victim did to provoke the attack. Domestic violence is a system of power and control — it is not a crime of passion or anger. Asking what the victim did to provoke the attack is a type of victim blaming.
- Whether the victim was drinking alcohol or taking drugs at the time of the assault, unless it is directly at issue in the case. Domestic violence is a crime. Period. A victim whose house was burgled wouldn't be quizzed as to whether he or she was intoxicated prior to the crime.

SCCADVASA's Domestic Violence Member Organizations

National Domestic Violence Toll-Free 24/7 Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

CASA/Family Systems

Hotline Phone: 800-298-7228
Counties Served: Orangeburg, Calhoun
and Bamberg

Citizens Opposed to Domestic Abuse

Hotline Phone: 843-770-1070
and 800-868-CODA (2632)
Counties Served: Beaufort, Jasper,
Colleton and Hampton

Cumbee Center to Assist Abused Persons

Hotline Phone: 803-641-4162
Counties Served: Aiken, Barnwell and
Allendale

Family Justice Center

Hotline Phone: 843-546-3926
Counties Served: Horry and Georgetown

Laurens County SAFE Home

Hotline Phone: 866-598-5932
Counties Served: Laurens, Saluda and
Abbeville

MEG's House

Hotline Phone: 800-447-7992
Counties Served: McCormick, Edgefield
and Greenwood

My Sister's House, Inc.

Hotline Phone: 843-744-3242 and 800-
273-4673
Counties Served: Charleston, Berkeley
and Dorchester

Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Assault

Hotline Phone: 800-273-1820 and 843-
669-4600
Counties Served: Florence, Darlington,
Marion, Chesterfield, Marlboro, Dillon and
Williamsburg

Safe Harbor, Inc.

Hotline Phone: 800-291-2139
Counties Served: Greenville, Oconee,
Pickens and Anderson

SAFE Homes - Rape Crisis Coalition

Hotline Phone: 800-273-5066
Counties Served: Spartanburg, Cherokee
and Union

Safe Passage, Inc.

Hotline Phone: 800-659-0977
Counties Served: York, Chester and
Lancaster

Sistercare, Inc.

Hotline Phone: 803-765-9428 and 800-
637-7606
Counties Served: Richland, Lexington,
Newberry, Fairfield and Kershaw

YWCA of the Upper Lowlands, Inc.

Hotline Phone: 803-775-2763
Counties Served: Sumter, Clarendon and
Lee

About SCCADVASA

Who We Are

The South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (SCCADVASA) is a statewide coalition made up of the 23 sexual assault and domestic violence advocacy programs in South Carolina. Since 1981, SCCADVASA has been a leader in representing the critical needs of survivors and their families. Our dedicated staff works to make the community aware of issues, problems, policy and legislation regarding sexual assault and domestic violence.

Our Mission

The mission of SCCADVASA is to end domestic violence and sexual assault in South Carolina by influencing public policy, advocating for social change, and building the capacity of member programs, allied organizations and communities across the state.

Our Vision

SCCADVASA is the leader in directing efforts to eradicate domestic violence and sexual assault in South Carolina.

Our Staff

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