

# Press Kit For Media Professionals: Reporting on **Sexual Assault**

Dear Media Professionals,

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

This press kit provides sexual assault resources, facts, and tips on interviewing survivors of sexual violence. Unfortunately many myths about sexual assault are still prevalent in our culture and society and those myths may stand in the way of sexual assault victims getting the help and resources they need. Rape and sexual assault victims are 90 percent more likely to be attacked by someone they know than a stranger. Victims and perpetrators of sexual assault can be young or old, male or female, straight or gay, wealthy or poor — sexual assault is a crime that doesn't discriminate.

By educating yourself on the dynamics and facts about sexual assault 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 sexual 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 sexual assault and domestic violence 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 sexual 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  
South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

## **What is Sexual Assault (Violence)?**

Sexual assault (violence) is any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient. It can happen to anyone—regardless of race, age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or ability.

The spectrum of sexual assault includes:

- rape
- marital or partner rape
- sodomy
- incest
- alcohol and drug facilitated sexual assault
- child sexual abuse
- child ‘brides’
- statutory rape
- ritual rape
- sexual exploitation
- human trafficking
- sexual harassment
- dating violence
- stalking
- molestation
- fondling
- sexual battery
- indecent exposure
- voyeurism

## **Perpetrators of Sexual Assault**

No two sex offenders are exactly alike. Many defense attorneys will talk about whether their client, the alleged assailant, either fits the profile of a rapist or doesn’t. This is an invalid argument because there is no typical profile of a rapist. Perpetrators come from all races, religions, ethnicities, and socio-economic groups. There is only one predominant characteristic that distinguishes perpetrators of sexual violence—statistically, they are male. We know that both men and women can be raped, but most perpetrators of sexual violence are male. This, of course, does not mean that most men are perpetrators. In fact, we know that very few men perpetrate this type of crime. We also know that sexual violence may occur in any type of relationship, but most perpetrators of sexual assault are known to their victims.

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

## **Sexual Assault Statistics in South Carolina:**

During 2014, SCCADVASA's 15 Member Sexual Assault Centers served:

- New Direct Victims/Survivors: **5,513**
- New Secondary Victims: **1,950**
- Responded to Hotline Calls: **3,820**

(SCCADVASA agency reports)

Accompanied **1,274** survivors to the hospital. Sexual Assault can also occur within a pattern of abuse in a relationship. During 2014 there were **1,167 cases of sexual assault reported within the context of domestic violence** (SCCADVASA agency reports)

- From 1975 to 2012, the rape rate has increased 37.6% (*Crime in South Carolina 2012*)
- South Carolina's rape rate has exceeded the national rate since 1982 (*Crime in South Carolina 2012*)

## **Sexual Assault Statistics Nationally:**

The annual economic impact of sexual violence is estimated to be \$127 billion. **Each rape costs \$151,423 in direct and hidden costs** to survivors and the community (*National Sexual Resource Center 2015*)

There are estimated to be **300,170 victims of rape and sexual assault** each year, or 1 every 107 seconds (*U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs Bureau of Justice Statistics 2014*)

**1 in 5 women** have been the victim of attempted or completed rape during their lifetime. 18 million women are survivors of sexual violence (*Centers for Disease Control 2012*)

**1 in 71 men** have been the victims of attempted or completed rape during their lifetime. 3 million men are survivors of sexual violence (*Centers for Disease Control 2012*)

## Facts about Sexual Assault

### ***FACT: Sexual Assaults Are Mostly Committed by Someone Known to the Victim.***

According to the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division, only 10% of victims of sexual assault were attacked by a stranger. A parent, family member, babysitter, roommate, friend, date, spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend most commonly commit sexual violence. In 2012, 77% of sexual assaults were perpetrated by someone the victim knew.

### ***FACT: Sexual Assault is Not About Sex.***

Forcing someone to engage in a sexual act against his or her will is an act of violence and aggression. A common misconception is that perpetrators of sexual assault cannot control their sexual urges and are driven by lust to commit these crimes. Sex offenders are not driven by uncontrollable sexual urges, but by a feeling of entitlement and desire to exert power and control.

### ***FACT: Victims Are Not Lying About Rape.***

There is a myth that rape is commonly falsely reported. But, the U.S. Department of Justice states that false reports of rape are made at about the same as any other major violent crime—only about 2%. Also, there is some disagreement as to whether this statistic also includes reports that are unfounded, which does not mean that they are necessarily false. Law enforcement officers may decide not to prosecute a case of sexual assault for many reasons, such as lack of corroborating evidence. An unfounded case does not mean that a crime was not committed. This is a dangerous assumption that contributes to the stigma associated with reporting sexual assault.

It is often incredibly difficult for a victim to speak about being sexually assaulted. When he or she is finally able to do so, we should be supportive, not questioning his or her credibility.

### ***FACT: Victims Cannot Prevent Rape.***

The only one person who can prevent a rape is the rapist. While there are things people can do to reduce their risk, there are no perfect solutions to avoid sexual assault—other than perpetrators not committing the crime. The way to prevent sexual violence is to encourage would-be perpetrators not to commit this act. We can do this by holding perpetrators accountable, teaching children and youth about healthy relationships and respecting one another's boundaries, and supporting a society in which sexual violence is not tolerated.

# Sexual Assault Media Coverage

(From The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma)

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

## 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 organization involved in the case, consider asking them if speaking to the media is likely to make things worse.
- However sensitive a male interviewer can be, 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 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 ostracized, 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 he or she are 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 favored 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.

**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 SCCADVASA 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.

**Please advertise that help for victims of sexual violence is available at sexual assault programs statewide.**

SCCADVASA recommends that you contact the sexual assault program in your area to get the perspective of a victim advocate. We also recommend that you include hotline numbers in your coverage of sexual assault, so that victims know they have someone they can contact 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The national sexual assault hotline number is 1-800-656-HOPE (4673).

## **Additional tips when interviewing**

When covering sexual assault issues, please consider the following:

- Rape is often envisioned as a “dark alley” crime committed by a lurking stranger. This image is inconsistent with the majority of sexual violence that occurs. Portraying perpetrators as “normal,” every day people, and people who are often known to the victim provides a more accurate depiction of sexual assault.
- Identifying the victim of a sexual assault in media coverage is **unconscionable and contributes to the humiliation and victimization the victim** has already experienced. Survivors of sexual assault may agree to be interviewed to help raise public awareness. However, never identify a victim without his or her explicit permission.
- In addition to physical trauma, individuals who have been victims of rape, incest, or sexual assault may feel guilty or responsible for the abuse, question their own judgment, and/or feel betrayed. When questioning victims, avoid questions that imply fault on the part of the victim.

**For example, avoid questions about:**

- **What the victim was wearing** at the time of the assault. Rape is driven by a desire for power and control and sometimes by a desire to humiliate. It is not a crime of lust. Asking what the victim was wearing is 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. Rape/sexual assault 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. Remember that victims are never to blame for the sexual assault.
- 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.
- A finding of “not guilty” in a rape case does not mean that a crime was not committed and that the accused is “innocent.” It means simply that a jury was not presented with enough evidence to overcome reasonable doubt.
- Refrain from referring to an alleged rape in ways that imply the contact was consensual. In a rape, the parties did not “have sex.” An adult does not “have sex” with a child—it is rape. Words are powerful.
- Be very careful when interviewing family, friends, and neighbors of either the victim or the accused that their statements don’t blame the victim or attempt to exonerate the accused. For example, statements by witnesses that the perpetrator “is such a nice guy” or “would never do something like that” do not add to the facts of the story, and only further traumatize the victim.

## **SCCADVASA's Sexual Assault Member Organization**

National Sexual Assault Rape and Sexual Assault Hotline: 800-656-4673

### **Beyond Abuse**

Counties Served: Greenwood, Laurens, Abbeville  
[beyondabuse.info](http://beyondabuse.info)  
Phone: 864-227-1623 Hotline: 888-297-4546

### **CASA Family Systems**

Counties Served: Orangeburg, Calhoun, and Bamberg  
[casafamilysystems.com](http://casafamilysystems.com)  
Phone: 803-534-2448 Hotline: 800-298-7228

### **Cumbee Center to Assist Abused Persons**

Counties Served: Edgefield, Saluda, McCormick, Aiken, Barnwell, and Allendale  
[cumbeecenter.org](http://cumbeecenter.org)  
Phone: 803-649-0480 Hotline: 803-641-4162

### **Family Resource Center**

Counties Served: Kershaw and Lee  
[thefamilyresourcecenter.org](http://thefamilyresourcecenter.org)  
Phone: 803-425-4357 Hotline: 800-585-4455

### **Foothills Alliance Center**

Counties Served: Anderson and Oconee  
[foothillsalliance.org](http://foothillsalliance.org)  
Phone: 864-231-7273 Hotline: 800-585-8952

### **Julie Valentine Center**

County Served: Greenville  
[julievalentinecenter.org](http://julievalentinecenter.org)  
Phone: 864-331-0560 Hotline: 864-467-3633

### **Hope Haven**

Counties Served: Beaufort, Hampton, Colleton, and Jasper  
[hopehavenlc.org](http://hopehavenlc.org)  
Phone: 843-524-2256 Hotline: 800-637-7273

### **Palmetto CASA**

Counties Served: Lancaster, Chester and Fairfield  
[palmettocasa.org](http://palmettocasa.org)  
Phone: 803-286-5232 Hotline: 888-790-8532

### **Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Assault**

Counties Served: Florence, Darlington, Marion, Chesterfield, Marlboro, Dillon, Williamsburg and Clarendon  
[peedeecoalition.org](http://peedeecoalition.org)  
Phone: 843-669-4694 Hotline: 800-273-1820 and 843-669-4600

### **People Against Rape**

Counties Served: Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester  
[peopleagainstrape.org](http://peopleagainstrape.org)  
Phone: 843-745-0144 Hotline: 800-241-7273

### **Pickens County Advocacy Center**

County Served: Pickens  
[pickensrcc.org](http://pickensrcc.org)  
Phone: 864-442-5500 Hotline: 864-442-5500

### **SAFE Homes- Rape Crisis Coalition**

Counties Served: Spartanburg, Cherokee, and Union  
[shrc.org](http://shrc.org)  
Phone: 864-583-9803 Hotline: 800-273-5066

### **Safe Passage, Inc.**

Counties Served: York and Union  
[safepassagesc.org](http://safepassagesc.org)  
Phone: 803-329-3336 Hotline: 1-800-659-0977

### **Sexual Trauma Services of the Midlands**

Counties Served: Richland, Lexington, Newberry and Sumter  
[stsm.org](http://stsm.org)  
Phone: 803-926-0505 Hotline: 803-765-9428 and 800-637-7606

### **The Rape Crisis Center**

Counties Served: Horry and Georgetown  
[victimtosurvivor.org](http://victimtosurvivor.org)  
Phone: 843-448-3180 Hotline: 843-448-7273

# 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

Sara Barber, Executive Director

Rebecca Williams-Agee, Director of Prevention and Education

Damond Ford, Communications and Prevention Coordinator

Portronda Lowery, Financial Coordinator

Donna Thompson, Training Coordinator

Courtney-Christie Paul, Training and Administrative Assistant