HOW TO REPORT ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DEATHS

01 Accountability: Place the responsibility solely on the killer.

a) Refrain from describing the murder as an uncharacteristic event, and look deeper into the character of the relationship. Men kill often because they want to reassert their control, not because they’ve “lost control”. Homicides are usually underpinned by a longstanding sense of ownership, coercive control and possessive behaviours: they are not a random event.

b) Consider the sources included in the piece. If a piece mainly consists of an accused man’s claims in court (which the deceased partner is unable to verify), this adds weight to his unreliable and biased version of events.

c) Do not include speculative “reasons” or “triggers” for a man killing a woman, either in the headline or overall framing of the story.

02 Accuracy: Name the crime as domestic violence

and reach out to experts for comment, not just the police. Include a reference to the National Domestic Violence Helpline at the end of the article, so readers know where to seek help. Here is some sample wording:

For confidential support, call the 24-hour National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline on 0808 2000 247 or visit womansaid.co.uk

03 Dignity: Avoid sensationalising language, invasive or graphic details that compromise the dignity of the deceased woman or her surviving children and family members.

In cases of BME women, avoid terms such as “honour” or culture” and focus on the perpetrator’s gender-based abuse and control as the root cause of homicide.

04 Equality: Avoid insensitive or trivialising language or images.

All women have a right to dignity and respect, especially in death, regardless of their race, sexuality, occupation, class and whether they live with mental or physical disabilities.

05 Images.

If you are reporting on domestic violence more generally, avoid using stock images that reinforce the myth that it’s only a physical crime.1

1 Photographer Laura Dodsworth has produced a free collection of images accredited by Scottish Women’s Aid, available here.