

# **MEDIA CHANGING THE STORY**

---

**MEDIA GUIDELINES FOR THE REPORTING  
OF DOMESTIC, FAMILY, AND SEXUAL  
VIOLENCE IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**

**CHAY BROWN, MANDY TAYLOR, CARMEL SIMPSON & SHIRLEEN CAMPBELL  
MPARNTWE/ALICE SPRINGS, NORTHERN TERRITORY, 2021**

# MEDIA CHANGING THE STORY

MEDIA GUIDELINES FOR THE REPORTING OF DOMESTIC, FAMILY, AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

PRODUCED BY



WITH SUPPORT FROM



Gender Institute

CHAY BROWN, MANDY TAYLOR, CARMEL SIMPSON & SHIRLEEN CAMPBELL  
MPARNTWE/Alice Springs, Northern Territory, 2021

# DEDICATION

In memory of R.Rubuntja and dedicated to her children and grandchildren. We continue to miss you every day. While our hearts still ache, we smile at the shared memories and your memory lives on in your children and grandchildren. We will continue your important work campaigning for the safety of women and children.

Dedicated to Rosie Batty and in memory of your son Luke. Rosie has worked tirelessly to support women

and children, to bring a voice to those who didn't have a platform, to listen to the stories of survivors and cry with those who have also lost loved ones.

To all the families who have lost someone to violence - we acknowledge you and will continue to raise our voices in solidarity.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge and pay respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout the Northern Territory and across Australia, who are the custodians of the oldest continuous living culture. We acknowledge that these media guidelines were conceived and written on what always was and always will be Aboriginal land. We honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's ongoing connection to sea, waterways and country. We pay respects to Elders past, present, and emerging and we acknowledge the leadership role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have played in the development of these media guidelines. We take inspiration from the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and commit ourselves to makarrata so that we may tell the truth about our colonisation history and work together to build a future based on equity, hope, and freedom for all.

We would also like to acknowledge the leadership of the Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group and Galiwin'ku Women's Space in shaping and drafting these media guidelines. We would like to thank all

the participants in the workshops for giving their time and expertise so generously. We would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Janet Hunt at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research for providing guidance and support. We would also like to thank the reviewers for their feedback and advice which so greatly strengthened these media guidelines:

Bridget Brennan, ABC

Larissa Ellis, Women's Safety Services of Central Australia

Karla McGrady, Our Watch

Shannon McKeough, Our Watch

Naomi Bailey, Our Watch

Samantha Jonscher, ABC

Finally, we would like to acknowledge and thank our funders for their support: The Northern Territory Government Office for Gender Equity and Diversity & the Gender Institute at the Australian National University.

# SUPPORT SERVICES

**Help is available if you, or someone you know, is experiencing violence.**

In the case of an **emergency call 000**.

For **information, support and counselling** contact **1800RESPECT (1800 737 732)** or visit **[www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)**. This service is free, confidential and open 24 hours a day.

## OTHER SUPPORT

---

### ■ Sexual Assault Referral Centres:

(Alice Springs) 08 8955 4500

(Darwin) 08 8922 6472

(Katherine) 08 8973 8524

(Tennant Creek) 08 8962 4361

■ **Women's Safety Services of Central Australia** - 08 8952 6075

■ **Tangentyere Family Violence Prevention Program** - 08 8952 1430

■ **Central Australian Women's Legal Service** - 1800 684 055

■ **Dawn House** - 08 8945 1388

■ **Darwin Aboriginal and Indigenous Women's Shelter and Outreach** - 08 8945 2284

■ **Domestic Violence Legal Services** - 08 8999 7977

■ **Katherine Women's Crisis Centre** - 08 8972 1332

■ **Katherine Women's Information and Legal Service** - 08 8972 1712

■ **Tenant Creek Women's Refuge** - 08 8962 1940

For other services, including safe houses in remote communities, visit here:

<https://nt.gov.au/law/crime/domestic-family-and-sexual-violence/get-help-for-domestic-family-and-sexual-violence#>

# FOREWORD

In 2017, on a July afternoon in the centre of Mparntwe (Alice Springs), came a moment the town should never forget. Holding flowers in memory of their loved ones, hundreds of strong women, children and men marched through the streets to call for justice for the mothers, sisters, aunties and grandmothers lost to violence in the Northern Territory. It was a moving and urgent call to action led by the ground-breaking work of the Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group.

As a black journalist, one of the greatest privileges of my career has been to sit and listen to the stories of survivors of domestic, family, and sexual violence in the Northern Territory. They are often stories of deep pain, resilience and love that all Australians should hear.

The murders of Aboriginal women in this nation are intrinsically tied to the ongoing impacts of colonisation and they require serious and extended coverage by media professionals.

But too often the nation does not mourn the loss of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The media can do much more to celebrate their lives, their

achievements and their voices.

While Australia has been undergoing a national conversation regarding women's safety, it's painful to see our stories are sidelined, placed at the back of news bulletins, or simply not told at all.

These guidelines are an excellent resource for journalists, writers and media professionals who are covering domestic, family, and sexual violence in the Northern Territory. They remind us to humanise victims and survivors, to use culturally sensitive reporting practices, and to centre the voices of relatives and community members. Deadlines should not come before the need to connect with communities to ensure that a tragedy is covered with the input, advice, cooperation and guidance of those affected by family violence.

It is an honour to know and work with the strong Aboriginal women of the Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group. Their respectful invitation to listen deeply, to learn and to lead is one we should all hear as journalists.

## **Bridget Brennan**

*Indigenous Affairs Editor, ABC  
Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung*



# PURPOSE AND SCOPE

These media guidelines were developed in collaboration with Aboriginal organisations, Aboriginal women's groups, specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services, and media professionals in the Northern Territory. An online survey was distributed to media professionals and a series of in-person and online workshops were held with stakeholders throughout the Northern Territory. This information was collated and analysed to produce the media guidelines for reporting on domestic, family, and sexual violence in the Northern Territory.

These guidelines aim to provide advice for news stations, media organisations and media professionals on how to report safely and ethically about domestic, family and sexual violence in the Northern Territory. Media guidelines also provide guidance for police, health services and specialist domestic, family, and sexual violence services about how to communicate with media organisations and develop their own media releases.

The purpose of these guidelines is to support media professionals and act as a reference when reporting domestic and family violence in the Northern Territory.

## NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

**The media guidelines use the language 'domestic, family and sexual violence' as this is common usage in the Northern Territory.**

**We acknowledge that whilst men can also experience these forms of violence, domestic, family, and sexual violence is gendered.**

**It also uses 'violence against women' to acknowledge that domestic, family, and sexual violence disproportionately affect women and children, and are mostly perpetrated by men.**

**It uses 'women' to mean all people who identify as women, including transwomen. It also acknowledges that gender diverse people are impacted by such violence, often in complex and intersecting ways.**

**The media guidelines also use the terms 'victim-survivor' and 'perpetrator' for clarity. We acknowledge that these terms are fraught and there is widespread disagreement.**

**We acknowledge and recognise people's capacity to change and people's right to have an identity apart from their experience and/or use of violence.**

**02** \_\_\_\_\_ **DEDICATION**

**02** \_\_\_\_\_ **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**03** \_\_\_\_\_ **SUPPORT SERVICES**

**04** \_\_\_\_\_ **FOREWORD**

**05** \_\_\_\_\_ **PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

**05** \_\_\_\_\_ **NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY**

**06** \_\_\_\_\_ **INTRODUCTION**

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA \_\_ **09**

CHALLENGES \_\_ **10**

**11** \_\_\_\_\_ **PRINCIPLES**

**12** \_\_\_\_\_ **GUIDELINES**

SAFETY \_\_ **12**

ABORIGINAL CULTURES \_\_ **13**

PERMISSION \_\_ **15**

NORTHERN TERRITORY CONTEXT \_\_ **16**

**18** \_\_\_\_\_ **5 THINGS TO BE AWARE OF IN THE COURTROOM**

**19** \_\_\_\_\_ **QUICK REFERENCE GOOD PRACTICE TIPS FOR  
MEDIA PROFESSIONALS**

**20** \_\_\_\_\_ **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**20** \_\_\_\_\_ **WORK STILL TO DO**

**21** \_\_\_\_\_ **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

**22** \_\_\_\_\_ **ENDNOTES**

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is a global epidemic and an unacceptable violation of human rights. The United Nations (1992) Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women defines 'violence against women' as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"<sup>i</sup>.

Whilst 'violence against women' covers the many different forms of violence experienced by women, the two most common forms are intimate partner violence (also referred to as domestic violence)

and non-partner sexual violence<sup>ii</sup>. These forms of violence are overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women.<sup>iii</sup> This violence is frequent and severe. On average, one woman is murdered every week in Australia by a current or former male partner.<sup>iv</sup>

The Northern Territory has extremely high rates of violence against women and the most common forms are domestic, family, and sexual violence<sup>v</sup>. The Northern Territory has a small population (approximately 250 000 people), yet police typically respond to 61 incidents of domestic violence every day, or more than 22 000 domestic violence incidents each year<sup>vi</sup>. The Northern Territory also has the highest rate of domestic and family violence related homicides in Australia<sup>vii</sup>. This violence is a key driver of incarceration, as 'acts intended to cause injury' and 'sexual assault and related offences' are the most common offences by offenders in custody, representing 47% and 11% respectively.<sup>viii</sup>

## DRIVERS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Gendered drivers of men's violence against women come from gender-absent, gender-insensitive or gender discriminatory structures, norms, practices and relationships which create the environment in which women and men are not considered equal (see diagram 1)<sup>ix</sup>. These drivers create the conditions where violence against women can occur, is tolerated, justified and/or condoned<sup>x</sup>. Change the Story, developed by Our Watch, identifies four expressions of gender inequality that are the most associated with violence against women:

**Driver 1:** Condoning of violence against women

**Driver 2:** Men's control of decision making and limits to women's independence in public and private life

**Driver 3:** Dominant forms of masculinity and rigid gender stereotyping

**Driver 4:** Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control<sup>xi</sup>



Whilst violence against women occurs in all countries, communities and cultures throughout the world, there are additional drivers of violence that intersect and increase the risk that some groups of women will be more likely to experience violence than others. In the Northern Territory, women's experiences of violence are compounded by additional barriers, challenges, and complexities which disproportionately exist in this context, particularly in remote Aboriginal communities. In the Northern Territory, Aboriginal women are hospitalised at 40 times the rate of non-Indigenous women and Aboriginal women are among the most victimised groups of people in the entire world.<sup>xii</sup>

Aboriginal people's prior experience of violence and resulting intergenerational trauma is inextricable from their experiences of ongoing colonisation.<sup>xiii</sup> The violence of the frontier wars traumatised Aboriginal communities and this was followed by successive government policies of annihilation, assimilation, neglect, and intervention<sup>xiv</sup>. These ongoing impacts

of colonisation on Aboriginal people, families and communities continue to drive violence against Aboriginal women. Moreover, the ongoing impacts of colonisation on non-Indigenous people and society has resulted in structures and systems which privilege and empower non-Indigenous people over Indigenous people. These drivers intersect with gendered factors to create the underlying conditions where violence against Aboriginal women occurs. How the media chooses to report the stories of violence against Aboriginal women can reinforce, or it can challenge, these ongoing colonial impacts.

There are further drivers of violence against other historically marginalised groups, such as LGBTQI+ people and refugee and migrant women. These intersect with gendered factors to drive violence against women and gender diverse people from historically marginalised groups. In a similar way to reporting that reinforces colonisation, reporting on LGBTQIA+ communities and migrant and refugee women can reinforce prejudice, or it can challenge it.

## RISK FACTORS FOR VIOLENCE

The socio-ecological model, developed by the World Health Organisation, also helps to explain why some individuals are at increased risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence (see diagram 2)<sup>xv</sup>. At the individual level, factors like age, income, substance abuse and history of violence can make a person more vulnerable to experiencing or perpetrating violence. At the relationship level, indicators such as conflict and imbalances in power and decision

making can increase the risk of violence. At the community level, the setting in which relationships exist can increase the risk of violence. For instance, lack of social support, reduced mobility and community condoning or justification of violence make the individual more vulnerable to perpetrating or experiencing violence, and individuals are less able to leave violent situations. At the societal level, structural, social and cultural norms such as government policies, inequality, discrimination and enforcement of stereotypical gender norms can increase the risk of violence. Risk factors are also cumulative, so the presence of each additional risk factor increases the possibility that an individual will experience violence<sup>xvi</sup>.

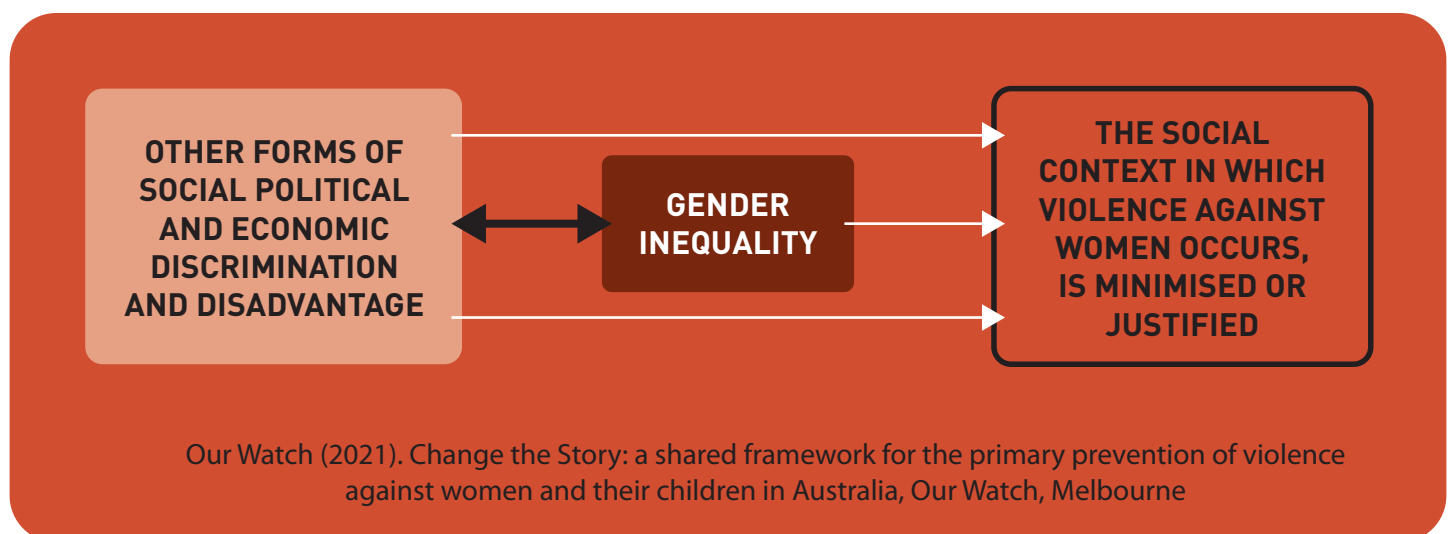


DIAGRAM 1

# THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Media organisations and media professionals are key stakeholders and potential allies in the prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence. The public consumes media as part of their daily lives: on the television, on the radio, in newspapers and online. Media keeps us entertained and informed and its influence over cultural and social norms is perhaps unparalleled. Therefore, it is vital that the media is engaged and invested in safely and ethically reporting on violence against women in all of its forms.

In Change the Story four drivers of violence against women are identified. The media has to be particularly aware of:

**Driver 1:** Condoning of violence against women, and

**Driver 3:** Dominant forms of masculinity and rigid gender stereotyping

The way that media presents and disseminates news and stories can reinforce these drivers. For example, if media reports on an incident of intimate partner violence by suggesting the woman was partly to blame or places responsibility on her to leave the violent relationship, this can reinforce harmful victim-blaming attitudes and beliefs which condone violence against women. Moreover, the way that media presents women and men, and the traits they elevate, praise, or criticise, can reinforce gender stereotypes and the construction of masculinity. For example, when the media focusses on the victim-survivor's sexual history and/or the mothering of her children as a problem, rather than the violence, and/or the sporting prowess of a perpetrator rather than their choice to use violence, can reinforce rigid gender stereotypes and perpetuates a culture and society where violence against women thrives.

Intersecting with this is also racist stereotypes of Indigenous people, and people of other ethnic or religious minority groups. The way media reports on domestic, family, and sexual violence matters perpetrated by or against these groups can reinforce harmful attitudes and beliefs which can marginalise these communities and make them vulnerable to

# RESEARCH HAS FOUND

There is a clear link between media reporting and attitudes and beliefs in relation to violence against women.

The majority of reporting on violence against women was about specific incidents looking at tragic individual instances, but not unpacking the issue in depth.

Reporting would be improved by including more experts and survivors, yet half of all sources were drawn from police and the criminal justice system; only 9.9% of sources were domestic violence advocates; only 8.7% were survivors.

Myths and misrepresentations find their way into reporting. Around 15 % of incident based reporting includes victim blaming; and 14.8 % of incident based reporting offers excuses for the perpetrator.

There is a tendency to render the perpetrator invisible, with 59.8% of incident based reporting including no information whatsoever about the perpetrator.

Choice of language can sometimes be insensitive: 17.2 % of newspaper and online headlines were deemed sensationalistic, while 13.3 % of incident based news items used language in the report that was sensationalistic, including excessively gory/ or overly sexually explicit detail.

Media can be a powerful source of information for women seeking to leave a violent relationship, yet only 4.3 % of news reports included help seeking information

*SOURCE: Georgina Sutherland, Angus McCormack, Jane Pirkis, Cathy Vaughan, Michelle Dunne Breen, Patricia Easteal, Kate Holland. (2016). Media representations of violence against women and their children: final report. ANROWS, Sydney*

other forms of violence.

Whilst the media can cause harm with reporting, it also has the potential to be a powerful ally in the prevention of violence against women. By reporting domestic, family, and sexual violence in a safe and ethical way, media can particularly influence attitudes and beliefs at the community and societal levels. Safe and ethical reporting can contribute to:

- Challenging harmful attitudes and beliefs about

gender-based violence

- Creating visibility, raising awareness, education, and creating community support for positive change
- Elevating the voices of victim-survivors and allowing them to share their story if they choose
- Convincing governments and other stakeholders that addressing men's violence against women is a priority.

## CHALLENGES

Safe and ethical reporting of violence against women is not without its challenges. Individuals and families who have experienced violence must deal with trauma, grief and loss, as well as other potential impacts, such as financial stress and/or homelessness, whilst also navigating interactions with the media. There can also be safety issues for these individuals, as there may be fear of reprisal violence or stigma from being associated with domestic, family and sexual violence.

Specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services and agencies, who are often called upon to give comment, can also be under significant pressure in the aftermath of a violent incident. They must work to support the victim-survivor, their family, and the community, in addition to managing their own

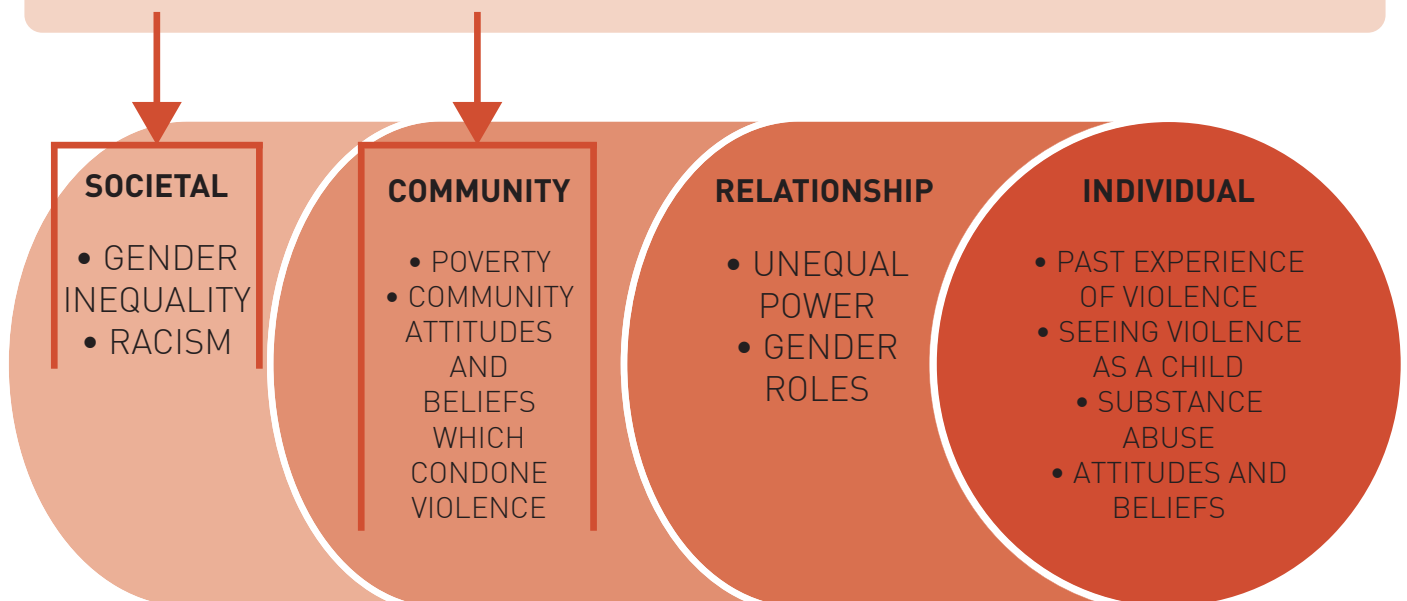
vicarious trauma and workload.

Police and healthcare workers, who often act as first responders to domestic, family and sexual violence incidents, can also be under significant pressure as they respond to the most pressing safety, health and wellbeing needs of victim-survivors. These workers may not have the necessary background or expertise in domestic, family and sexual violence, and may have opaque organisational media policies which limit their ability to give empathetic, efficient, accurate and gender sensitive comment to media.

Media organisations and media professionals also face significant challenges, which include legal obligations, balancing editorial decisions with safe and ethical reporting, tight timeframes and deadlines.

Despite these challenges, it is possible for these groups to come together to produce reporting which is safe, ethical, and aims to prevent further harm.

Media is a key agent of socialisation that contributes to perpetuating social norms about gender social constructions of inequitable gender roles contribute to gender inequality, which drives violence. Equally, media are important allies in changing harmful attitudes and beliefs.



# PRINCIPLES

The principles of the media guidelines emphasise that reporting can be both objective and fair, whilst also being safe, ethical and victim-survivor centred.



## SAFETY-FOCUSED

The safety of women and children is prioritised in reporting.



## VICTIM-SURVIVOR CENTRED:

The voices of victim-survivors are elevated.



## RAPPORT AND RELATIONSHIPS

Build trust with affected communities and the domestic, family and sexual violence sector.



## DO NO HARM

Always consider the impact the report may have on victim-survivors, families and communities, as well the impact it may have on community attitudes towards violence against women.



## CHALLENGE MYTHS AND STEROTYPES

Challenge harmful attitudes and beliefs about violence against women and provide the necessary context and depth in the reporting.



## DEEP LISTENING

Listen to Aboriginal people, families, and communities about the issues that affect them. Listen to Aboriginal experts and other experts from the domestic, family and sexual violence sector.

Reporting on domestic, family and sexual violence is important: it creates visibility and can help create change. This section gives specific guidance and advice on reporting in relation to victim-survivors', family and community safety, Aboriginal cultures, seeking permission, and the Northern

Territory context. This guidance is aspirational and acknowledges that reporting on violence is often complicated. However, these guidelines defer to the principle of 'do no harm' and were developed in the spirit of providing guidance to media professionals as allies in the prevention of violence against women.

## SAFETY

It is important to understand that disclosing particular details about a domestic, family and sexual violence incident can place the victim-survivor, their children, or family at risk of further violence. Including details about the location of the incident, for example, or including photographs of the community, can lead to the identification of the victim-survivor and/or their whereabouts. In a small town or remote context, including details about the victim-survivor's profession, relationship to perpetrator, or even the number of children someone has can make someone identifiable within their community. There can also be safety implications for the perpetrator's family if they are identified.

Language which focuses on the victim-survivor's behaviour, assigns responsibility for the violence to the victim-survivor or seeks to justify or rationalise violence can be construed as victim-blaming. Victim-blaming can also have long-term impacts on the victim-survivor and create conflict in the community. Victim-blaming can also reinforce harmful attitudes and beliefs which condone men's violence against women.

People who use violence may try to provide a motive or excuse for their choice to use violence. Reporting on perpetrator's excuses can reinforce harmful attitudes and beliefs which minimise or justify violence. Reporting on excuses or justifications should be contextualised within the evidence – that violence is a choice, and that drugs, alcohol, and mental health issues, for example, do not cause violence

These safety considerations must be carefully balanced with the benefits of reporting the incidents, and media should always defer to the principle of 'do

no harm'. Managing risk and safety considerations can be done in conjunction with seeking permission and listening to the experts.

## CONSIDER

**Physical safety:** of victim-survivors, children, extended family members and the community

**Legal safety:** legal obligations, sub judice, contempt of court, and trial impacts

**Cultural Safety:** mindful and respect for Indigenous cultures, and aware of power and privilege held by non-Indigenous people and society.

## DE-IDENTIFY

- Consider the extent to which the report should be **de-identified**. Be thorough in considering all the ways someone could be identified by another member of the public.
- Consider what information can be gleaned from photographs and details in the report – does it place the victim-survivor and/or their children at **risk**?

## SAFETY CONTINUED

### GAIN CONSENT

- Gain informed **consent**<sup>1</sup> from victim-survivors and empower them through giving them the chance to share their story in the way they choose. When it is not possible to speak to the victim-survivor directly, check with your primary source that they have confirmed the victim-survivor is comfortable with the information being shared.
- **Children** cannot give consent so centre their safety and consider the impact on them

## ABORIGINAL CULTURES

Whilst Aboriginal women are disproportionately impacted by domestic, family, and sexual violence because of the drivers discussed in the introduction, it is important to contextualise this violence within

### CONSIDER

**Respect:** Learn about the different culture/s in the Northern Territory and engage respectfully with Aboriginal people.

**Relationships:** Speak to the right people and build relationships with Aboriginal communities

**Obligations:** Be mindful and respectful of cultural obligations, such as sorry business.

## BE TRAUMA-INFORMED

- Be **trauma-informed**<sup>2</sup> and manage the risk of re-trauma to victim-survivors. Ask sensitive questions and be empathetic and understanding.
- Be mindful of your **language**. Language can apportion blame, create stigma, and re-traumatise victim-survivors. Use language that empowers victim-survivors and holds perpetrators to account for their use of violence.

the violence of ongoing colonisation and as part of the global epidemic of violence against women. Truth-telling about our colonisation history is an important step towards recovery.

It is important that reporting on domestic, family, and sexual violence against Aboriginal women does not attribute this to Aboriginal culture/s. Aboriginal cultures in the Northern Territory are all different, but men's violence against women is not a part of any traditional Aboriginal cultures. Moreover, gender inequality and/or male dominance is not a part of traditional Aboriginal culture/s. Reporting which perpetuates the view that violence is 'just a part of their culture' reinforces racist stereotypes that do harm to Aboriginal people, families, and communities.

When interacting with Aboriginal people, families, and communities, it is important that media professionals are respectful and mindful of cultural practices and obligations. However, this does not mean that Aboriginal communities do not want these stories published. In fact, the silence of media can also be hurtful and harmful. The key to writing these stories in a safe and ethical way is respect, relationships and asking permission.

## BE PREPARED

- Undertake cultural safety **training** and learn about Aboriginal culture/s and cultural obligations.
- Develop **relationships** with Aboriginal leaders, cultural liaisons, traditional owners, and Aboriginal-

<sup>1</sup>In order to give their consent, the victim-survivor must be properly informed about what information will be shared, with whom it will be shared, how it will be shared, and the risks and benefits of sharing the information. Once the survivor has this information, they can give their informed consent for the information to be presented and shared in the media.

<sup>2</sup>Understanding and practice which acknowledges the impacts of trauma on victim-survivors, their emotions, behaviour and relationships. A trauma-informed approach centres safety for victim-survivors, builds trust, gives victim-survivors choice and respects their agency, as well as aims to empower victim-survivors through genuine collaboration.

controlled organisations who can advise on reporting. Engage with Aboriginal-controlled organisations in the first instance to ascertain the right people to speak to.

- Develop relationships based on the principle of **deep listening** – do not assume that you are the expert and respect different worldviews and different ways of being, doing and knowing.

## GAIN PERMISSION

- Gain **clearance** for the use of photos and names from the victim-survivor, or in the case of deceased persons, from their family. Do not republish photos of deceased persons without permission. Names are

sacred in many Aboriginal cultures. Use the deceased person's last name, instead of their first.

## BE BALANCED

- Cover a range of **different stories**, do not ignore violence against Aboriginal women because it is difficult to gain information and details.
- Understand that constant negativity affects Aboriginal people's mental health and wellbeing, balance these stories with reports of Aboriginal women's **leadership** and strength.
- When reporting on general stories unconnected with particular families, speak to different people. There is not just one Aboriginal voice and **perspective**.

# KEY QUOTES FROM ABORIGINAL WOMEN

"If not reported properly, [news stories about domestic, family, and sexual violence] can have a whole ripple effect than affects the whole community"

"It feels like [media] don't take all lives equally and as seriously"

"[Media reporting can lead to] cyber-bullying on Facebook and other social media"

"[Some problems that come from reporting are] shame and tribes fighting against each other"

"[One consequence of poor reporting on domestic, family, and sexual violence is that] people might think that the wrong way is the right way to talk about it"

"Reading negativity continuously about your community can cause mental breakdown"

"It's not only Aboriginal people,..Violence is across the community"

"[Poor reporting can lead to] discrimination, kinship not being respected, and love marriages being looked down upon"

## DIAGRAM 3



## ABORIGINAL CULTURES CONTINUED

### BE RESPECTFUL

- Understand that sorry business **takes time** and that families are grieving. Attend sorry business if you are welcome and if you are able.
- Understand and be mindful of the complexities of **kinship and family connections**, which all come with family obligations.

## PERMISSION

Permission is an important aspect of safe and ethical reporting on specific incidents of domestic, family and sexual violence. Media professionals who seek to talk about the problem of men's violence against women more broadly can engage with experts to inform their reporting, whilst those that present the stories of individual victim-survivors should gain permission from:

- The victim-survivor
- In the event of deceased person's, gain permission from close family
- Depending on the specific circumstances, gain permission from friends and extended family

The relationships and dynamics of domestic, family and sexual violence cases can be complex, so it is important to determine the right person to task for permission. Whilst media usually first hear of violence from police, they should instead seek to speak to specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services. These services are often connected to the families involved or can advise about who to contact. If it is difficult to receive contextual comment from an organisation when the incident is first reported be sure to follow up with expert comment in the days following. However, be mindful that tight turnaround times can lead to problematic reporting and cause harm – always defer to the principle of 'do no harm'.

Try to limit engagement with agencies, organisations, workplaces or persons who are unconnected to the case and/or are not experts in the field of violence against women. Unsolicited phone calls can cause distress and pressure during what is already a difficult time and elevated views and opinions from non-experts carries the risk of perpetuating harmful attitudes and beliefs.

## CONTEXTUALISE

- Recognise the ongoing **impacts** of trauma and grief on Aboriginal people, which is compounded by intergenerational trauma.
- Consider the issue of violence against Aboriginal women within the context of ongoing **colonisation**.
- Understand the **complexities** and impacts on Aboriginal women who leave violent relationships, such as loss of family, relocation, being off-Country and possibly being unable to return to community.

### ASK PERMISSION

- Always **ask** for permission to report on specific incidents.
- Be **mindful** that rushed, unethical and unsafe reporting can cause more pain for the victim-survivor or their friends and family.
- Determine the **right person** to ask for permission. This is usually a family member or trusted person. Take the time to find out who is the right person to speak to.

## CONSIDER

**Expertise:** Speak to experts on violence against women.

**Connection:** Speak to connected services and specialist domestic, family, and sexual violence services

**Transparency:** Determine the right person to give permission and be transparent about what will be published and when

- Build **networks** and draw upon your **existing relationships** to find out the right way to contact the right person to ask for permission.
- Talk to family to select the right **photo**, do not take



any old photo. Even if photos are on the internet, such as social media, still get permission before republishing.

## DEFER TO EXPERTS

- Speak to **connected services** and experts in the field.
- Be mindful of **different agendas** and manage the different advice you may receive from police, healthcare workers, and other agencies. Always defer to **experts**.

# NORTHERN TERRITORY CONTEXT

The Northern Territory is a unique place: a place of strong culture and identity, a good sense of humour and strong sense of Territorian pride. However, despite its vast geographical space, it's extreme remoteness and isolation, the Territory is also a very small place. When reporting on domestic, family and sexual violence you must be aware that everyone knows everyone in the Territory. This makes it very easy to figure out who was involved in domestic, family and sexual violence cases, which has safety implications.

It is important to remember the history of the Northern Territory when reporting on domestic, family and sexual violence. There is the history of ongoing colonisation, with the last documented massacre of Aboriginal people taking place in Coniston in 1928.<sup>xvii</sup> There is also the more recent history of intervention.

The Northern Territory is not a state, which affects its relationship with the Federal Government, and has legislative and fiscal implications which may be borne out in measures to address domestic, family and sexual violence. Moreover, the Northern Territory Emergency Response (also known as the Intervention), implemented in 2007 and continued as Stronger Futures in 2012<sup>xviii</sup>, continues to impact, particularly in the domestic, family and sexual violence space. There are reports that the Intervention has perpetuated harmful stereotypes of Aboriginal people.<sup>xix</sup> Measures introduced under the Intervention, such as mandatory income management, impact

## BE TRANSPARENT

- Be **transparent**. The victim-survivor and/or their family and trusted persons will want to know what will be published – no surprises. Where possible, consider discussing angles and quotes with the family and victim-survivor.
- Manage any **mistakes** you may make transparently and correct as soon as possible.

women and families experiencing violence. The media also played a particular role in the Intervention, which means that media has not always been a trusted source for Aboriginal organisations, people and communities.

## CONSIDER

**Population:** The Northern Territory is a small place, everyone is connected, and everyone knows each other.

**Dynamics:** The Northern Territory is a diverse place of different cultures, religions, and ethnicities. Reporting should reflect and respect diversity.

**Perspective:** The Northern Territory has a history of criticism and imposed interventions from external sources. Elevate experts and voices from the Territory and create balance with positive news stories.

The introduction of prohibition and alcohol restrictions to much of the Northern Territory<sup>xx</sup> has been a part of the response to domestic, family and sexual violence, and unfortunately, has dominated the conversation. However, it must be remembered that alcohol and substance misuse does not cause violence. Alcohol

## NORTHERN TERRITORY CONTEXT CONTINUED

and substance misuse is a risk factor for violence, which can increase both the frequency and severity of violence<sup>xxi</sup>. However, alcohol and substance abuse is not a cause or driver of violence<sup>xxii</sup>.

Other contextual factors, such as extreme remoteness, limited infrastructure, and limited access to goods and services, further impacts women and children experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence. It is also important to consider the context when reporting violence, to ensure that safety is prioritised.

### KNOW THE HISTORY

- Understand the **history** of the Northern Territory, including the Intervention, and rebuild trust between the media and Aboriginal organisations, people, and communities.
- Understand the context of ongoing colonisation and resulting intergenerational trauma in the Northern Territory, and how this translates into **unequal power relations** between Aboriginal people and communities and non-Indigenous society.

### KNOW THE COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE

- Familiarise yourself with the geography of the Northern Territory and its **diverse** people.
- Manage the **risk** and likelihood that individuals will be identified from news reports. The Northern Territory has a very small population, and we all know each other.

## OVERCOME BARRIERS

- Build relationships outside of regional hubs. Journalists who are not based in remote communities may struggle to tell the story effectively unless they can draw upon **networks** and other resources.
- Disseminate news stories in ways that are **accessible** for people in remote communities, using a variety of platforms.
- Knowing that English is not the first language of many Territorians, make news reports available in **different languages**.
- Understand the impacts of poverty, discrimination and disadvantage in the Northern Territory and ensure reporting highlights them, but does not perpetuate **harmful attitudes and beliefs**.
- Be conscious of **headlines**. Many people, particularly in remote communities, do not have televisions or access to newspapers. Many people get their news from Youtube or online headlines. When there is no access to the full story – or a paywall – this means the headline is the only thing people will be read.

# FIVE THINGS TO BE AWARE OF IN THE COURTROOM

## 1. VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Repeated engagement with traumatic material can have lasting impacts on your sense of self, safety and relationships. Practice self-care. Media organisations have a responsibility for collective care.

## 2. PREJUDICE

Courtrooms are social environments, which mean they are filled with the same prejudices, unconscious biases, and harmful attitudes and beliefs as found in the rest of society.

## 3. TIMING

Consider when you will report in order to meet your legal obligations but so that one-sided narratives that excuse violence do not comprise the full report. Choosing to report on days when both arguments are presented, such as in closing, may help to overcome this.

## 4. EXPERTS

Judges, lawyers, and police are not necessarily experts in domestic, family and sexual violence, and may not have the background and contextual knowledge about the drivers of men's violence against women. Balance these perspectives by speaking with specialist domestic, family, and sexual violence services and where possible, speak to specialist legal services, such as the Central Australian Women's Legal Service or Domestic Violence Legal Service.

## 5. CONTEXT

Consider how the specific case links to broader systems of gender and racial inequality and contextualise it within the social and cultural problem of men's violence against women.

# QUICK REFERENCE GOOD PRACTICE TIPS FOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

## DO

- ✔ Consider the impact of your story on the family and community before you publish.
- ✔ Contextualise violence against women in the Northern Territory within the broader Australian and global context.
- ✔ Check your language. Be aware of perpetuating stereotypes.
- ✔ Understand that getting permission to use an image or preferred identifier will take time.
- ✔ Build strong relationships with Aboriginal community-controlled and multi-cultural organisations and leaders.
- ✔ Speak to the experts.
- ✔ Be aware that many domestic, family and sexual violence workers have lived experience of violence.
- ✔ Consider if you should be using a translator.
- ✔ Consider whether you should ask an Aboriginal person to speak about circumstances or issues outside their own community or language group.
- ✔ If possible, check information released by authorities with representatives of the affected community or family group.
- ✔ Reflect on your own knowledge and biases.
- ✔ Undertake cultural safety training.
- ✔ Tell stories of hope.
- ✔ Where legally possible, name the perpetrator as responsible and name the action and choice to use violence.
- ✔ Take time for self-care.

## DON'T

- ✘ Forget to include safety information. Where possible, include Northern Territory specific helplines and services.
- ✘ Assume because one media outlet or journalist has been given permission to use an image or identifier, that this applies across the board and for all time. Always seek permission.
- ✘ Minimise risk. Understand that publishing certain details may inadvertently lead to further (re)trauma and violence. Manage risks appropriately.
- ✘ Erase victim-survivors. Victim-survivors are not just numbers. They are not just another statistic. Their stories deserve respect.
- ✘ Put pressure on domestic, family and sexual violence services and workers. Where possible, give notice and realistic timeframes.
- ✘ Expect victim-survivors to keep reliving their personal story of trauma every time they are interviewed.
- ✘ Sensationalise and/or perpetuate myths.
- ✘ Attribute the use of violence to alcohol, drugs, or mental health. There is no excuse for violence.
- ✘ Disregard or minimise the risk of vicarious trauma. Ensure self and collective care processes are in place.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## 1. Who should I ask when seeking permission to report particular details with a story involving Aboriginal family and domestic violence?

- Speak to Aboriginal-controlled organisations and/or connected services to determine the right person to ask
- Gain permission from close family or trusted persons

## 2. Why is it taking some time to get permission for a photograph of the victim or to speak to family members and friends?

- People may be grieving and/or supporting people in crisis.
- There are cultural considerations and/or obligations. Sorry business can take time, for example.
- In many cultures, consensus and collective decision-making is more important than individual decisions. People need time to discuss and reach agreement.

## 3. How do I centre women's voices in a story on family and domestic violence?

- If speaking with the victim-survivor is not possible

or inappropriate, speak with victim-survivor advocates.

- Interview women who are experts in domestic, family, and sexual violence.
- Speak to Aboriginal women leaders and gain their perspectives.

## 4. Why are the statistics for family, domestic, and sexual violence so high in the Northern Territory?

- Gender inequality is the key driver of men's violence against women.
- Gendered factors intersect with other drivers, such as the ongoing impacts of colonisation, homophobia and/or transphobia, to drive violence against women and gender diverse people from historically marginalised groups.
- In the Northern Territory, these underlying drivers are exacerbated and compounded by culminative risk factors and contextual factors which disproportionately exist in the Northern Territory, such as inadequate infrastructure and services, remoteness and isolation, prior exposure to violence and trauma, harmful alcohol and drug use, homelessness, and system issues, such as racial inequality and discrimination.

# WORK STILL TO DO

As the media guidelines were developed, a number of areas of recommendation and for further work were discussed. The media guidelines are a living document, and when they are revised, it aims to contribute to the development and progress of three key areas:

- **Stock images:** a bank of stock images to be used in the reporting of domestic, family, and sexual violence to be developed in collaboration with experts, specialist services, and media.

- **Training:** comprehensive and specialist training on domestic family and sexual violence has been developed for media organisations and delivered to media professionals. Domestic, family, and sexual violence services receive media training on how to effectively communicate their messages.

- **Coordination:** media, police, health, Aboriginal-controlled organisations, and specialist domestic, family, and sexual violence services are working effectively together to stop the perpetuation of myths and harmful attitudes and beliefs in the media.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## REPORTING ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

<http://kalinya.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Reporting-on-Aboriginal-peoples-experiences-of-family-violence-media-toolkit-1.pdf>

## OUR WATCH

### Media Making Change resources

<https://media.ourwatch.org.au/reporting-violence-against-women/guidelines-for-reporting-violence-against-women/>

## MEDIA DIVERSITY AUSTRALIA

### Reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Issues An introductory resource for the media

[https://www.mediadiversityaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ReportingonAboriginalandTorresStraitIslanderPeoplesandIssues\\_Handbookv2.pdf](https://www.mediadiversityaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ReportingonAboriginalandTorresStraitIslanderPeoplesandIssues_Handbookv2.pdf)

## AUSTRALIAN PRESS COUNCIL

### Advisory Guideline on Family and Domestic Violence Reporting

[https://www.presscouncil.org.au/uploads/52321/ufiles/Guidelines/Advisory\\_Guideline\\_on\\_Family\\_and\\_Domestic\\_Violence\\_Reporting\\_09072021.pdf](https://www.presscouncil.org.au/uploads/52321/ufiles/Guidelines/Advisory_Guideline_on_Family_and_Domestic_Violence_Reporting_09072021.pdf)

## DART CENTRE FOR JOURNALISM AND TRAUMA

### Conducting Interviews with Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

<https://dartcenter.org/content/conducting-interviews-with-survivors-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-by-witness>

## GENDER EQUAL MEDIA SCOTLAND

### Research and resources for the ethical reporting of violence against women

<https://www.genderequalmedia.scot/research/5-violence-against-women/>

- i** United Nations (1993) Article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.
- ii** World Health Organisation (2021) Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018: global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women
- iii** Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2019). Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: Continuing the national story 2019 [Cat. no. FDV 3]. . NSW: Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
- iv** Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2019). Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: Continuing the national story 2019 [Cat. no. FDV 3]. . NSW: Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
- v** The Northern Territory Government. (2018). The Northern Territory's Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Reducation Framework 2018-2028: Safe, respected and free from violence. Darwin: The Northern Territory Government.
- Havnen, O. (2012). Office of the Northern Territory Coordinator-General for Remote Services Report June 2011 - August 2012. Darwin: Office of the Coordinator-General for Remote Services, Northern Territory Government.
- vi** The Northern Territory Government. (2018). The Northern Territory's Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Reducation Framework 2018-2028: Safe, respected and free from violence. Darwin: The Northern Territory Government.
- The Northern Territory Government. (2017, May). Issues Paper: Northern Territory Alcohol Policies and Legislation Review. Retrieved from Department of Health, The Northern Territory Government : <https://digitallibrary.health.nt.gov.au/prodjspui/bitstream/10137/1281/1/Northern%20Territory%20Alcohol%20Policies%20and%20Legislation%20Review%20-%20Issues%20Paper.pdf>
- vii** The Northern Territory Government. (2018). The Northern Territory's Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Reducation Framework 2018-2028: Safe, respected and free from violence. Darwin: The Northern Territory Government.
- viii** Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. (2018). Northern Territory Correctional Services Annual Statistics 2016 - 2017. Northern Territory Correctional Services and Youth Justice Annual Statistics. Darwin: Criminal Justice Research and Statistics Unit, Northern Territory Government.
- ix** Our Watch (2021). Change the Story: a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia, Our Watch, Melbourne
- x** Our Watch (2021). Change the Story: a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia, Our Watch, Melbourne
- xi** Our Watch (2021). Change the Story: a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia, Our Watch, Melbourne
- xii** The Northern Territory Government. (2018). The Northern Territory's Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Reducation Framework 2018-2028: Safe, respected and free from violence. Darwin: The Northern Territory Government.
- xiii** Our Watch. (2018). Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children. Melbourne: Our Watch.
- xiv** Watson, I. (2009a). In the Northern Territory Intervention, What is Saved or Rescued and at What Cost? *Cultural Studies Review*, 15(2), 45-60.
- xv** World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical. (2010). Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: taking action and generating evidence. Geneva: World Health Organisation .
- xvi** Bryant, C. (2009, December). Identifying the risks for Indigenous violent victimisation. *Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse*, p. Brief 6.
- xvii** Wilson, B., & O'Brien, J. (2003). "To infuse an universal terror": a reappraisal of the Coniston killings. *Aboriginal History*, 27, 59-78. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24054260>
- xviii** Strong Futures in the Northern Territory: A ten year commitment to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory July 2012 (2012), Department of Social Services, Australian Government, Canberra [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/09\\_2012/stronger-futures-booklet-jul2012.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/09_2012/stronger-futures-booklet-jul2012.pdf)
- xix** Brown, C. (2020). From the roots up: Principles of good practice to prevent violence against women in the Northern Territory. Canberra: Australian National University.
- xx** The Northern Territory Government. (2017, May). Issues Paper: Northern Territory Alcohol Policies and Legislation Review. Retrieved from Department of Health, The Northern Territory Government : <https://digitallibrary.health.nt.gov.au/prodjspui/bitstream/10137/1281/1/Northern%20Territory%20Alcohol%20Policies%20and%20Legislation%20Review%20-%20Issues%20Paper.pdf>
- xxi** World Health Organisation . (2017, November). Violence against women. Retrieved from World Health Organisation : <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/> ; Abramsky, T., Watts, C. H., Garcia-Moreno, C., Devries, K., Kiss, L., Ellsberg, M., . . . Heise , L. (2011). What factors are associated with recent intimate partner violence? findings from the WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence. *BMC Public Health* 11, 109, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-11-109>.
- xxii** Our Watch. (2018). Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children. Melbourne: Our Watch.

