



# Beyond the Headlines: Media guidelines for reporting on rape

that's still rape

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# **These guidelines were created by Blu Mckenzie for That's Still Rape, 2025.**

## **About That's Still Rape**

We are a non-profit highlighting myths about rape and their harmful impact on survivors. Through our viral content and guerrilla campaigns we shift the narrative around rape – debunking misinformation and challenging victim blaming.

## **About these guidelines**

These guidelines will help journalists report on rape responsibly. They highlight the media's role in perpetuating myths about rape, outline common pitfalls to avoid, and provide best practice tips.

# Everything you know about rape is wrong

## What are rape myths?

Rape myths are false beliefs about rape and rape survivors. For example, that most rapes are committed by strangers or that someone who was 'genuinely' raped, reports the assault immediately.

These myths make it harder for survivors to be believed, making them less likely to report their assault. And when survivors do report, these myths can influence the response of police and juries, preventing justice.

## Common rape myths

### **Men aren't raped.**

1 in 18 UK men are raped. <sup>1</sup>

### **Women commonly lie about rape.**

False reports account for 3% of rape cases — no higher than any other crime. <sup>2</sup>

### **Most rapes are committed by strangers.**

90% of survivors know their attacker. <sup>3</sup>

### **'Real' survivors report their rape immediately.**

Many survivors take time to come forward, and most never report at all.

### **It's only rape if they fight back.**

Freezing is a common trauma response. Many survivors are unable to move or speak during an assault.

### **Survivors act a certain way after being raped.**

There's no 'right' way to respond to rape. Trauma affects people differently, and survivors may not feel its full impact until much later.

### **A woman's clothing can invite rape.**

There's no evidence that clothing influences rape.

### **It's your fault if you get drunk and are raped.**

Rape is never the survivor's fault. It doesn't matter if they were drunk — the perpetrator is always to blame.

# How the media reinforces rape myths

The media plays a key role in shaping perceptions of rape, as it's where many of us get our information from. When coverage is inaccurate or sensationalized, it reinforces harmful myths and encourages victim blaming.

## **Using victim-blaming language**

The media shifts blame onto survivors by focusing on their choices. Headlines like 'Drunk woman raped' imply the survivor made themselves vulnerable and is therefore responsible.

## **Focusing on stranger rape**

The media overreports stranger rapes and underreports acquaintance rapes relative to their actual frequency. This reinforces the myth that most rapists are strangers.

## **Creating sympathy for the perpetrator**

Highlighting how rape affects the rapist — like reporting that a 'promising career is ruined' — shifts sympathy away from the survivor and toward the perpetrator.

## **Downplaying rape**

Using soft language like 'non-consensual sex' instead of 'rape' or 'underage sex' instead of 'statutory rape' downplays the severity of the crime.

## **Overemphasizing 'perfect' victims**

The media prioritizes stories about young, white women while overlooking Black & Asian women, male survivors, trans and non-binary people, and sex workers — reinforcing the idea that only certain people are raped.

## **Treating rape with skepticism**

The word 'alleged' casts doubt on survivors' accounts. While legal caution is necessary, using 'alleged rape' instead of 'reported rape' discredits accusations.

# How to report rape the right way

## (Focus on the who, what, why and how)

### Who

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Perpetrators of rape should be referred to as 'men' or 'women', not as 'monsters,' 'animals,' or 'predators.' Dehumanizing language promotes the myth that rape is committed by evil outliers and not ordinary people.

Avoid framing perpetrators positively, for example as a 'great father' or 'community leader.'

Use active language to keep the perpetrator in focus. Say 'A man raped a woman' *not* 'A woman was raped.' Passive wording erases the rapist and makes it seem like rape just happens, rather than being a deliberate act.

### **Morning Pages**

#### **Vile predator assaults woman in horror attack**

The woman was attacked while walking alone at night.

### **Morning Pages**

#### **Man arrested for raping woman**

According to reports, the man assaulted the woman as she walked home.

### **Daily Press**

#### **Beloved coach allegedly assaulted players**

Community reeling after 'beloved coach' and father accused of sexual assault.

### **Daily Press**

#### **Local coach reported for sexual assault**

Community reeling after reports that a football coach assaulted players.

# How to report rape the right way

(Focus on the who, what, why and how)

## What

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Use words that accurately describe the crime. Say 'rape,' 'sexual assault,' and 'statutory rape' instead of misleading terms like 'non-consensual sex,' 'inappropriate touching,' or 'underage sex.'

Sexual acts involving a child are always abuse. Never use terms like 'child prostitute,' 'underage woman,' or 'schoolboy lover.' These misrepresent survivors and minimize the crime!

### **The Gazette**

**Married teacher, 42, 'romped' with schoolboy lover in car**

Woman arrested after clandestine relationship with year 8 student.



### **The Gazette**

**Teacher, 42, arrested for child sexual abuse**

Woman arrested after a student reported the abuse to his parents.



### **Town Herald**

**City trader given 9 months in jail for breast grab**



### **Town Herald**

**City trader given 9 months in jail for sexual assault**



# How to report rape the right way

(Focus on the who, what, why and how)

## Why

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Never justify rape. Do not suggest the survivor was to blame because of how they were dressed or whether they were drinking or flirting.

Likewise, do not make excuses for perpetrators. Blaming rape on a perpetrator's trauma shifts responsibility away from them, and stigmatizes survivors of childhood abuse – most of whom do not go on to harm others.

### **News Express**

**Woman 'too drunk to stand' raped after night out**

The court heard the victim flirted with the man on the night of the attack.

### **News Express**

**Man raped woman after night out**

The court heard the woman and the accused were socialising that night.

### **The International**

**'Vulnerable' woman accused of child abuse reveals her painful past**

### **The International**

**Accused child rapist discloses history of sexual abuse to court**

# How to report rape the right way

(Focus on the who, what, why and how)

## How

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Be accurate, not sensationalist! When describing an assault, use clear and accurate language without exaggeration or graphic details that could retraumatize survivors. This is especially important in headlines, which should inform without exploiting the crime.



**The Now**  
Sex beast lurks in suburbs: woman's night of terror



**The Now**  
Man arrested for rape in suburban area



**The Daily**  
Knife attack: Man 'sobbed' and 'begged' during gang rape ambush  
Local man subjected to an 'hour long' assault.



**The Daily**  
Group accused of raping a man at knifepoint  
Local man claims he was ambushed and assaulted.

# Final tips for responsible reporting

## **Signpost support services**

Always end your article with details of support services for survivors. You'll find a list of recommended organizations on page 10.

## **Consider disabling comments**

Comment sections on stories about rape are rarely safe spaces. If you can't moderate comments to prevent victim-blaming, harassment and abusive language, consider limiting them.

## **Review images**

Avoid stock photos that perpetuate stereotypes, for example women crying or faceless men in alleyways. Opt for neutral images that do not sensationalize violence. If unsure, leave the story image-free.

## **And lastly**

### **Seek support for yourself**

Reporting on sensitive topics like rape can take an emotional toll. It's important to seek out support for yourself and your colleagues to ensure your own well-being.

# Resources and support services

## **Imkaan**

Black feminist organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and Minoritised women and girls.

[www.imkaan.org.uk](http://www.imkaan.org.uk)

## **Rape Crisis England & Wales**

English and Welsh charity delivering specialist services to those affected by sexual violence and abuse.

[www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)

## **Rape Crisis Scotland**

Scottish charity delivering specialist services to those affected by sexual violence and abuse.

[www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)

## **Safeline**

Charity providing therapeutic and practical support for survivors and their families.

General helpline: 01926 402 498

Male survivor helpline: 0808 800 5005

[www.safeline.org.uk](http://www.safeline.org.uk)

## **SurvivorsUK**

Supports men, boys, trans and non-binary people aged 13+ who have experienced sexual violence.

[www.survivorsuk.org](http://www.survivorsuk.org)

## **The Survivors Trust**

UK umbrella agency for specialist rape and sexual abuse support services.

[www.thesurvivorstrust.org](http://www.thesurvivorstrust.org)

## **Victim Support**

Charity supporting victims of crime and traumatic incidents in England and Wales.

Helpline: 0808 168 9111

[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

## **Women's Aid**

Charity providing women's refuges across the UK.

[www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

# Sources

1. Office for National Statistics (2023).
2. Rape Crisis Scotland (2013). False Allegations of Rape: Briefing Paper. Available at: <https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/files/false-allegations-bp-170913-1-1.pdf>
3. Office for National Statistics (2021).

**Any questions?**  
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