A woman with curly hair and hoop earrings holds a large, torn cardboard sign. She is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. In the background, several other women are visible, some looking towards the camera and others looking away. The scene is outdoors, likely at a protest or demonstration. A red banner is at the bottom of the image.

CHANGING
THE
NARRATIVE
OF VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN

WOMEN'S FUND OF OMAHA | MEDIA RESOURCE



**At some point,
we all come from a place
of being less informed.
BUT ONCE WE KNOW BETTER,
WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY
TO DO BETTER.**



**CHANGING THE NARRATIVE
OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**
A MEDIA RESOURCE

Introduction.....4

Important Definitions.....5 - 6

WAYS JOURNALISTS HELP TELL STORIES OF:

- Domestic Violence.....7-10
- Sexual Assault.....11-14
- Sex Trafficking.....15-18

Reporting Considerations.....19-20

Language Considerations.....21-24

Trauma-Informed Interviewing.....25-27

Citations.....28

Content Experts.....29-30



www.OmahaWomensFund.org

Thank you to the Maine Sexual Assault Coalition for permission to utilize their 2015 SEX TRAFFICKING & EXPLOITATION MEDIA GUIDE in the creation of this resource. We would also like to thank the survivor leaders with Survivors Rising.



CHANGING THE NARRATIVE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

AT THE WOMEN'S FUND, WE BELIEVE IT'S CRUCIAL TO PARTNER WITH OUR ALLIES IN THE JOURNALISM INDUSTRY TO SHIFT THE CONVERSATION AROUND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ASSAULT AND SEX TRAFFICKING.

Journalists have the ability to shape public perception about these issues. The media plays a tremendous role in ending domestic and sexual violence and this resource was written as a toolkit to assist in that work. When individual stories are used to illuminate systemic injustices, the public is given the tools to identify and respond to these crimes, the ability to draw links to systemic injustices and the necessary context for people combatting these issues.

As a representative of the media, you have the power to shape how our society views women and girls. Telling the story of survivors more completely allows the public to better understand the complexities and realities of violence against women, how to recognize it and hopefully, how to prevent it in the future. We invite you to join us in changing the narrative and creating a community where women and girls are free from violence.

The following guidelines for reporting on violence against women are intended to provide clarity and support for journalists with the most up-to-date resources for readers and the Nebraska community.

Important Definitions *to* Know

Important Definitions *to* Know

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence, sometimes called domestic abuse or intimate partner violence, is a pattern of behaviors toward an intimate partner with the intent to establish and maintain power and control over the other person and the relationship. This may include verbal or emotional abuse, financial abuse, physical or sexual violence. This behavior may occur over months or years and does not have to be consistent to be domestic violence.

LEGAL DEFINITION:

Any criminal statute can be domestic violence in nature, and there are approximately 30 crimes commonly seen in domestic violence cases. The most common, and the only crime specifically between intimate partners is Nebraska statute 28-323 which covers first-, second- and third-degree domestic assault.

Domestic assault requires an intimate partner relationship, which is defined as a current or former spouse or dating partner or persons with a child in common.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assault broadly refers to any sexual contact or behavior without the explicit consent of the victim or if the victim is too young or unable to consent. This can also include coercion to engage in a sexual act against their will and drug/alcohol facilitated sexual assault. It can be anything from touching genital or breast areas over the clothes to vaginal, anal or oral penetration.

LEGAL DEFINITION:

First-, second- and third-degree sexual assault definitions are outlined in Nebraska state law 28.319 and 28.320.

Third-degree or misdemeanor sexual assault is typically touching of a victim's genital or breast areas over clothing. Second-degree is generally sexual contact without penetration. First-degree sexual assault occurs when the victim is subject to sexual penetration. All sexual assaults take place without consent of the victim OR when the person knew or should have known the victim was not able to consent. This could mean that the victim was intoxicated or under the influence of another substance or the victim has an intellectual disability, among other things.

In Nebraska, 16 is the legal age of consent. Any adult 19 or older who engages in sex with someone under the age of 16 could potentially be prosecuted for sexual assault.

SEX TRAFFICKING AND COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Sex trafficking, or commercial sexual exploitation, is the exchange of sex or sex acts for anything of value when an individual is coerced or manipulated into the arrangement through a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes, including monetary, social or political profit from the sexual exploitation of another.¹ A third party may not be involved, and money may not change hands (e.g. the exploiter requires sex acts in exchange for drugs or a place to stay). Not all sexual exploitation meets the legal definition of trafficking. Someone cannot consent to sexual activity if they are being exploited.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children is the use of a child for sexual purposes in exchange for cash or in-kind favors between a customer, intermediary or agent, and others who profit from the trade in children for these purposes.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children is perpetrated when individuals buy, trade or sell sexual acts with a child.² Under U.S. federal law and Nebraska state law, any minor under the age of 18 years induced into commercial sex is a victim of sex trafficking.

LEGAL DEFINITION:

Sex trafficking is a felony under state law 28.830, perpetrated when someone recruits, entices, harbors, transports, provides, solicits or obtains a person for the purpose of having such person engage in commercial sexual activity without their consent. Attempting to do these acts is sex trafficking. For consent to occur, an individual cannot use force, fraud or coercion, and both parties must be competent and more than 18 years old.

Sex trafficking under federal law occurs when a person requires someone to engage in commercial sexual activity via force, fraud or coercion. A "commercial sex act" is any sex act where anything of value is given to or received by any person. Sex trafficking is perpetrated when another party benefits from the sale of a person for sex acts, through force, fraud, coercion, threats, and/or manipulation or when the person is a minor. Forcing someone to take sexually explicit photographs or videos/pornography can also be a form of sex trafficking.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND CONSENT AS IT RELATES TO THE VARIOUS TYPES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN.

- **In Nebraska, 16 is the legal age of consent.** Any adult 19 or older who engages in sex with someone under the age of 16 could be potentially prosecuted for sexual assault.
- **Under U.S. federal and Nebraska state law, any minor under the age of 18 years induced into commercial sex is a victim of sex trafficking.** In cases of sexual commercial exploitation of an adult, someone cannot consent to sexual activity if they are being exploited.

A woman with blonde hair and a serious expression is holding a white sign in front of a brick wall. The sign contains a headline about domestic violence. The headline is written in a mix of red and black text, with some words crossed out.

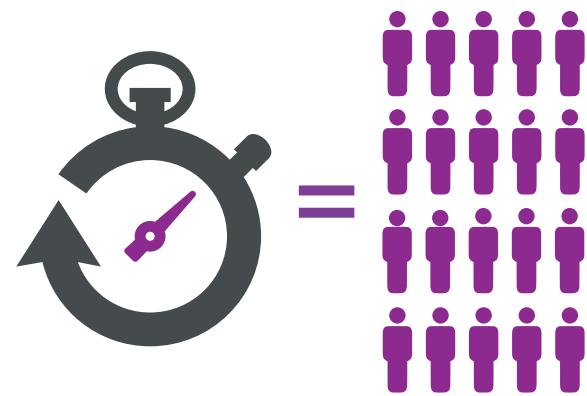
~~Domestic Abuser~~
~~Lovesick Teen~~ Brings
a Gun to School,
Shoots Ex-Girlfriend

Ways Journalists Help Tell Stories of DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- **Portray domestic violence as a pattern of behavior rather than inexplicable random incidents.** Domestic violence is a pattern of escalating conduct. An accurate portrayal will illustrate that pattern. Include whether prior incidents occurred, any history of controlling behavior, and any prior arrest or court records for the abuser.
- **Talk about stalking, psychological abuse and financial abuse.** These crimes are often overlooked because society emphasizes physical abuse; however, abusers also use stalking, psychological abuse and financial abuse to manipulate and control their victims.
- **Include warning signs and risk factors, such as whether there were guns in the house, or previous abusive relationships.** These factors help educate the public to identify and intervene in domestic violence in the future.
- **Place your story in the broader context of domestic violence as a public health issue.** Studies show that when domestic violence is accurately portrayed as a public health issue, with base rates and risk factors, the public places a greater emphasis on their role in intervening.
- **Emphasize that anyone can be abusive.** Stories often talk about how an abuser was “odd” or “antisocial,” which reinforces the idea that abusers are lone exceptions. On the contrary, domestic violence is a systemic, societal issue. Similarly, some witnesses express surprise at a “normal” or “clean-cut” individual being an abuser or identify the abuser must be mentally ill. In fact, most abusers only abuse their partner, NOT others around them which shows their value system is the problem, not the psychology.
- **Don’t overemphasize the statements of neighbors, family and friends.** They often make statements that detract from the issues at hand. For example, family members often suggest that an abuser “just snapped” because they might be unaware of prior controlling behavior.
- **Remember that abusers could use your story.** Abusers use news reports to threaten their victims with similar fates or reinforce the belief that the victim will be humiliated and not believed.

Reporting *on* Domestic Violence

To end domestic violence across Nebraska, it's imperative to change societal narratives. Language allows us to transmit, re-affirm and change ideas about issues like domestic and sexual violence. People hear language and unconsciously attribute it to their understanding of these issues. Journalists have the power to either reaffirm harmful ideas or shatter the problematic ways we discuss these issues. However, if not accurately written and contextualized, these stories can cause additional harm to the victims by bringing about public shame and victimization and can disempower survivors from their own voices. In fact, 40 percent of news stories about domestic violence included language that blamed the victim and minimized or exonerated the offender's actions.³



On average, nearly
**20 PEOPLE
PER MINUTE**

are physically abused by an intimate partner with more than 10 million abused by an intimate partner each year.⁴



THE PRESENCE OF A GUN

in a domestic violence situation increases the risk of homicide by

500%⁵

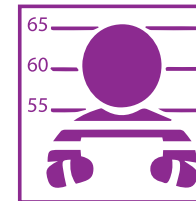


have experienced
**SEVERE PHYSICAL
VIOLENCE**

by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime.⁶

HOW DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AFFECTS SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

Domestic violence is more likely to happen in certain populations than others. The dynamics of that violence can also look drastically different in different communities. It's important to ensure that the survivor stories you're sharing in your reporting are reflective of this diversity.



INCARCERATED PEOPLE:

Many people, particularly **women and girls**, end up **incarcerated because of their responses to domestic violence**. These reactions often include violence against abusers or engaging in illegal substance abuse as a response to sexual trauma.



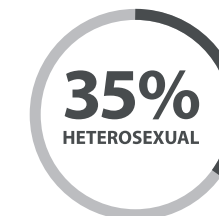
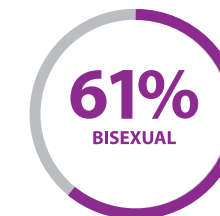
AMERICAN INDIAN/NATIVE COMMUNITIES

experience violence at significantly higher rates than many other with **56% of women** and **44% of men** experiencing physical violence by an intimate partner.¹⁰



PEOPLE OF COLOR experience domestic violence at rates 35% higher than white females.⁷

However, they are less likely than white women to use social services, domestic violence programs or go to the hospital.⁸ Each community of color has challenges and circumstances unique to their community, which often include a strong loyalty to race, faith, culture and family.



LGBTQ & TRANSGENDER / NONBINARY people are equally to more likely to experience domestic violence than their straight and cisgender peers. 26% of lesbian and 61% of bisexual women experience rape, physical abuse or stalking by an intimate partner, compared to 35% of heterosexual women.⁹

YOUNG PEOPLE:

The highest rates of domestic violence are experienced by women between 16 and 24.¹¹



MILITARY SERVICE: Domestic violence in the military is complicated because victims might be reluctant to seek help out of concern for their military spouse's career. Approximately **30% of active duty women** report intimate partner abuse.¹² They often have increased barriers to reporting and accessing services due to isolated deployment locations, rank of assailant(s) and lack of institutional confidentiality.



Ways Journalists Help Tell Stories of SEXUAL ASSAULT

- **Don't overestimate false reporting.** The rate of false reports for assaults is consistent with other crimes (2-10%)¹³; however, due to the media's heavy attention of false reports, many in the public believe rates of false reporting are as high as 50%. Reflecting the reality of false reports is important, because the public's focus on false reports is part of what prevents survivors from coming forward to report a chronically underreported crime.
- **Place stories in the context of statistics, like the amount of stranger assaults versus acquaintance assaults or the amount of assaults that are prosecuted.**
- **Use of anonymous sources.** Victims of both sexual harassment and sexual assault often have legitimate reasons for requesting anonymity. It is important for journalists to understand those reasons, and work with sources to give audiences confidence in the information reported. When listening to stories from victims, reporters must balance their need to verify details against causing more unnecessary harm.¹⁴
- **Remember that offenders could use your story.** Offenders may use news reports to threaten their victims, affirm their innocence or reinforce the belief that the victim will be humiliated and not believed.

Reporting *on* Sexual Assault

Journalists' stories on sexual assault are used in a myriad of ways. They influence public perspective, and they are also used to shape local policies and procedures around the issue. They can help survivors come forward with their own stories and seek services. They educate the public on warning signs of these crimes that allow them to take action in their communities and relationships.



**\$23
BILLION**

Sexual assault costs \$23 billion in lost productivity and almost \$145 billion in reduced quality of life every year.¹⁵



**\$145
BILLION**



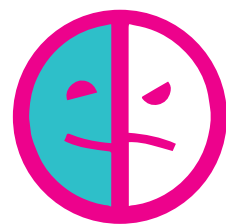
1 IN 3 WOMEN

have experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime, and **one in 6 women and one in 33 men have experienced an attempted or completed rape.**¹⁶



**47%
OF TRANSGENDER
PEOPLE**

are sexually assaulted at some point in their lives.¹⁷



**UP TO
HALF**

of all sexual assault survivors suffer from at least one symptom of **prolonged trauma** from their assaults.¹⁸

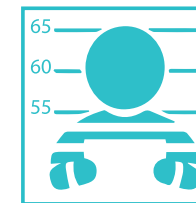


7 OUT OF 10 RAPES

are committed by someone known to the victim.¹⁹

HOW SEXUAL ASSAULT AFFECTS SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

Sexual violence is more likely to happen in certain populations than others. The dynamics of that violence can also look drastically different in different communities. It's important to ensure that the survivor stories you're sharing in your reporting are reflective of this diversity.



INCARCERATED PEOPLE:

Four percent of incarcerated people have reported experiencing sexual assault within the past 12 months.²⁰

**56%
WOMEN**

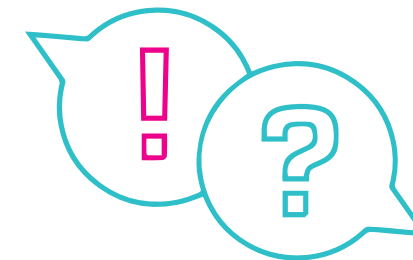


**28%
MEN**



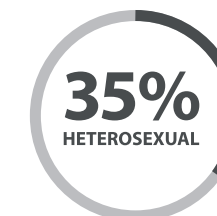
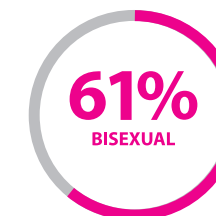
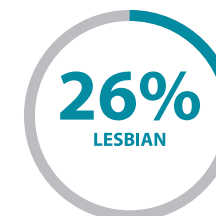
AMERICAN INDIAN/NATIVE COMMUNITIES

experience violence at significantly higher rates than many others with **56% of women** and **28% of men** having experienced sexual violence.²³



IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES:

Immigrant survivors have additional barriers to seeking support, such as language barriers, immigration status and laws, and cultural isolation.



LGBTQ & TRANSGENDER / NONBINARY

people are equally to more likely to experience sexual violence than their straight and cisgender peers. 26% of lesbian and 61% of bisexual women experience rape, physical abuse or stalking by an intimate partner, compared to 35% of heterosexual women.²¹ In addition, one in two transgender individuals experiences sexual abuse during their lifetime.²²

YOUNG PEOPLE:

Women attending college, ages 18 to 24, are three times more likely to experience sexual assault, and women who are 18 to 24 and not in college are four times more likely to experience sexual assault.²⁴



Ways Journalists Help Tell Stories of SEX TRAFFICKING

- **Provide context on the relationship between prostitution and trafficking.** In regular investigations of criminal activity, remember that people arrested for prostitution are often trafficked. Reporting on prostitution cases if you're unsure whether exploitation is involved could put trafficking victims at risk and in danger. Additionally, just because someone is charged with prostitution without the presence of coercion or force, does not mean we understand whether there is an element of exploitation. A lack of economic opportunity, marginalization and the inability to access basic resources can contribute to a person's involvement in the sex trade.

Note: These issues are complicated and often depend on how a victim identifies, how the law defines the acts reported, whether there is a trafficker involved, etc. In general, if sex trafficking or aggravated sex trafficking is charged in a case, assume that it is a case involving coercion or force. In cases where prostitution is charged, there may still be force, fraud or coercion at play, but law enforcement officers may not be aware of the circumstances. For example, in cases where pandering (enticing someone into the commercial sex trade) is charged, trafficking is often present, even if it's not immediately identified.

- **Focus reporting on the root cause.** The purchasing of sex contributes to the commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking of individuals. This is true regardless of whether the buyer knows the individual they purchased was trafficked. If purchasing a trafficking victim, the buyer is committing violence against them. In order to end the demand, the narrative of sex trafficking must focus on buyers.
- **Highlight reputable sources.** While awareness about sex trafficking increases, attempts to identify trafficking and highlight potential risk occurs. As a result, data that may not be accurate and misleading stories are sometimes shared on social media. For instance, a seemingly viral Facebook post about possible trafficking at a local store does not mean that there is an increase in trafficking activity in a community. It is important that when prevalent numbers, statistics and stories are given, they are from reliable sources.

Reporting on Sex Trafficking

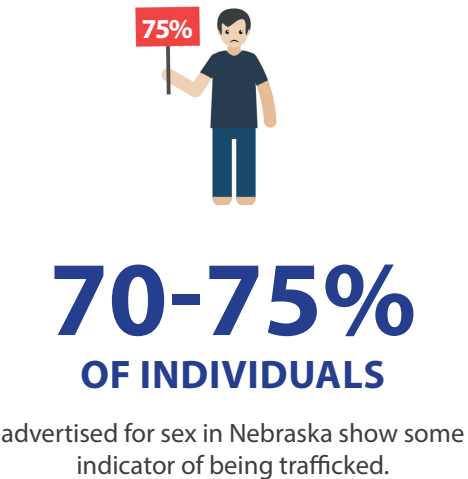
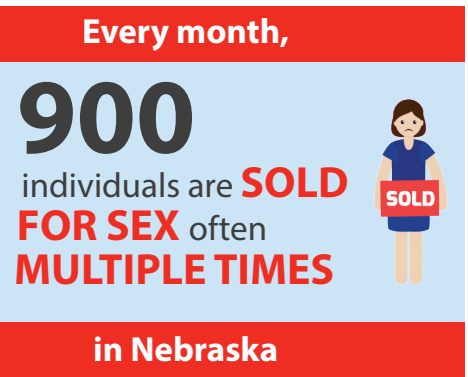
The media shapes public debate and discourse, influencing how sex trafficking is understood and responded to.

Exploitation and sex trafficking exist on a spectrum; many exploitive behaviors may not meet legal definitions of trafficking. Related activities such as various forms of commercial sex, may be illegal under Nebraska law, and yet not entail trafficking. What matters most in these cases, regardless of whether legal definitions are met, is the trauma, or intense emotional response, that many survivors of exploitation and trafficking experience. This trauma is what makes trafficking such a heinous crime that society must continue to discuss and find solutions to ending.

This resource is intended to inform reporting on cases where individuals are being trafficked or exploited through force, fraud, coercion or manipulation, and to distinguish between those cases and all incidents in the commercial sex trade. It is not an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of trafficking or exploitation.

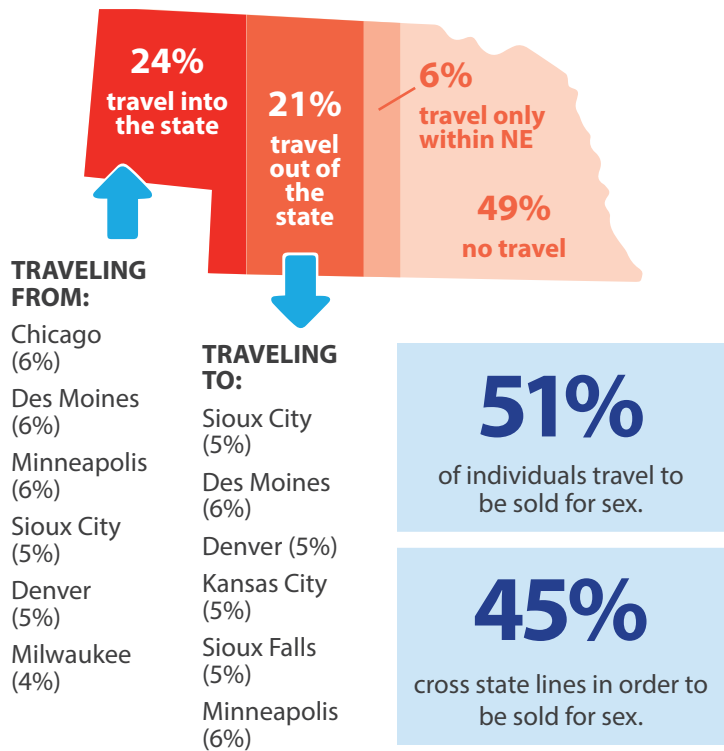
Commercial sexual exploitation doesn't exist independently of other structural inequalities. Many survivors were first driven to commercial sex trade because of poverty, lack of opportunity or former sexual exploitation and situations which are linked to race, class, sexuality, nationality and ability.

STATISTICS ON SEX TRAFFICKING IN NEBRASKA²⁵



INTERCONNECTED MARKET

Not only does Nebraska exist within the larger national system, but its cities are part of an integrated state-wide system with a clearly defined structure.



NATIONAL DATA ON SEX TRAFFICKING

7x

LGBTQ+ YOUTH

are 7.4 times more likely to experience acts of sexual violence than their heterosexual peers and are 3-7 times more likely to engage in survival sex to meet basic needs.²⁶



99% of sex trafficking survivors experience

NEGATIVE MENTAL HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

from their victimization, and 98% experience negative physical health ramifications.²⁷



1 IN 7

of the more 25,000 children reported to the **National Center for Missing and Exploited Children** (2017) as missing were likely the victims of child sex trafficking.²⁸

HOW SEX TRAFFICKING AFFECTS SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

Often individuals sold for sex are recruited from vulnerable populations. Nebraska's commercial sex market is extremely skewed toward youth, low socio-economic status and historically disadvantaged populations. However, the relationship between race and the commercial sex market requires further study to create comprehensive solutions for all populations.

IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES:

In general, refugee, asylum-seeking and immigrant individuals are less likely to be advertised online, therefore it is likely this populations is under-represented as being sold for sex.



PEOPLE OF COLOR:

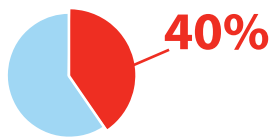
Nebraska has a racially imbalanced online commercial sex market. African Americans represent only 5% of Nebraska's population, and yet they make up half of all individuals sold for sex online in the state. **Because of this, there is also likely a disproportionate number of African Americans being trafficked.**²⁹



YOUNG PEOPLE:

In Nebraska, 11% of those being sold for sex online are advertised under the age of 21.

Overall, 20% of individuals sold for sex in Nebraska are advertised as "very young" based on keywords or their posted age.³⁰



AMERICAN INDIAN/NATIVE

Across four sites surveyed in the US and Canada as part of a 2015 report, an average of **40 percent of the women** involved in sex trafficking identified as American Indian/ Native or First Nations.³¹

Important Considerations When Reporting *on* Violence Against Women

1. NAMING THE VICTIM

Victims of sex trafficking, domestic violence or sexual assault are victims of crimes. As most news organizations agree, every attempt to conceal a victim's identity should be made out of respect for the victim unless the victim wishes to be identified. This includes information that may identify her/him in a small community, and any photos of the victim.

Sometimes a victim may also have criminal charges related to their victimization; however, this does not negate their experience as a victim and the need to conceal their identity.

A victim under the age of 18 should never be identified in any way, including naming the parents of child, address or school name, etc.

2. WHAT FRAMEWORK YOU USE

A public health framework shifts the public's perception of violence against women as a random violent crime to a systemic issue with potential prevention strategies. Studies have shown that when issues are positioned this way, readers place more responsibility on society's role in solving these crimes.

3. WHAT TO INCLUDE IN STORIES

The following are helpful ways to add context to stories, particularly if a survivor is not available or willing to discuss their experiences.

- Talk to lawmakers and elected officials about the current policy landscape surrounding these issues, gaps they see and areas for growth.
- Talk to reputable groups involved in violence prevention work. Much of the domestic/sexual violence and sex trafficking work tends to focus on crisis response, so discussing prevention strategies can show how this can be prevented in the first place.
- Talk to local service providers and experts in the fields of sex trafficking, domestic/sexual violence and child welfare to learn more about how these issues look in Nebraska.
- Point to risk factors as identified by the experts to give the public the tools to identify these crimes and respond to them.
- Share local, state and/or national statistics from reputable sources to illuminate how these issues impact communities.
- Reach out to leaders involved in racial justice and LGBTQ+ justice to learn how these systems are connected to these types of trauma.
- Contact information for local and national advocacy resources for survivors. Resources are included at the end of the document.

Important Considerations When Reporting *on* Violence Against Women

3. WHAT TO INCLUDE IN STORIES (Con't.)

- Information on how offenders can get help. It's important to remember that change is possible for offenders and assailants who are willing to be accountable for their actions. Helping them access the resources they need to change will only benefit society.

4. REFLECT ON THE DETAILS

It's important to assess when details are helpful and when they are harmful. Details that are relevant include presence of risks factors in the offender's behavior. Details that are not relevant include descriptions of what the victim was wearing, prior sexual history and other victim-focused observations.

5. REFLECT THE DIVERSITY OF VICTIMS AND THESE CRIMES

Domestic violence, sexual assault and sex trafficking are more likely to occur in Native American communities, LGBTQ communities and within prisons; however, these stories are often ignored.

Telling the story from the point that a crime is reported is the approach **least likely** to illuminate anything. Because that's the point that a victim is most likely to insist on anonymity.

WHAT IF OUR POLICIES ENCOURAGED JOURNALISTS TO LOOK FOR TRENDS AND HOLD THE POWERFUL ACCOUNTABLE?

— Poynter³²

Language Considerations When Reporting on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Trafficking

Words matter. How you say it is just as important as what you’re saying. While these language considerations are best practices in discussing violence against women, the most important guideline is to respect the terminology used by a survivor.

INSTEAD OF ...	USE ...	BECAUSE ...
Victim/ Survivor	Use whatever word the victim/survivor uses to identify themselves	It’s important to give victims/survivors power in defining their experiences, given how they often had little control over their lives during their experience of violence.
Innocent Victim	Victim/Survivor	All victims/survivors are innocent. Implying that a victim/survivor could not be innocent furthers the myth that it’s the victim/survivor’s responsibility to prevent the violence inflicted upon them.
Victim admits/ confesses	Victim reports/shares/ reveals	Words like “admit” and “confess” imply responsibility and shame, when the responsibility should be solely on those inflicting violence.
Prostitute	Trafficking victim (when force, fraud, or coercion are present or when the individual is a minor) Individual sold for sex (when force, fraud, or coercion are not present, and the individual is not a minor)	The term "prostitute" tends to convey choice, agency and criminality to the reader. In cases where there are charges related to the trafficking, it’s important to accurately reflect that the person trafficked is a reported victim of a crime. Prostitute is also a legal term that is societally stigmatized. Regardless of how you identify people, use the terminology that they prefer.
Child prostitute Underage prostitute	Commercially sexually exploited child, child sex trafficking victim	The term prostitute implies consent, which minors legally cannot give. Commercial sexual exploitation accurately defines the severity of this exploitation. The Associated Press recommends that writers never use the word “child prostitute” because it implies that the youth is voluntarily exchanging sex for money.
Real names of survivors	Pseudonyms	Under 18: We strongly recommend concealing identity because of safety concerns. Over 18: Utilize pseudonyms and conceal identities unless the victim/survivor specifically requests to be named. Remember, this is their story. It’s best to explain exactly what identifying information is in the article and how the article could follow them.

INSTEAD OF ...	USE ...	BECAUSE ...
Details about the victim’s private life, habits, sexual history, or physical appearance	Pull-out quotes Data points Charts or graphs Details about sexual assault/domestic violence and trafficking response in Nebraska	Details about the victim’s private life, sexual history or physical appearance often contribute to victim blaming. Inclusion of these details implies that it’s the victim’s physical appearance, mental health or the number of sexual partners they had that prompted someone to assault them, rather than the assaulter’s behavior. Instead, statistics on sexual assault or details about local responses can be more informative to the public.
Rescue	Healing Recovery Restoration Process of relief from sex trafficking	Perpetuating the idea that domestic and sexual violence and trafficking victims need someone to save them simplifies a complex crime and ignores the fact that leaving the situation is only the first step of a very significant recovery effort. In the vast majority of experiences of these types of violence, there is no one single act of recovery or rescue. Use terms that describe a long-term process of recovery and healing.
Slavery/ Modern Day Slavery	Human trafficking Commercial sexual exploitation	Historical slavery was legal; human trafficking is not. Slavery is based on race. Sexual exploitation is grounded in the complex foundation of rape culture, race and socially constructed risk factors (food/housing insecurity, sexist culture/household, unrepresentative leadership, etc.) that make people more likely to either cause harm or to be a victim. Additionally, there is nothing modern about this form of exploitation which dates back as far as the early 1600s, in the American context.
Unharm ed	Visibly unharmed	Trafficking and domestic and sexual violence are traumatic experiences with profound negative psychological impacts whether or not physical harm occurred. Saying that a victim is unharmed minimizes the psychological impact of these types of violence.
Pimp	Trafficker Exploiter	Given its use in popular culture, the term "pimp" minimizes the severity of trafficking.
"John"	Sex buyer	The term “sex buyer” shows the active choice a person makes when they choose to purchase sex.
Monster	Trafficker Exploiter Abuser Assaulter	The default should also be to honor the language that victims/survivors use. In any reporting or set-up to the story, avoid calling those who inflict violence against women "monsters" as it discourages bystanders from reporting a perpetrator they may know. It also might make it more difficult for a survivor to identify their situation as abusive and/or coercive if they see their perpetrator as their boyfriend or family member.

INSTEAD OF ...	USE ...	BECAUSE ...
Ex-Boyfriend/ Ex-Girlfriend Estranged Peer	Abuser Assaulter Attacker	Calling an abuser or assaulter “peers”, “estranged” or “ex-boyfriend/girlfriends” minimizes the violence and makes it seem as though the victim and abuser were on equal footing, instead of one person who has/had power and control over the other.
Imagery containing chains, handcuffs, individuals in undergarments, or sensational stereotypes	Pull-out quotes Data points Charts or graphs Empowering images of individuals in everyday clothing No images	While some domestic violence and trafficking may involve physical captivity, in Nebraska it is usually characterized by coercive tactics such as emotional and physical abuse, threats and lack of resources. These images create a perception of captivity and misdirect the public understanding of the issue. Survivors are among us in plain sight but often experiencing the violence in the shadows. This can also perpetuate stereotypes that survivors are responsible for their victimization for example, because of what they were wearing, that they were alone in dark alley, etc.
Allegations/Alleged	Reports/ Reported/ _____ said	Alleged suggests that the victim could be making up the crime, while reports sounds more neutral. You don't need to use the word allegedly if you credit the story to a speaker. The word “allegation” is not a neutral term and strongly implies doubt. For instance, “reported rape” is a more neutral term that’s still legally appropriate.
False	Unfounded/ Not enough evidence	There is a lot of confusion surrounding false accusations vs. unfounded reports. Often, law enforcement officers may not prosecute a case because there’s not enough evidence, among other reasons. This means that the case is unfounded, but a crime could still have occurred, there’s just not enough evidence to confirm either way. Incorrect use of the term “false report” contributes to the public’s incorrect assumption that false allegations are rampant.
Accuser Accused	Survivor Reported assaulter	The accuser centers the action around the survivor’s coming forward, rather than the assaulter’s assault. Referring to them as the survivor and the reported assaulter is legally and ethically appropriate.
Sex scandal Domestic Dispute Quarrel Temper Tantrum	Trafficking Intimate partner violence Domestic violence/abuse	Words like these minimize the severity of domestic and sexual violence and imply equal power between the parties involved. Be clear about what the situation actually is to not minimize the violence experienced by survivors.

INSTEAD OF ...	USE ...	BECAUSE ...
Violent Assault	Assault	All assaults are violent, regardless of where or not the survivor appears to be physically injured.
Fondle	Grope	The term "fondle" implies pleasure for the person being touched. The term "grope" focuses on the actions of the assaulter.
The survivor performed oral sex They had sex/ anal sex They engaged in a sex act	The assaulter forced his penis in their mouth The assaulter raped/ anally raped/penetrated the victim Rape	The word "sex" implies mutual pleasure, diminishing the pain of assault. Also, the focus should always be on the actions of the assaulter because they were the one in power in this situation.
Sex with a minor	Sex trafficking Rape	Minors cannot consent to commercial sex therefore the act is sex trafficking. In Nebraska, the age of consent is 16 so for situations that are NOT sex trafficking and are nonconsensual, it is rape.
Passive Tense	Active tense	It’s best to use accountable language that places the focus on the person committing the crime. So instead of “the victim says they were raped,” rephrase to say, “the victim reports someone raped them.”

It is not enough to bring individual perpetrators of rape and sexual violence to justice. Since the problem lies in a culture that is entertained by degrading acts and images of women, the solution is to look at the individual acts as a symptom of rape culture and solve it holistically.

WE ALL HAVE A PART TO PLAY IN ALLOWING RAPE CULTURE TO EXIST. ~~SO~~ WE CAN ALL DO SOMETHING TO ERADICATE IT.³³

Trauma-Informed Interviewing

Interviewing survivors requires empathy and conscientiousness. The trauma of domestic and sexual violence and sex trafficking can have a profound psychological impact on survivors. As a result, it's important to help the survivor feel as comfortable as you can. As a reporter, it's important to give the survivor as much power and agency in the interview as possible. While victimized, control over their circumstances was taken from them.

Trauma-informed refers to interactions with victims that understand and recognize the impact of trauma, including how the brain processes trauma and behaviors that may result of it, and respond in a way that supports the victim and promotes safety.

CONTACTING THE SURVIVOR

- Ask permission before interviewing the survivor. Do not pressure them to agree to an interview.
- Contact them as far ahead of time as possible. Making the decision to talk can take a lot of emotional energy after experiencing trauma.
- Ask them their preferences for who interviews them. Survivors may prefer to have an interviewer of a particular gender or age.
- Give the survivor control over where and when the interview will happen. Don't make the survivor responsible for whether you meet a deadline.
- Be completely honest with the survivor. Don't tell them they'll get closure from the interview or help other victims come forward with their stories if you don't know that.
- Respect their right to decline the interview or change their mind about it, even if they've shared their story before. **You do not have the right to expect another interview at a later time.**
- Ask if the survivor would like a trained advocate or another person they trust present.

GROUND RULES

- Share with the survivor what you're planning to discuss, how their story will be incorporated into your story, and how much time the interview will take.
- Ask the survivor for their pronouns and use them consistently during the interview.
- Keep the survivor safe. Ask them if they'd like to be referred to by an alias and if there are any other ways you can keep them safe.
- Ask which topics and questions are off-limits.
- Ask them about any triggers they might have—some of these may be obvious, like pictures of their perpetrator, while others could be less obvious, like cold environments, certain types of flowers, etc.
- Be transparent and answer any questions they have.
- Respect the survivor's boundaries and don't push them.
- Express your sorrow for their circumstances.
- If using a translator, brief them on this information.

Trauma-Informed Interviewing

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Try to avoid "why" questions. They're favored by interrogators and can imply victim blaming. For example, asking a survivor why they stayed places the burden on them to leave the situation rather than on the abuser to not be violent.
- Never say you know how they feel, but do say, "I appreciate how difficult this is for you."
- Allow the survivor to take breaks if they want them.
- Don't allow your own emotional reactions to their testimony take over the interview.
- Frame the survivor's experience as events, rather than the basis of their identity. Remember that although survivors have endured tremendous trauma, they are people who are not defined by their experiences.
- Don't underestimate how your own reactions can influence the conversation. Be conscious of your own facial expressions and body language.
- Be aware of your own biases and analyze your reactions and responses throughout the interview. For instance, even a subtle hint of homophobia can create a hostile environment for an LGBTQ survivor.
- At the end, ask them if there's anything they'd like to add.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Be prepared to connect the survivor with a local organization as a resource if needed.
- Make yourself available for contact after the interview.
- Don't be surprised if accounts only make partial sense. Due to the impact of trauma, individuals often have fragmented memories of traumatic events.
- Avoid paraphrasing whenever possible. Try to use direct quotes to give the survivor control over their experiences. Be respectful of the language and terminology the survivor uses.
- Don't sensationalize with lurid details or exaggerate the impact on the victim.
- Talk with local experts to gain insight on policy and sociological trends.
- Ask the survivor to have prior review before you publish the story. They may be able to point out errors or add necessary context.

Trauma-Informed Interviewing

Violence against women appears in the news frequently. As journalists continue to cover stories related to domestic and sexual violence and sex trafficking, it can be helpful to have a better understanding of how to interview survivors of these type of crimes. A thoughtful approach to the interview can help educate the public and support survivors in sharing their story.³⁴

INSTEAD OF ...	USE ...	BECAUSE ...
How did you get yourself into this?	What tactics did your abuser/trafficker(s) use to gain and maintain control over you?	The first question places the blame on the survivor, whereas the second question places the blame on the abuser/trafficker. Even subtle hints of victim blaming can be very hurtful to survivors after the abuse they've endured.
Why didn't you just leave or ask for help?	What did your abuser/trafficker do to make you feel you couldn't leave?	The rephrased question acknowledges that it may have been impossible to leave or ask for help.
Will you provide me details about your experience?	Is there anything you'd like to share that would help shed light on sex trafficking / domestic violence / sexual assault?	The second question connects the survivor's experiences back to the larger issue of violence against women.
Did you say no?	What are various ways consent is/is not provided to a sexual partner?	The first question presumes that it's the survivor's responsibility to say no, while the second question helps to educate community members on consent and how to respect their sexual partner's boundaries.
How vulnerable were you that you could find yourself in this situation?	How does a sex trafficker/perpetrator find and manipulate people?	The first question suggests that there was something about the survivor that caused this to happen to them, whereas the second question conveys that sex traffickers use strategies to manipulate any individual.
Did you know what you were getting yourself into when you went to this party/drank/did drugs/got in that car, etc.?	How did your assaulter use your situation to commit this crime?	The first question implies that it's the survivor's fault that they were assaulted because they drank or partied or entered a situation. The second question shows how assaulters use factors like intoxication or other vulnerabilities against survivors.
Should parents, young children, teens and members of our community be scared about this?	How should people understand and respond to domestic/sexual violence/sex trafficking?	The second question gives community members action items to help fight these types of violence; while the first question won't help community members take action.

Research Citations

¹ United Nations. (2003). Secretary-General's Bulletin: Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

² National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. (2010). Commercial sexual exploitation of children: A fact sheet. Retrieved from http://www.missingkids.com/en_US/documents/CCSE_Fact_Sheet.pdf

³ Rothman, Emily; Nagaswaran, Anita; Johnson, Renee; J Health Communications. 2012 Jul; 17(6): 733–744. Published online 2012 Apr 4. doi: 10.1080/10810730.2011.635778.

^{4, 6, 9, 10, 11} Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J. & Stevens, M. (2011). The national intimate partner and sexual violence survey: 2010 summary report.

⁵ J.C. Campbell, D.W. Webster, J. Koziol-McLain, et al., "Risk factors for femicide within physically abusive intimate relationships: results from a multi-site case control study," 93 Amer. J. of Public Health 1089-1097 (2003).

⁷ Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2001.

⁸ Feminist Majority Foundations Choice Campaign, Women of Color and Reproductive Justice: African American Women: www.feministcampus.org

¹² Campbell, Garza, et al., Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse Among Active Duty Military Women, Violence Against Women, 2003.

¹³ Lonsway, K. A., Archambault, J., & Lisak, D. (2009). False reports: Moving beyond the issue to successfully investigate and prosecute non-stranger sexual assault.

¹⁴ Poynter. (2017). Which sexual harassment and assault stories should you cover? Here are some guidelines. Retrieved from <https://www.poynter.org/news/which-sexual-harassment-and-assault-stories-should-you-cover-here-are-some-guidelines>

^{15, 18} Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2002. National Crime Victimization Survey. Table 82.

^{16, 21, 23} Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J. & Stevens, M. (2011). Center for Disease Control; The national intimate partner and sexual violence survey: 2012 summary report.

¹⁷ "Sexual Assault and the LGBTQ Community," Human Rights Campaign, HRC, 2018.

¹⁹ Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2010-2014 (2015).

²⁰ Beck. Allen, Berzofsky, Marcus, Casper, Rachel. (2014). National Inmate Survey (NIS).

²² Kenagy, G., FORGE. (2005). Sexual Violence in the Transgender Community.

^{24, 34} Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Rape and Sexual Victimization Among College-Aged Females, 1995-2013 (2014).

^{25, 29, 30} Women's Fund of Omaha. (2017). Nebraska's Commercial Sex Market. Retrieved from <https://www.omahawomens-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/Nebraskas-Commercial-Sex-Market-Report-FINAL.pdf>

²⁶ Polaris Project. (2016). Sex Trafficking and LGBTQ Youth. Retrieved from <https://polarisproject.org/resources/sex-trafficking-and-lgbtq-youth>

²⁷ Lederer, Laura J., and Christopher A. Wetzel. "The Health Consequences of Sex Trafficking and Their Implications for Identifying Victims in Healthcare Facilities." Annals of Health Law, vol. 23, no. 1, 2014, pp. 61–87.

²⁸ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.missingkids.com/theissues/cse/1in7>

³¹ Sweet, V. (2015). Trafficking in Native Communities. Published on 5/24/2015 by Indian Country Today Media Network. Retrieved from <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/05/24/trafficking-native-communities160475>.

³² Poynter. (2018). To tell the stories of sexual assault victims, it's time for a new look at anonymity policies. Retrieved from <https://www.poynter.org/news/tell-stories-sexual-assault-victims-its-time-new-look-anonymity-policies>

³³ The Nation. (2013). Ten Things To End Rape Culture. Retrieved from <https://www.thenation.com/article/ten-things-end-rape-culture/>

³⁴ RAINN. (2018). Tips for Interviewing Survivors. Retrieved from <https://www.rainn.org/articles/tips-interviewing-survivors>

Content Experts—Nebraska

For more information related to this guide, or to reach our local content experts on domestic and sexual violence and sex trafficking, please contact:

WOMEN'S FUND OF OMAHA
402-827-9280 • www.OmahaWomensFund.org
(Please note: we are not a direct service provider.)

For additional information on these issues, please refer to these local content experts and available resources.

LOCAL

HEARTLAND FAMILY SERVICE—SAFE HAVEN
800-523-3666 • www.HeartlandFamilyService.org

Topics:

Domestic violence, sexual assault, and sex trafficking services, shelter and housing for survivors

IMMIGRANT LEGAL CENTER
402-898-1349 • www.ImmigrantLC.org

Topics:

Immigrant and refugee legal services for survivors of violence

MAGDALENE OMAHA
www.MagdaleneOmaha.org

Topics:

Residential housing and entrepreneurship opportunities for survivors of sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation

SURVIVORS RISING
402-999-2725 • www.survivorsrisingomaha.org

Topics:

Survivor leaders using their voices to impact domestic violence, sexual assault and sex trafficking

WOMEN'S CENTER FOR ADVANCEMENT (WCA)
402-345-7273 • www.WCAOmaha.org

Topics:

Advocacy and legal services for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and sex trafficking

YOUTH EMERGENCY SERVICES (YES)
402-345-5187 • www.YESOmaha.org

Topics:

Homeless youth, including those experiencing trafficking

STATEWIDE

COALITION ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING
www.NoTrafficking.org

Topics: Hotel/motel and travel/tourism industry training on trafficking

NEBRASKA ALLIANCE OF CHILD ADVOCACY CENTERS
402-933-7422 • www.NebraskaCACS.com

Topics: Child sexual abuse, child sex trafficking, public policy

NEBRASKA COALITION TO END SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
402-476-6256 • www.NebraskaCoalition.org

Topics: Statewide public policy and connection to direct service providers

Content Experts—National

For additional information on these issues, please refer to the following content experts and available resources.

NATIONAL

POLARIS PROJECT
888-373-7888 • www.PolarisProject.org
Topics:
Client services, policy advocacy, national human trafficking hotline, training and technical assistance

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN
800-THE-LOST • www.MissingKids.com
Topics:
Missing and sexually exploited children

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE
800-799-7233 • www.TheHotline.org
Topics:
Research and national data related to domestic violence

NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT HOTLINE
800-656-4673 • www.RAINN.org
Topics:
Research and national data for sexual assault, state-by-state laws around sexual violence

LOVE IS RESPECT
Text LOVEIS to 22522 • www.LovelsRespect.org
Topics:
Youth-specific information on domestic and sexual violence

Suggested Sign-Offs

A suggested tag to include in articles related to **sex trafficking and exploitation** is:

TO REACH THE NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING RESOURCE CENTER HOTLINE, CALL 1-888-373-7888 OR TEXT HELP TO BEFREE (233733).

A suggested tag to include in articles related to **domestic and sexual violence** is:

IF YOU, OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW, NEEDS HELP, PLEASE CALL THE DOUGLAS COUNTY 24-HOUR HOTLINE AT 402-345-7273. IF YOU NEED ASSISTANCE IN SARPY COUNTY, PLEASE CALL 1-800-523-3666.

(If outside Douglas/Sarpy Counties in Nebraska, please utilize local domestic violence/sexual assault hotlines.)

OTHER RESOURCES:
For reporting on these issues specifically as it relates to children, please contact Project Harmony at 402-595-1326.



WOMEN'S FUND of Omaha

📍 1111 N. 13th Street
Suite #106
Omaha, NE 68102

🌐 OmahaWomensFund.org