

Nous sommes **une équipe**
contre la violence.



Break the Silence!

**We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls
in Côte d'Ivoire**

A Guide for Journalists

Published by the International Rescue Committee, 2012



Introduction

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is perhaps the most widespread and socially tolerated of human rights violations. The cost to women, their children, families and communities is a significant obstacle to reducing poverty, achieving gender equality and meeting the other Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Violence is a traumatic experience for any man or woman, but VAWG is predominantly inflicted by men on women and girls. It both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims.

VAWG may involve intimate partners, family members, acquaintances or strangers. Though it was long regarded a private matter, it is now recognized by the international community as a violation of human rights, rooted in women's subordinate status.

Can journalists report a story about VAWG in a sensitive, informed way that covers the facts of the story but also enhances efforts to reduce the problem of violence? The answer is yes. Journalists can be part of the solution. This short guide is intended to help Cote d'Ivoirian reporters and news managers to report violence against women and girls in a way that does not perpetuate gender stereotypes or dysfunctional social norms, but rather informs the public about important services and encourages positive public dialogue and social change.

Background

Violence against women tends to occur throughout society and across all demographic and socioeconomic groups and appears to be heavily influenced by community norms and responses.

After over decade of war, many women and children continue to be victims of rape and other gender-based violence in the Cote d'Ivoire.

Evidence suggests that rates of VAWG are highest in settings where social norms support gender inequality and male superiority and entitlement, where communities fail to punish men who use physical or sexual violence against women, and where violence against women is considered normal or justified.

The relationship between these dysfunctional social norms and high levels of violence against women has led many organizations to put their attention on programs that promote more equitable gender norms. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is working to develop an appropriate model for working with men

and boys to reduce gender-based violence in post-conflict settings. This model includes operating gender sensitivity “Men Dialogue Groups” where men learn about the benefits of an equal partnership. More information about these gender sensitivity groups run by the IRC in a partnership with the SONKE Gender Justice Network can be found here: <http://bit.ly/mdgircsonke>.

Social Marketing Campaign: “Break the Silence”

As part of a nationwide initiative to reduce VAWG, the IRC is launching a nationwide social marketing campaign to combat VAWG, called “Break the Silence.” Social marketing campaigns use mass media and marketing principles to affect positive change in attitudes and behavior of target groups. As journalists, you can make a positive impact by providing the public with important information about VAWG, regional information to assist help-seekers, as well as act as advocates for truth and justice surrounding VAWG.

How you can help: The Media’s Role in Reporting Violence against women and girls

As our understanding of violence against women and girls, its manifestation and costs grows, the media is charged with not only increasing the visibility of the issue, but also offering helpful information on prevention and treatment of VAWG. The media can help to inform and empower the public and survivors to stand up against violence, as well as ensure that the public and policy makers acknowledge violence as a human rights violation which impacts each and every one of us. The media also plays a powerful role in influencing local public opinion on what behaviors and attitudes towards violence are common, or accepted by society.

By making VAWG more visible through the media, the press forces society to acknowledge it as a problem, and places pressure on policy makers to legislate against it. Where legislation already exists the media can help to enforce such legislation. Sensitive reporting on VAWG can also help survivors and supporters of survivors, by providing them with the information they need to protect themselves or others and to seek help and justice.

In-depth features, analysis pieces, and blogs can provide more a comprehensive understanding of the psychologies of violence against women and girls in a way that will improve readers’ understanding of both the actions and reactions of the survivor and the perpetrator.

How does a reporter approach VAWG in a “sensitive” way? Aren’t reporting the facts enough? Not always. If a reporter includes only numbers of reported VAWG incidents or that “violence is a growing problem,” within his or her story, this may

serve to strengthen society's perception that violence it is "normal" and that nothing can be done about it. If, however, the same reporter supplements those statements and statistics with quotes from respected people who support the survivors, who denounce violence in all forms, or who demand legal enforcement—this will help balance the story and encourage other potential survivors or supporters to report violence and speak up as well.

Tips for reporting on the topic of violence against women and girls:

Working with editors

Set up ongoing dialogues with your editors to discuss new approaches to dealing with stories about VAWG or gender issues. Positive spins sometimes can be viewed as "boring" or not newsworthy. Find an angle and fight for your story!

Suggest that the headline writers discuss headlines and captions with you first to ensure that they match your article and are not sensational in tone.

Use appropriate terminology

Survivor: The correct terminology for a person who has been raped or who is the victim of domestic violence is "survivor," and not "victim," or the "abused." The term has emerged as a result of gender activists' assertion that the use of the word "victim" reinforces negative stereotypes about women as passive and weak. Unfortunately the term "survivor" has yet to be acknowledged by the criminal justice system and society in general.

Violence against women and girls: The term "violence against women and girls" is used interchangeably with "gender based violence," and the UN has narrowed the definition of violence against women to refer to "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 deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life." Although we use "VAWG" throughout this handbook for convenience, we suggest using "violence against women and girls" spelled out.

Avoid: Stereotypes and Sensationalism

- Don't take quotes out of context or endorse attitudes that perpetuate violence against women.

Media reporting of sexual violence often creates the impression that the woman asked for it. The affected women are often entirely invisible in the report, or they focus on the woman's "inferior status," as is evidenced by the following headlines:

"Soldier rapes maid three times"

"Four young rapists sentenced to spend 15 years behind bars"

"White farmer who allegedly raped black worker still free"

Another stereotype that is prevalent in the media and in the law is the treatment of sexual violence as a crime against the honor of the family or against decency, rather than against the woman's human rights. This can be seen in coverage of sexual violence where the focus and sympathy is on the "husband forced to watch as his wife is raped," for example, rather than on the rape survivor.

Assess the issue from a legal, religious and cultural perspective specific to Cote d'Ivoire because:

- It gives voice to affected women and avoids stereotypes
- It speaks to some of the issues that prevent women from seeking justice
- It highlights the political will, or lack thereof, to address the issue
- Whether there is any legislation addressing the practice and whether it is being implemented

Provide relevant facts and the cost to both survivor and society

- Statistics of the numbers of women and girls affected
- The views of the affected woman or girl and her supporters
- The costs of the practice to personal and national development

Provide useful information for potential survivors and survivor advocates

- List local social center phone and address with contact of individual
- List safe havens and shelters for survivors
- Publicize local police and other citizens who are advocates of survivors
- Provide "steps to reporting" VAWG so actions for both survivors and survivor advocates will be clear (see steps later in guide)

Carefully select informed experts and spokespeople

- Sometimes, despite being an academic scholar or expert on a subject, interviewees will fall prey to using the same stereotypes we are trying to avoid

Provide positive examples of men involved in women's empowerment and who express healthy attitudes toward women

- Include voices of both women and men, both positive and negative
- Report any male-inclusive initiatives to end violence against women
- Explain to readers how social constructions of masculinities perpetuate violence against women and girls
- Interview the “heroes” in the fight against VAWG, survivors as well as female and male supporters of survivors—people who bring survivors to justice, provide safe haven, etc.
- Investigate how positive male role models influence the future behavior of male children towards women and the way that girls learn to deal and interact with males when they reach adulthood
- Give voice to the leaders of the community who are willing to speak up against violence

Report on the impact of violence against women and girls on familial economic security, national development, and civil society

- Highlight VAWG’s impact on personal and familial financial security, as it affects how women are unable to fully participate in the economic, social and political spheres.
- Bring the scale of the problem to the attention of policy makers and the public and how it affects society as a whole
- Feature politicians, legislators, judiciary, and police who are “walking the walk” by enacting and enforcing laws that combat VAWG

Common myths and misconceptions about domestic violence

Violence against wives or girlfriends has been sanctioned for centuries by our legal systems and many religions. As a result, domestic violence has come to seem ‘normal’, if not a man’s right. Countless misconceptions exist which trivialize and justify domestic violence. For example:

Myth: *She provoked his abuse through her nagging or unreasonable demands.*

Fact: While these might be annoying, they do not excuse violence. After all, it is not acceptable to hit shop assistants, motorists, colleagues or anyone else, merely because they have annoyed us.

Myth: *Domestic violence is caused by alcohol or substance abuse.*

Fact: While drugs and alcohol can aggravate violent behavior, they do not cause it. Many violent men abuse regardless of whether they are drunk or sober.

Myth: *Both partners are responsible for the abuse - it can’t be blamed on the husband or boyfriend alone (or its variations: ‘it takes two to tango - there are two sides to every story’).*

Fact: Domestic violence occurs when an imbalance of power exists in a

relationship. This imbalance is maintained by behavior designed to control or exert power over the other, through emotional and physical abuse which undermines self-esteem and enforces subservience. For the person in the powerless position, almost anything they do - including trying to protect or defend themselves- can be interpreted as “provocation”.

Myth: *Wives need to be “kept in line” by their husbands and should not try to “wear the pants” in the household.*

Fact: This myth reinforces unequal relationships and justifies the use of force to maintain inequality. It also suggests that women need to be disciplined.

Myth: *Being the breadwinner entitles a man to behave as he likes in his own home.*

Fact: There is no justification for VAWG. Besides, domestic violence happens to working women and to women who are often the only source of family income. Also, women who don’t have paid work contribute to the home in other indispensable ways, by looking after the household and children.

Myth: *Men who commit violence in the home do so because they are stressed at work, through unemployment, poverty and other problems.*

Fact: Everyone experiences problems and feelings of powerlessness. It is not acceptable to take frustrations out on one’s wife or girlfriend, nor to attempt to reassert one’s self-esteem by exerting power over them.

Myth: *Men who beat their wives or girlfriends are provoked into a temporary loss of control and are not therefore responsible for their actions.*

Fact: These same men often control their actions when with other people and would never consider being violent with colleagues or friends. Because abusers may be respected and well-liked community members, people often disbelieve the survivor.

Myth: *If it was so bad, the woman would just leave.*

Fact: There are many reasons why women find it difficult to leave abusive relationships. Many are financially dependent on the abuser and worry about the survival of their children. Many women stay in violent relationships for the sake of their children, despite the fact that children are often better off in single parent households than in violent ones. Abusers often threaten that if the woman leaves, they will kill her or themselves or harm the children or her family. Abused women often have internalized the abusers’ accusations that she is to blame. Abuse often happens in cycles during which there may be periods of apology and nonviolence. Women desperately want to believe the abuser has changed or will do so. Also, many people put pressure on women to “make their marriages work” and look down on divorced women.

SOURCE:

- This section fully excerpted from: Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication *Violence Against Women in South Africa: A Resource for Journalists* ©1999

FAQs AND RESOURCES

Definition of “Violence Against Women and Girls”

The term violence against women and girls, in its widest sense, refers to the physical, emotional or sexual abuse of a survivor. Domestic violence includes:

- physical abuse;
- sexual abuse;
- emotional, verbal and psychological abuse
- economic abuse (for example withholding money needed to survive, forbid a woman from doing any economic activity, or the confiscation of wages);
- harassment;
- stalking (following a woman everywhere she goes, or keeping her under surveillance);
- damage to property;
- entry into the complainant’s home without consent, where the parties do not share the same home;
- any other controlling or abusive behavior where such conduct harms, or may cause imminent harm to the safety, health or well-being of the survivor

IRC recommended steps for survivors reporting assault or rape

If survivors are just told “to talk about it” this may not be enough information for them to actually make a report.

The following are recommended procedures for survivors and witnesses of violence. It may be helpful in your reporting to include these steps along with statements or quotes from individuals who have successfully taken these steps to address a case of VAWG.

- 1) Don’t be afraid to talk about it. Confide in someone you trust to support you and who can accompany you to report the incident.
- 2) Go to your local social or health center to report the incident as soon as possible.
- 3) Identify a safe haven and assure your children are there and safe, and that

- you can return there after reporting the violence.
- 4) In case of sexual violence report the incident to the social center or health center within 48 hours and do not wash after the incident. Keep the clothes you were wearing during the incident as evidence and bring with you to the social center.
 - 5) Report the incident to the police or official recommended by your local social or health center.

IRC recommended steps for witnesses or confidantes of survivors

- 1) If your friend, neighbor or relative is subjected to violence, it is your business too.
- 2) Encourage the survivor to talk about the incident, and to report it to a social center.
- 3) Offer to accompany the survivor to the social center and the police department. Your presence will reassure the survivor and encourage the authorities to take the survivor's situation seriously.
- 4) Help the survivor to find a safe haven if necessary so they do not continue to experience more violence, nor are they subjected to retaliation violence.

Violence Against Women and Girls - Facts and Statistics - Cote d'Ivoire

- Violence (partner and non-partner) in Cote d'Ivoire is a common phenomena experienced by more than half of all women (60%) and nearly half of all men (43%) in their lifetime.
- The majority of women (75%) in the study sample reported that their experiences of partner violence were perpetrated by their current male partner.
- Women reported experiencing a higher proportion of severe forms of partner physical violence (i.e. dragged, kicked, choked) throughout their lifetime compared to men.
- Half of the women who reported partner violence had never disclosed their experiences of to another person. There is a need for violence prevention activities to address the factors that prevent women from disclosing experiences of partner violence.
- Among women who did disclose partner violence, they reported that their primary source of support was family and friends.

Source:

• *VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & MEN IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE* © London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) 2010.

Legal information regarding VAWG specific to Cote d'Ivoire

Ivorian law does address several forms of VAWG, including physical assault, rape, female genital mutilation, forced and early marriage, abandonment of the family, sexual harassment, forced prostitution, adultery, and unequal inheritance rights.

However legal reform is needed to define rape, create specific laws against intimate partner violence, incest, and levirate or sororate marriage (types of marriage where a deceased man's brother marries the widow, or where a husband enters into a marriage or sexual relationship with his deceased wife's sister).

Law enforcement is another challenge for women. Women and others who are victims of rape and domestic violence are often ignored when they attempt to report it to police. Lodging a complaint is challenging, because even police sometimes believe violence against women in the household is a private matter. If a woman presses charges or confides in professionals, family and community pressure is often exerted on her to withdraw the charges. Referral services (especially on legal, medical and psychosocial matters) in many areas are inadequate and often inaccessible to the population due either to the distance, the cost, a lack of staffing, or poor quality of services. Knowledge among community members about legal provisions for violence against women is very low (especially amongst the rural female population).

For more information on legislation and legal enforcement of VAWG laws in Africa, see: Population Council Inc. [Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Africa Literature Review © 2008](#)

The International Rescue Committee's VAWG Program in Cote d'Ivoire

IRC's program to combat VAWG seeks to:

- Educate communities about the causes and consequences of violence
- Provide strategies on how to solve problems without the use of violence
- Help strengthen communication within couples, households and community about the laws protecting women

- Improve the provision of services to survivors

Social Centers by Region

Region	City	Name of Center	Address ^[1]	Phone
Lagunes	Anyama	Anyama		
	Abidjan	Abobo		
		Yop maca		
		Yop port bouet2		
		Yop niangon		
		Adjame 220		
		Adjame sante		
		Cocody		
		Comite national		
		Treichville habitat		
		Treichville avenue 1		
		Koumassi		
		Service social de Port bouet		
		Port bouet		
Lacs	Yamoussoukro	Centre social de Yamoussoukro		
Marahoue	Bouaflé	Centre social de Bouaflé		
Haut Sassandra	Daloa	Centre social de Daloa		
Moyen Cavally	Duékoué	Centre social de Duékoué		
Montagnes	Bangolo	Centre social de Bangolo		
	Man	Centre social de Man-Djoulaboubou		

		Centre social de Man- Grand ...		
	Danané	Centre social de Danané		

The International Rescue Committee's Women Protection and Empowerment Technical Unit

The Women Protection and Empowerment Technical Unit Based at IRC's Headquarters in NY is responsible for quality and innovation for the IRC's programs addressing violence against women and girls around the world. They do this through the development of policy and practice, promotion of research and learning, staff development, representation and advocacy, and the provision of technical expertise.

Around the world, the International Rescue Committee helps survivors heal and works with communities and institutions to break the cycle of violence. As first-responders in emergencies, the IRC works hands-on to deliver urgent care and referrals for victims of assault. In longstanding crises, we provide safe spaces for women to come together for support and to build skills at our women's centers. And in the aftermath of war, such as in West Africa, the IRC addresses the root causes of violence against women by helping them gain greater economic independence and play a more meaningful role in decision-making.

Through grassroots campaigns that channel women's voices about their experiences, we work with partners to reach out to men and boys to change attitudes that foster violence against women. We also advocate with government officials to advance laws preventing violence against women, and enforce policies ensuring survivors' access to care and legal justice.

The recovery of communities devastated by war relies heavily on the participation of women and girls. The IRC works to foster conditions in which women and girls not only survive the effects of conflict, but ultimately thrive.

Women and Girls Rebuilding Nations: Towards Gender Equality in West Africa
After long-standing conflict across the region, West Africa is embarking on an era of peace and stability. Recognizing this timely opportunity to shape women's status in post-conflict societies, the IRC launched a new five-year program in 2007.

Funded by the NoVo Foundation, this unprecedented program to help women and girls in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast, is based on the premise that violence against women and girls is rooted in their marginalization and lack of power in society. It specifically focuses on objectives the IRC has identified as critical to achieving women's empowerment. These include: helping women gain access to sexual and physical assault response and referral services; mobilizing communities to combat violence against women; helping women gain greater economic independence and a more meaningful role in decision-making; and advocacy to influence policy and laws at the national level.

More information about IRC programs and services may be obtained on the IRC website: www.rescue.org.

For specific information about the IRC VAWG program in Cote d'Ivoire, please contact: Veronique Ossouhe- Kone P: +22508086387 E: VAWGadvocacy@cotedivoire.theirc.org or Monika Bakayoko-Topolska, P: +22507202516 E: monika.topolska@rescue.org

Resources:

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & MEN IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE © London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) 2010.

Reporting Gender Based Violence, A Handbook for Journalists, Inter Press Service ©2009

Facts and Figures on Violence Against Women, UNIFEM www.unifem.org

[UNFPA State of World Population 2005](#)

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the Sixth African Development Forum (ADF IV), www.uneca.org/ADF

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), www.unfpa.org

The UN Secretary General's Campaign to End Violence Against Women, www.endviolence.un.org

Gender Links www.genderlinks.org.za

DART Centre for Journalism and Trauma; <http://dartcentre.org>

Addressing Gender-based Violence through USAID's Health Programs: A Guide for Health Sector Program Officers. Washington, DC IGWG of USAID. 2006.

Violence Against Women in South Africa: A Resource for Journalists Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication ©1999.

Responding to Gender Based Violence: A Focus on Policy Change; A Companion Guide; USAID

We Can End VAWG in Cote d'Ivoire: A Guide for Journalists
Virginia Williams

Policy Project, May, 2006.

IRC Nationwide Social Marketing Campaign to Combat Violence “Break the Silence!”

On March 2, 2012, the IRC launches a countrywide social marketing to combat violence against women and girls. The campaign is funded by the Novo Foundation and The World Bank.

Objective: This mass media campaign is designed to encourage women and men to support the reporting of violence against women and girls and to promote more equitable gender norms.

Target Audiences: Young men 18-35; Housewives 18-35

Target Messages for Men: 1) *Nous sommes une équipe contre la violence.* 2) *Protéger les femmes, c’est aussi notre affaire!*

Target Messages for Women: 1) *Brave femme, lève-toi contre les violences!* 2) *Chez nous, la violence n’a pas sa place!*

Participants and spokespeople include: Ivoirian celebrity football star Kolo Habib and his wife (name?), Didier Bléou, host of the popular TV show “Tempo,” numerous Cote d’Ivoire music stars, including Billy Billy, Nash, Garagistes, Patron, Abou Nidal and Jean Jacques Kouame, and acclaimed actresses Akissi Delta Marie and Marie Louise Asseu.

Events will include:

- A nationwide launch at the Palais de la Culture in Abidjan on March 3rd 2012, featuring music, celebrity speakers and advocates, and a series of football matches between teams of journalists, social workers, medical doctors and police.
- Simultaneous launch events, round tables and symposiums in Yamoussoukro, Bouaflé, Daloa, Duékoué, Bangolo, Man, Danané and Biankouma.

Press/Media Kits: Press Kits will be available approximately February 20th, 2012. Please contact the IRC contact person listed below to assure that you will be sent a press kit when they are available.

Partnerships: List orgs here

Key Sponsors: List corporations here

About the campaign: Why a marketing campaign and what is social norms marketing? Social norms marketing uses traditional marketing techniques to promote popular acceptance of healthy behaviors and attitudes in society. It goes further than a “public awareness” campaign in that it works to change what behaviors are acceted and encouraged within the target groups. This countrywide marketing campaign will combat VAWG in Cote d’Ivoire by promoting healthy messages around gender equity, as well as help sway public opinion in favor of beneficial actions like reporting violence and supporting violence survivors.

For additional information or resources about the “Break the Silence” campaign, please contact: Veronique Ossouhe- Kone, P: +22508086387 E: VAWGadvocacy@cotedivoire.theirc.org or, Monika Bakayoko-Topolska P: +22507202516 E: monika.topolska@rescue.org