

Resources for Covering Sexual Harassment, Abuse, and Assault in the News



[Watch the Webinar](#)

What is in this Resource Packet?

This resource packet contains information discussed in the webinar, Covering Sexual Harassment, Abuse, and Rape in the News. Nine best practices for news coverage of sexual violence are summarized and include links to example stories and resources. The packet also includes a table of recommended words for describing sexual assault and fast facts on sexual violence with citations. Lastly, included is a list of experts in the field of sexual violence prevention and services who could serve as sources for journalists.

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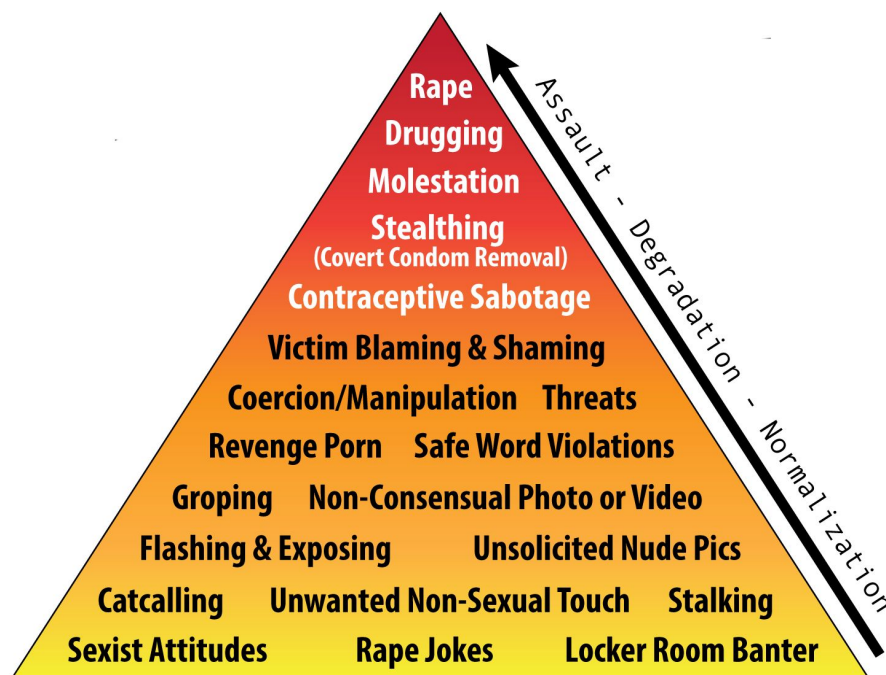
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Best Practices for Covering Sexual Violence

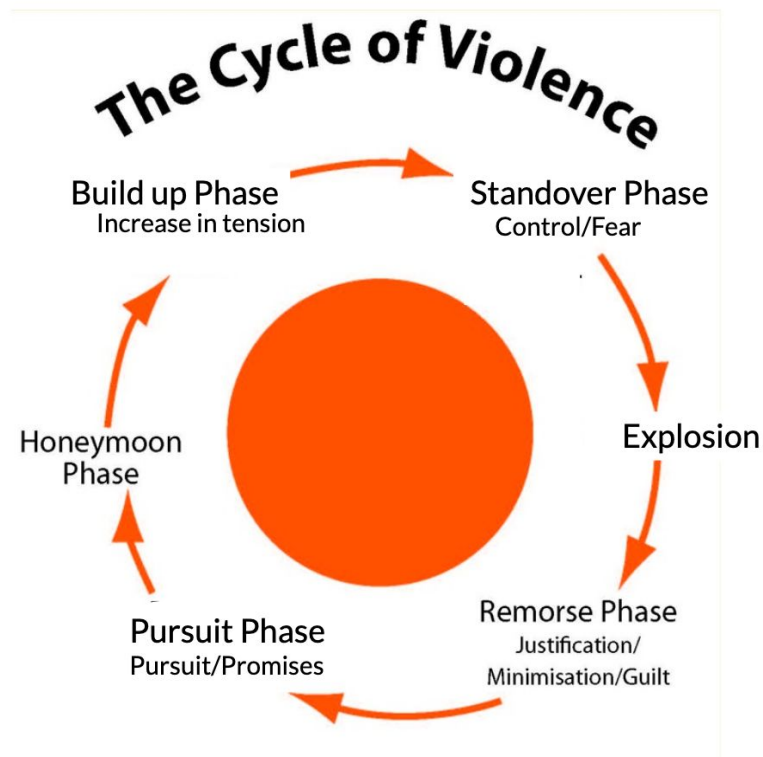
1. Report on the full spectrum of violence.

*Sexual violence is a broad term and includes **rape, incest, child sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, unwanted sexual contact, sexual harassment, exposure and voyeurism.***

What was the story before the incidents of violence? Report on the escalation of violence within an individual's story and their community. The presence and permission of the lower actions permit the behaviors above it. All sexual violence is harmful.



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<http://www.listugujhavenhouse.ca/learn/cycle-violence/>

The Albuquerque Journal's double homicide news report¹ included examples of intimate partner violence within the intimate relationship that lead up to the double homicide.

2. Use accurate unbiased language.

Consider using people-first language when describing stigmatized experiences. Protect the survivors' identity and privacy. Reflect the terminology the survivor uses about their experiences. Focus on conduct or the perpetrator, not on character.

¹Barnitz, K. & Martinez, P. (2019, June 23) Ex-boyfriend detained in double homicide, *Albuquerque Journal*. <https://www.abqjournal.com/1332045/man-suspected-of-killing-mother-daughter-detained-in-el-paso.html>

Consensual sex is just sex. To say that implies that there is such a thing as non-consensual sex, which there isn't. That's rape. That is what it needs to be called. There is only sex or rape. Do not teach people rape is just another type of sex. They are two very separate events. You wouldn't say **'breathing swimming'** and **'non-breathing swimming.'** You say **swimming** and **drowning.**" ~unknown author²

Recommended Words

No words are neutral. Consider the associations and assumptions carried with the following words.

Instead of...	Use...	Because...
Sex scandal	Sexual assault, sexual abuse, rape, etc.	"Sex scandal" diminishes the crime and sensationalizes it. It removes the distinction between a normal, consensual act and violence/a potential crime.

² This quote was widely shared as a meme. The earliest share in 2015 by The Body is Not an Apology Facebook page.
<https://www.facebook.com/TheBodyisNotAnApology/photos/content-warning-discussion-of-sexual-assault-there-is-no-non-consensual-sex-it-i/1144796582200701/>

Instead of...	Use...	Because...
Domestic Dispute	Intimate partner abuse, Intimate partner violence	“Domestic dispute” diminishes the crime, erases the violent nature of the conflict, and normalizes its occurrence.
Sex or intercourse (as a euphemism for rape or sexual assault)	rape, sexual assault, etc.	This again blurs the line between what is a consensual sex act and what is a crime. “Intercourse” instead of “rape” prevents the public from fully understanding that the act was one of violence and not a mutually consensual act.
Nonconsensual sex	Sexual assault; sexual abuse; rape, etc.	By definition sex is consensual. If it’s not consensual, it is sexual assault or rape.
Underage women, Underage girls	Children, minors	The use of the word “women” falsely implies they are adults and consensual sex is possible. People the aged 0 to 18 are children and are under the age of consent for sex with adults. Therefore any sexual encounter with an adult is sexual assault.
Perform oral sex	Forced oral and genital contact	The use of the word “performed” wrongly assumes that the victim is the primary actor and was not forced. When in doubt, consider if the public needs to know specifics about the assault in question.
Fondle	Grope; unwanted sexual contact	Fondle conveys the idea that the perpetrated act is gentle, which may undermine a reader’s ability to see unwanted sexual contact as a harmful and potentially criminal activity.
Engaged in	Was forced to	The term “engaged in” assumes that the victim was an active participant , negating the fact that she/he was <i>forced</i> to participate.

Instead of...	Use...	Because...
Victim admits; Victim confesses	Victim reports; victim reveals	Both “admits” and “confesses” imply responsibility and shame on the part of the victim and does not hold the perpetrator responsible.
Accuser	Alleged victim; victim (if perpetrator convicted) or survivor	Referring to the victim as the “accuser” means they are no longer a victim of the alleged perpetrator’s attack. The victim becomes portrayed as the one doing something to the perpetrator. In other words, the victim is now the perpetrator of the accusation. The perpetrator is transformed from the alleged perpetrator of sexual violence to the actual victim of their accusation. Excessive use of the word “alleged” or “claimed” implies disbelief of the victim.
Affair	Abusive relationship, Intimate partner violence	Referring to a relationship with a power imbalance (such as a teacher/student or boss/employee) by using the word “affair” implies a consent on the part of both parties. Sometimes these relationships can start consensually, but become abusive when one party coerces the other using their unequal position of power. Other times the whole relationship was coercive because the disadvantaged person felt pressured into the relationship. The term “affair” diminishes the crime and sensationalizes the relationship as taboo.
Prostitution	Human sex trafficking, survival sex work, sex work	Referring to someone who was forced into sex work as a “prostitute” implies choice and agency on the part of the victim. Some people do choose to engage in sex work in order to survive homelessness. Job discrimination, housing discrimination, and other forms of violence can create life circumstances where a person engages in survival sex work. Lastly, some people do work in the sex industry consensually, and often refer to their work as sex work, not prostitution.
Child prostitution	Child sex trafficking	By definition a child cannot consent to sex, so they cannot be a professional sex worker. Using the word “prostitution” implies the victim has a profession as a sex worker. Any child forced to have sex is being exploited by adults.

Child pornography	Child sex abuse imagery	Pornography with children is a documentation of sexual abuse. Referring to these abuse images as pornography, hides the crime and focuses on the utility of the images to perpetrators . Referring to these images as abuse centers the survivors' experiences rather than the perpetrator.
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Many of these terms were reprinted with permission from Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault.

3. Report on a range of people affected.

Sexual violence can happen to anyone, but there are populations that experience high rates of sexual violence, and low instances of media coverage. This disparity masks a more complex aspect of the role of oppression in sexual victimization. People who commit sexual violence often look for victims that have less power in society. [This news report covered the rape of a person with a disability](#)³ and included information about high rates of sexual violence against people with disabilities.

Populations targeted with sexual violence

- People with disabilities
- Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, and Queer people
- People who are transgender
- Children
- Elderly people
- People of color
- People with financial or housing insecurity

Sexual violence is one piece of the intersectional oppression. [This article](#)⁴ explores a lawsuit against the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation for nine months of solitary confinement after a rape complaint by a transgender inmate.

³ Mejia, C., Loew, M, & Whitney, B. (2019, January 4) Woman in vegetative state give birth at Hacienda Healthcare in Phoenix. *AZFamily.com*.
https://www.azfamily.com/news/investigations/hacienda_healthcare/woman-in-vegetative-state-gives-birth-at-hacienda-healthcare-in/article_9342c7c4-0fb2-11e9-8138-4fcd53869faf.html

⁴ Ashton, A. (2019, January 8) 9 months of solitary followed California prison rape complaint, lawsuit alleges. *Sacramento Bee*.
<https://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/the-state-worker/article224037370.html>

4. Describe consequences of sexual violence.

Sexual violence has lasting physical and emotional tolls on survivors. This AP article⁵ included the following about the survivor's response to the assault.

"The lawsuit said the 13-year-old rape victim became withdrawn, irritated and lost his desire to play soccer."

Avoid focusing on the consequences of the perpetrator's actions on the perpetrator. The criminal justice system is already quite lenient towards people who rape, especially those rapists with privilege. This focus masks the reality that the large majority of rapists have no consequences.

5. Give context.

Sexual violence does not happen in a vacuum. When sexual violence is framed tightly around one instance of violence, the context in which the violence happens is lost in the story. There are two types of frames used to report on violence, episodic and thematic. Episodic framing reports on one episode of violence and gives very little context for the violence.

Thematic framing also could be a feature story or an investigative report that looks at a broader view of the issue of sexual harassment, abuse, or rape, bringing in multiple examples and exploring systems, environments, and themes. Thematic framing more accurately portrays the complexity of sexual violence. This is a great example of a thematic frame⁶ feature published by Jackson Hole News and Guide.

The vast majority of reporting of violence is framed in a single episode. Even when under the constraints of a daily story, a journalist can include some context of the violence.

Here is an example of a story published in the Washington Post⁷ exploring rape victim-blaming in a small Texas community.

⁵ (2018. September 18) Lawsuit: New Mexico soccer player raped by team members. *APNews.com*. <https://www.apnews.com/1cf341badf734390a8641e55d7724432>

⁶ Cassutt, M., Gross, A., Mieure, E., Mohr, K. (2018. October 17) Sexual assault survivors share why they spoke when they did. *Jackson Hole News and Guide*. https://www.jhnewsandguide.com/special/jackson_hole_woman/article_9ada81d6-f847-5700-a086-aa0eaa09086f.html#comments

⁷ Bruenig, E. (2018. Sept 18) What do we owe her now? *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/opinions/arlington-texas/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.693381140d0

6. Interview a range of sources.

Of 1000 sexual assaults, 995 perpetrators will walk free.⁸ The criminal justice system is not a part of the large majority sexual assault stories. One way to include a more full and complete picture of violence is to interview sources outside of the criminal justice system. This will provide more context to the violence and show that the criminal justice system is not the only solution to ending or preventing violence. Sexual violence impacts all areas of society. For example, prevention is a part of the business sector in terms of sexual harassment policies. Sexual violence is a part of medical providers as they treat chronic illnesses caused by sexual trauma.

Who else can be a source for a story about sexual violence?

Provide multiple perspectives on sexual assault as a social problem by including a variety of sources impacted or with a stake in preventing it.

- Sexual violence prevention specialists

- Survivors of violence

- Social workers

- Parents

- Educators

- Physicians

- Mental health providers

- Business leaders

To find contact information for sexual violence prevention educators and service providers in New Mexico see page 15 of this packet or visit NMCSAP website.

Sexual Violence Prevention programs:

<https://nmcsap.org/prevention/prevention-partners/>

Sexual Violence Service providers:

<https://nmcsap.org/find-help/sexual-assault-service-providers-sasp2/>

7. Use trauma-informed interviewing skills.

Build solid relationships with sexual assault service providers and prevention

⁸ <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>

organizations in your community. Educate yourself and your publication on sexual violence and trauma-informed interviewing. Create a list of sources to be called when reporting on sexual violence. Understand the impact of trauma on memory. Reflect the terminology of the survivor in your questions and reporting. Offer to stop the interview at any time. Offer the option to speak off the record. Avoid “why” questions and implying victim-blaming. Provide [this resource](#)⁹ for survivors wanting to share their story.

DART Center for Trauma & Journalism has [a practical guide for journalists covering trauma](#).¹⁰

8. Discuss prevention.

Include examples of how sexual violence is being prevented. Be specific. “Provide sexual harassment training” is not specific enough. [The Coalition of Imokalee Farmworkers](#)¹¹ was a great example of sexual harassment prevention in Florida.

Sexual violence prevention programs are highly effective and delivered in New Mexico Communities. See this list of [sexual violence prevention programs](#).¹²

9. Provide resources.

Survivors read news coverage of sexual violence. Providing information about warning signs and resources can help them find support and healing.

Shirttail (example):

“This story (or article) mentions sexual assault, which may be hard for some readers. If you need support, please call [local sexual assault service provider phone number] to talk with someone who can help. This service is free, private and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Puede llamar 24 horas. Se habla Español.”

Warning Signs (example):

⁹ <https://www.ccasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2019-STF-Media-Toolkit.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://dartcenter.org/content/trauma-journalism-handbook>

¹¹ <https://www.thenation.com/article/these-farmworkers-know-how-to-end-sexual-harassment-in-the-fields-will-wendys-listen/>

¹² Sexual Violence Prevention programs: <https://nmcsap.org/prevention/prevention-partners/>

“Not all intimate partner violence involves physical abuse. Power and control can be exerted in relationships in terms of financial control, intimidation, belittling comments, surveillance, digital stalking, and more. If you feel scared or unsafe in your relationship or you are concerned about someone you know, you can reach out to [local community sexual assault center] for support and options.”

National Public Radio and Latino USA created exceptional coverage of sexual violence in their piece, Buried Alive.¹³ The coverage used many of the best practices that are discussed here.

¹³ Hinojosa, M. & Vasquez, T. (2019. March 8) Buried Alive. Latino USA. *National Public Radio*. <https://www.npr.org/2019/03/07/701301193/buried-abuse>

Fast facts about sexual violence

NM Prevalence:

1 in 4 women and 1 in 20 of men in New Mexico will experience a completed or attempted rape sometime in their lifetime.¹⁴

Sexual Assault Offenders in New Mexico (2013)¹⁵

According to data reported to NM service providers regarding offenders:

- 98% were male

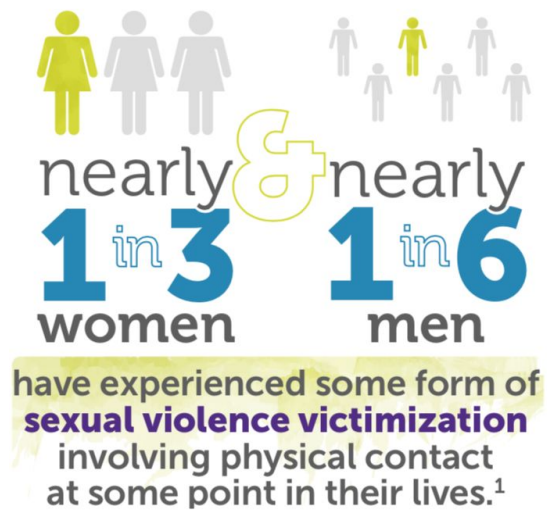
- 80% were adults (over 18 years old)

- 82% were of the same race/ethnicity as their victims

- In 89% of the cases, the offender was known to the victim

- In 32% of the cases, the offender was a family member

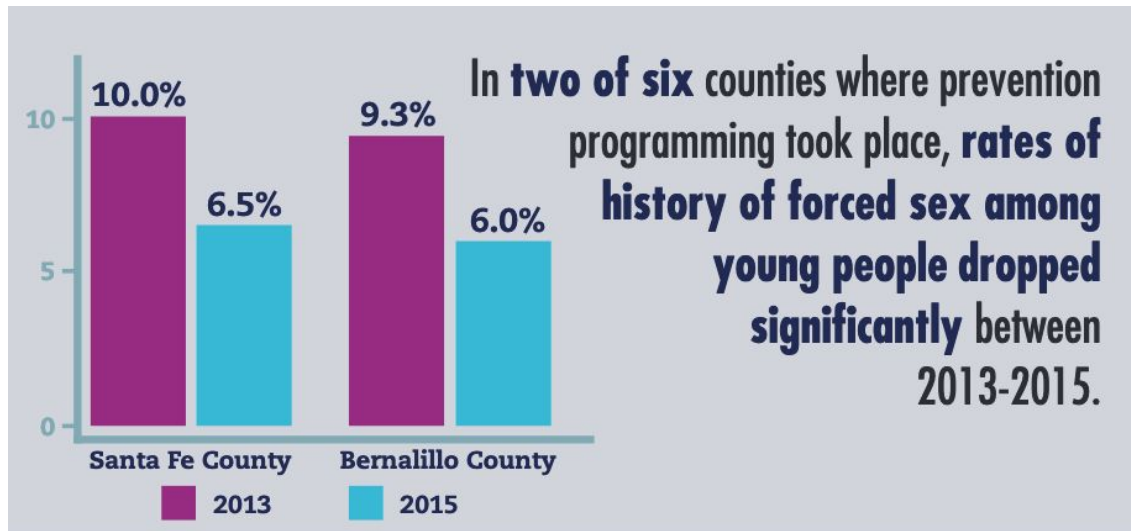
National Prevalence:



¹⁴ New Mexico Department of Health, Strategic Plan for Sexual Violence Prevention, 2015-2020.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Prevention:

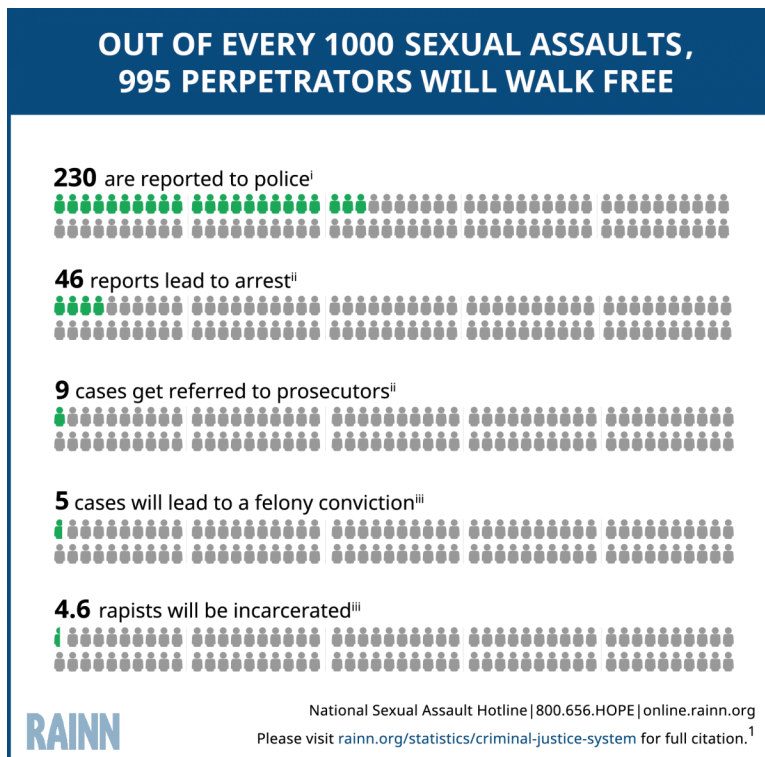


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“32% of college men say they would have sex with a woman ‘against her will if there were no consequences.’ But most do not recognize these actions as rape.”¹⁷

¹⁶ New Mexico Department of Health

¹⁷ *Where we're going, and Where we've been: A guide book for preventing sexual violence*, by Berkeley Media Studies Group



“Of all the murders of women around the world, over half are at the hands of their intimate partners or family members.” ¹⁸ (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime)

¹⁸<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2018/November/home-the-most-dangerous-place-for-women-with-majority-of-female-homicide-victims-worldwide-killed-by-partners-or-family-unodc-study-says.html?ref=fs1>

New Mexico Sexual and Domestic Violence Prevention Programs

Arise Sexual Assault Services – Portales

Provides free, confidential, and comprehensive sexual assault services to all survivors in Curry, Roosevelt, Quay, Harding, DeBaca, and Lea Counties.

Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women – Albuquerque

CSVANW is focused on shaping policy, conducting outreach, increasing awareness, informing priorities and working to ensure that our tribal communities are represented within conversations where native people have historically been underrepresented. CSVANW prevents sexual violence through community support, education, and policy advocacy.

Community Against Violence – Taos

Provides free, comprehensive sexual and domestic violence services, legal and medical advocacy services, counseling and support groups, children's programs, community prevention and outreach programs, and information and resources for those in need. Also has an on-site emergency shelter for adults and children, offers short and long-term transitional housing programs, and has a 24-hour confidential crisis hotline.

Domestic Violence Resource Center --Albuquerque

Domestic Violence Resource Center provides advocacy and case management for domestic violence survivors leaving abusive relationships. They provide trauma informed counseling for survivors working towards recovery and specializing in Counseling for child witnesses. Programs include primary prevention services working to change the social norms that contribute to the continuance of violence.

Enlace Comunitario -- Albuquerque

Enlace Comunitario provides prevention programming and services for domestic violence, sexual violence, sex trafficking, child abuse and neglect, and teen dating violence. Prevention and services are available in Spanish and English.

Fierce Pride – Albuquerque

A statewide network of communities that advances education, research, and support for the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, two spirit, transgender, queer, and gender non-conforming people throughout New Mexico.

Resolve – Santa Fe

Resolve's mission is to prevent violence by building skills and inspiring individuals to be

agents of personal, community and cultural change. IMPACT provides experiential violence prevention programs for schools, community groups, and the public in Central and Northern New Mexico. Programs address topics such as healthy boundaries, anti-bias/anti-bullying, healthy relationships, gender roles, and roots of violence.

La Casa, Inc. -- Las Cruces/Southern New Mexico

La Casa provides emergency shelter, counseling, and transitional housing to people who have survived domestic violence. For prevention, they offer community education, with an effort in rural outreach to Chaparral, Sunland Park and Hatch, NM.

La Piñon Sexual Assault Recovery Services of Southern New Mexico -- Las Cruces
Provides bilingual and bi-cultural, comprehensive sexual assault recovery services for sexual abuse victims and their families throughout Doña Ana County, and in Truth or Consequences, Deming and Lordsburg.

Life Link -- Santa Fe

The Life Link is a Licensed Community Mental Health Center that provides individual wrap-around services for survivors of human trafficking. Life Link also provides prevention programming.

New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Services --Albuquerque/Statewide
NMCSAP provides educational activities to improve the awareness and understanding about the problem of sexual assault.

New Mexico Coalition Against Domestic Violence --Albuquerque/Statewide
NMCADV works to achieve a coordinated local, regional, and statewide response to domestic violence through a collaborative network of member programs that consist of domestic violence service providers and other allied organizations and individuals. The NMCADV serves as a clearinghouse for information and referrals on all domestic violence related issues and services. The coalition collaborates with agencies and advocates in the areas of program development, public policy, education and funding proposals.

Rape Crisis Center of Central New Mexico -- Albuquerque

Provides emotional support and advocacy to survivors of sexual assault and abuse throughout Central New Mexico, and serves as a community resource on issues regarding prevention and awareness of sexual assault and abuse.

Sexual Assault Services of Northwest New Mexico -- Farmington

Provides residents in San Juan, Rio Arriba, and McKinley Counties comprehensive sexual assault services including physical exams, crisis advocacy and support counseling, and medical care as needed. Also works in the community to prevent sexual assault through education-based awareness and prevention programs.

Silver Regional Sexual Assault Support Services/Silver Regional SANE -- Silver City

Empowers individuals, families, and communities impacted by sexual violence through support, advocacy, and education in rural southwestern New Mexico.

Solace Crisis Treatment Center – Santa Fe

Provides individuals who have experienced trauma with evidence-based treatment, advocacy services for navigating community resources, and education in order to restore strength and find inner resiliency. Serves Santa Fe, Rio Arriba and Los Alamos Counties and central northern New Mexico as well as San Ildefonso, Nambe, Tesuque and Santo Domingo Pueblos.

Tewa Women United – Espanola/Northern New Mexico

A collective intertribal women's voice in the Tewa homelands of Northern New Mexico. Provides safe spaces of indigenous women to uncover the power, strength and skills they possess to become positive forces for social change in their families and communities.

Valencia Shelter Services – Los Lunas

Provides confidential services and hope to individuals and families affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse. The primary purpose of the Valencia Community Child Advocacy Center (CAC) is to minimize trauma to children and families, to improve the collaboration of community agencies, and to prevent and effectively respond to child abuse, neglect, and maltreatment. The CAC accomplishes this by providing a multi-disciplinary approach to addressing child abuse in Valencia County.

National Experts

National Sexual Violence Resource Center has a directory of experts on sexual violence.

<https://www.nsvrc.org/experts>

More Resources for Journalists

The Power Shift “Assignment Desk” resources for journalists.

<https://www.freedomforuminstitute.org/initiatives/power-shift-project/assignment-desk/>

EEOC 2016 Select Task Force on Sexual Harassment Report:

https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/task_force/harassment/task_force_report.cfm

Funding for covering #MeToo stories

<https://thewholestory.solutionsjournalism.org/introducing-the-metoo-fund-covering-solutions-to-sexual-harassment-and-sexual-assault-3dd17aadb6b8>

Solutions Journalism: One Way To Combat #MeToo Backlash Across Industries

<https://thewholestory.solutionsjournalism.org/solutions-journalism-one-way-to-combat-me-too-backlash-across-industries-5533d789de78>

DART Center on Covering Trauma

<https://dartcenter.org/content/trauma-journalism-handbook>

International Women’s Media Foundation

<https://www.iwmf.org/>