



# **Strangulation in the UK media** – An analysis of online article titles

## Part Five: Summary & Discussion

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Institute For  
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## Summary & Discussion

A content analysis of online article titles reporting on strangulation reflected the gendered nature of strangulation and highlighted some of the inequalities previously observed in how men (predominantly the perpetrators) and women (predominantly the victims) are reported in the media covering domestic abuse and sexual violence. In the fatal strangulation article titles the use of the word “wife” to describe a woman and “man” to describe a man was a prime example of this. What does this tell us about how the media reports women? As wives, their identity dependent on their relationship to men whose identity is that of their own? From our perspective there is something outdated about this finding. There were, however, some differences between the fatal-strangulation and non-fatal strangulation group when it came to words that reflected identity. This could suggest a difference in the demographics of victims and perpetrators across these two crimes – non-fatal strangulation and murder. Or it could suggest that non-fatal strangulation lends itself to a more factual reporting of the crime, where victim and perpetrator identities are objectively presented.

In the non-fatal strangulation group, we observed some positive steps towards more fact-based reporting and naming strangulation as domestic abuse and its links to coercive and controlling behaviour. These findings reflect those observed on the reporting of coercive and controlling behaviour following a similar change in legislation in 2015[22] and should be built upon. This might reflect societal changes on perceptions of domestic abuse and sexual violence but raises the question as to why reporting on fatalities did not follow the same trajectory.

For both groups, sensationalising and using language particularly around circumstances that minimised or even trivialised the events surrounding strangulation were observed. This is something that may not come as a surprise in the ‘click bait’ era of online journalism.

The presence of words related to the criminal justice system was expected and, in some cases, reporting on sentence length conveyed the serious repercussions that those who perpetrate strangulation could face. In contrast to aspects of the literature review of strangulation in the media more broadly, strangulation was not presented in these online article titles as something that women enjoy, but as a crime and the women affected, therefore, seen as victims.

From an IFAS perspective, it is essential that strangulation, both fatal and non-fatal, continues to be reported on in the UK media. This includes taking opportunities to highlight the high-risk nature of strangulation in the context of intimate partner violence and domestic homicide.

Given the government’s intention to halve violence against women and girls in a decade[38], media reporting may help change societal perceptions and could be used to demonstrate perpetrators being held accountable and provide help and support for victim/survivors. Survivors in our lived experience group at IFAS have shared experiencing the power in reading other survivors lived experiences through online articles that resonated with them before leaving an abusive relationship. Such articles provided survivors with an accurate exposure to the risks of domestic abuse. Any opportunity to bring awareness to the reality that no one should have to live in fear of someone else might just help save a life.

With adequate funding, IFAS will continue to conduct research and raise awareness on the risks associated with strangulation. The dataset we obtained for the purpose of this study could be utilised further. At this point we have only analysed the titles of the articles; an in-depth analysis into the reports themselves could be conducted to answer future research questions, for example into the type of images used in such articles. We would encourage any researchers or VAWG sector practitioners who are interested in the data set to contact us.

Lastly, we would urge journalists to familiarise themselves with the existing guidelines for reporting violence against women and girls. Where possible, we would encourage them to include the voices of survivors, not only to provide case studies but to sense-check articles and the impact that reporting on strangulation might have on other survivors. For example, those with lived experience of strangulation could help journalists to consider how the victims and perpetrators are portrayed, the importance of correct terminology, and whether enough information about access to help and support is included. Further to this it may also allow for a more varied presentation of who is affected by this behaviour, and that all victims do not fit the same mold.

We plan to work with survivors of strangulation and journalists to develop an approach to engaging with the media. We are aware that other charities working to tackle specific forms of abuse have already developed practical toolkits for survivors when engaging with the media, for example the recently published 'Media Advocacy Toolkit' by Karma Nirvana [39]. Our aim is to ensure that strangulation is sensitively and respectfully reported in the media, with information that accurately reflects the existence of strangulation in the UK.



## References

38. Home Office (2024). New measures set out to combat violence against women and girls.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-measures-set-out-to-combat-violence-against-women-and-girls>

39. Karma Nirvana (2024). Honour Based Abuse and Forced Marriage: Media Engagement Toolkit.  
<https://karmanirvana.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/survivor-ambassadors/media-advocacy-toolkit/>



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