



## "2 dead in Warner Robins Valentine's Day domestic dispute"

Whilst our campaign is UK focused, we do cover [appalling misrepresentations of domestic and sexual violence and abuse](#) internationally. This [particular article](#) is from a US publication that includes every single thing that is wrong about media coverage of cases of murder-suicide starting with the fact that it refers to murder as a "[domestic dispute](#)". As we have made clear on numerous occasions, domestic violence and abuse are not "domestic incidents" or "disputes". A domestic "dispute" is arguing over what to watch on TV. Disputes do not end in physical violence or murder.

Secondly, both the title "2 dead in Warner Robins Valentine's Day domestic dispute" and sub-heading "Valentine's Day ended tragically for a Warner Robins couple late Sunday" completely erase the crime and the perpetrator. A tragic incident on Valentine's Day is burning dinner, not murder. It also implies that both the perpetrator, Christopher Hankinson, and the victim, Angela Polk, were equally culpable in their deaths. The only person responsible was Hankinson. He made the choice to kill Polk and then he made the choice to kill himself. Nothing Polk could have said or done could ever justify murder. The fact that Hankinson sent his daughter and son to the neighbour's house after an argument started is evidence of intent - not the actions of a loving father, although I suppose we should feel thankful Hankinson chose not to murder his children too.

Thirdly, the article focuses on the perpetrator rather than the victim. A nephew of Hankinson's is quote as saying this:

"He was a loving, caring uncle, and he did everything he could for his family and his kids,"

This is what Brendan Hankinson had to say about Polk:

"She was nice".

If you insist on including a positive comment about a perpetrator of fatal male violence against women and girls, it's not really that much to ask that you include something positive about the victim. "She was nice" following a comment about a "loving, caring" man dismisses the victim as inconsequential. Of course, some recognition of the fact that men who perpetrate intimate partner violence are manipulative and capable of behaving appropriately to wider members of the family and the community would have been helpful too.

Certainly ending the article with the statement:

Police have not said what may have prompted the argument.

demonstrates a clear failure to recognise domestic violence and abuse from both the journalist and the police. "Arguments" do not cause domestic violence and abuse. Perpetrators, the vast majority of whom are men, make the choice to engage in coercive controlling behaviour that



may or may not be accompanied by physical, sexual, financial or psychological abuse. These men use the excuse of an "argument" to justify their behaviour.

Also, we're not entirely sure why the neighbour cat was considered an important witness to the crime. A neighbour may have heard noises during the night which may have gunfire but reporting a cat being "antsy and whining" isn't journalism.

If we are serious about ending domestic violence and abuse, journalists need to start taking responsibility for perpetuating myths and excusing violent men. This article is precisely we advocate for ALL journalists and editors to take mandatory, specialist training on domestic and sexual violence and abuse. There is simply no acceptable excuse for such shoddy journalism.