

Violence Against Women: A Media Intervention

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Abstract

This ARC-funded linkage grant involves a collaboration across journalism, law, medicine, sociology and social work, and across organisations (including the University of Melbourne, the University of Wollongong, VicHealth, Domestic Violence Resource Centre and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission). It is addressed to aspects of the media, and its role in the primary prevention of violence against women [VAW].

A primary cause of VAW is community attitudes. Media coverage of VAW is one of a group of social factors that are understood to influence attitudes, although the degree and operation of this is unclear. Research has found that media coverage can misrepresent the nature of VAW, may be sensationalist, may minimize the responsibility of perpetrators of VAW and may blame the victim.

Little is known about how journalistic practices and newsroom cultures influence media reporting of VAW. At the other end of the causal chain, there is scant conclusive research on how news media outputs influence community attitudes, and whether changes in news agendas may contribute to changes in community attitudes. This project addresses these gaps.

It uses interviews with media professionals to explore how they perceive VAW as a news story, and how they report it. The focus of the interviews includes the cursory reporting of VAW as well as in-depth, consistent and contextual reporting of the issue, how VAW stories became reportable, recent changes in reporting, sources relied on and observations on gender in the newsroom.

The second stage of the project will collect and analyse media coverage of VAW in three periods. The first is September-October 2014, the second after the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence has been reported (in April-June 2016) and the third after the 'media intervention' (described below).

Questions that will be asked throughout the coding and analysis of this data include how is the story, victim and/or perpetrator framed? Does the article use sensationalistic language? What themes are discussed? Does the article discuss the gender political causes of VAW? It will use a modified version of the data collection tool developed by Morgan and Politoff (2012).

The third part of the project involves employing a journalist to lead a social media intervention aimed at journalists to help them source information about VAW and improve coverage of the issue. We will be studying the impact of this intervention through further interviews and analysis of media-content post intervention.

Finally, we will use focus groups to explore the influence of (changes in) news media reporting of VAW on people's knowledge of and attitudes towards VAW.

Progress thus far:

Interview Data

We have finished interviewing editorial executives, senior and junior journalists from the Herald Sun, The Age, Mamamia, Channel 10's The Project and Channel Nine. Preliminary analyses of these have commenced, with a focus on gender in the newsroom and sources journalists rely on.

Media Outputs Survey Data

Outputs for the first stage of media analysis have been sourced, the coding frame settled and training and coding will commence in late January 2016.

Media Intervention

Interviews for the journalist role have concluded and it is expected they will commence work in late January.

Key Words

1. Attitudes, stigma
2. Culture, society, challenges
3. Innovation, quality

References

Morgan, J. and Politoff, V. (2012). *Victorian print media coverage of violence against women*. VicHealth.

Flood, M. and Pease, B. (2009). 'Factors influencing community attitudes in relation to violence against women: A critical review of the literature.' Paper Three of the Violence Against Women Community Attitudes Project. VicHealth.

Learning Objectives

1. Bring together previously separate bodies of expertise on media, gender relations in the workplace, feminist theory on the social construction of knowledge and the ways in which news agendas are formed.
2. Understand the impact of new and social media on newsroom practice in covering the complex social issue of violence against women.
3. Understand newsroom cultures and practices and their impact on news media outputs in relation to violence against women, filling a gap in current research.
4. Understand the effect of news media outputs on community attitudes, filling a gap in current research.
5. Develop educative materials to help journalism practitioners improve reporting on violence against women.