

Issued June, 2017

News media and the primary prevention of violence against women and their children:

Emerging Evidence, Insights and Lessons

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This report was commissioned by Our Watch with support from the Australian Government, Department of Social Services (DSS).

Published by Our Watch
GPO Box 24229, Melbourne VIC 3001
www.ourwatch.org.au

Acknowledgement of Country: *Our Watch acknowledges the traditional owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people past and present, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledges.*

Suggested citation:

Sutherland, G., Simons, M., and Blatchford, A. (2017). Emerging Evidence, Insights and Lessons: News media and the primary prevention of violence against women and their children. Report prepared for Our Watch. Melbourne: RMIT University.

Contents

1 Executive Summary	4
2 Glossary	6
3 Context	8
3.1 The role of the news media in primary prevention	9
3.2 The changing face of the media	10
4 Method	12
5 Findings	13
5.1 Key approaches	13
5.1.1 Media training	14
5.1.2 Cross sector collaboration, communication and learning.....	21
5.1.3 Guidance for industry responsive to indentified needs, news, agendas and the exigencies of journalistic practice.....	22
5.1.4 Attention to social media as a means of interacting with journalists and their sources	24
5.1.5 Acknowledgement and celebration of high quality reporting practices.....	25
5.1.6 Ongoing monitoring and evaluation and investment in further research	26
6 Conclusion	29
7 Acknowledgements	30
8 Appendix A: An evaluation of Our Watch’s National Media Engagement Project	31
9 Endnotes	33

1 Executive Summary

The news media (referred to as media throughout this report) have been identified in numerous Australian state and national policy documents as a priority area for action on preventing violence against women, including in the Council of Australian Government's *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. The media features as a priority area in primary prevention because of its potential influence on public understanding of violence against women.¹ News reports are a key factor in shaping community understanding because they report on current events and provide a framework for their interpretation. Who or what is selected to appear in the news and how those individuals and events are portrayed can have a profound influence on people's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.

Violence against women and its prevention are legitimate topics of public interest and research shows that media reporting on the issue in Australia is extensive.² This research identified that while some aspects of reporting on violence against women in Australia are changing for the better, there remains much room for improvement.³ A key question is how to sustain positive shifts and foster further improvement.

This emerging evidence paper aims to identify effective approaches or 'issues to consider' in engaging with, and building the capacity of the Australian media, to embed primary prevention as part of their work in reporting on violence against women. It is designed to inform and stimulate thinking about what future initiatives might look like if they are to be responsive to the current evidence-base, while being well suited to practical and policy considerations.

Our synthesis of the key national and international scientific and grey literature, together with emerging evidence from research and evaluation projects, showed that approaches to engaging with media in primary prevention are more likely to be effective when they are evidence-informed, developed collaboratively and involve multi-faceted, integrated and appropriately resourced strategies that consider the following key elements.

Future prevention efforts in the news media should consider:

1. **Media training**
 - a. **For university students and practicing journalists**, including the development and implementation of content specific training and curriculum materials
 - b. **For community spokespeople**, including survivors and others likely to become sources for media reports. This includes strategies for responding to and setting news agendas, as well as managing communications via social media
2. **Cross sector collaboration, communication and learning** including with media professionals and all those who interact with news media reporting on violence against women and their children
3. **Guidance for industry that is responsive to identified needs, news agendas and the exigencies of journalistic practice**, acknowledging that media guidelines alone will not be sufficient to change reporting practices
4. **Attention to social media as a means of interacting with journalists and their sources**, cognizant that social media platforms are fast-paced and require timely engagement
5. **Acknowledgement and celebration of quality reporting practices** which should have at its heart opportunities for networking, sharing, guidance, training and encouragement
6. **Ongoing monitoring and evaluation**, including shared indicators of success and **investment in further research** to build the evidence base

It is essential that these inter-related elements be underpinned by a comprehensive understanding of the media landscape in Australia and elsewhere, including the complexities of an industry that is rapidly changing. It must also be acknowledged that the media industry itself – not just the news it produces– must be part of the broader primary prevention effort by promoting gender equality and challenging norms supporting male violence and entitlement. The dominance of men in positions of power in media newsroom in Australia cannot be ignored, nor can the reported high levels of sexual harassment.⁴ The media industry, and the organisations and workplaces that make up the industry, need to step up to be leaders in the prevention of sexism, discrimination and violence against women.

2 Glossary⁵

Violence against women

Any act of gender based violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of harm or coercion, in public or in private life.⁶ This definition encompasses all forms of violence that women experience (including physical, sexual, emotional, cultural/spiritual, financial, and others) that are gender based.⁷

Domestic violence

Domestic violence refers to acts of violence that occur in domestic settings between two people who are, or were, in an intimate relationship. It includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse.⁸

Family violence

Family violence is a broader term that refers not only to violence between intimate partners but also to violence between family members.⁹ This includes, elder abuse and adolescent violence against parents. Family violence includes violent or threatening behaviour, or any other form of behaviour that coerces or controls a family member or causes that family member to be fearful.¹⁰ In Indigenous communities, family violence is often the preferred term as it encapsulates the broader issue of violence within extended families, kinship networks and community relationships, as well as intergenerational issues.¹¹

Prevention of violence against women

(Referred to in this report as ‘primary prevention’)

Prevention of violence against women is defined as activities and interventions that aim to prevent violence against women before it occurs by addressing the primary (first or underlying) drivers of violence.

Primary prevention is distinct from service response or early intervention, which occurs after violence has occurred or at early signs of violence. It differs also from more specific actions targeted at individuals and groups who exhibit early signs of perpetrating violent behaviour or of being subject to violence.¹² The term prevention or primary prevention is used in this document to refer to work that contributes or is relevant to the prevention of violence against women. The term applies to work carried out by prevention-specific practitioners as well as other experts and spokespersons.¹³

Gender

The socially learnt roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that any given society considers appropriate for men and women; gender defies masculinity and femininity.¹⁴ Gender expectations vary between cultures and can change over time.¹⁵

Gender equality

Gender equality involves equality of opportunity and equality of results. It includes the redistribution of resources and responsibilities between men and women and the transformation of the underlying causes and structures of gender inequality to achieve substantive equality. It is about recognising diversity and disadvantage to ensure equal outcomes for all¹⁶ and therefore often requires women-specific programs and policies to end existing inequalities.¹⁷

Gender inequality

Gender inequality refers to the unequal distribution of power, resources, opportunity, and value afforded to men and women in a society due to prevailing gendered norms and structures.¹⁸

Media

Media is used to refer to a variety of forms of media, including news reporting, social media, advertising and popular programming. This document focuses on news media.¹⁹

News media

Print, electronic and broadcast (television and radio) media that focus on delivering news to the general public or a target audience.²⁰

Social media

The collective of online communications technologies and applications dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content sharing and collaboration.²¹ Social media is a new and constantly changing platform/medium, and therefore its scope, reach and consumption is constantly being redefined.²² It describes a variety of applications such as forums and content communities (YouTube), blogging and micro-blogging (Twitter), social networking (Facebook), social news networking (Reddit), social curation (Pinterest), collaborative projects (Wikipedia) and visual media exchanges (Instagram).²³

The National Media Engagement project

An Our Watch suite of initiatives aimed at engaging the Australian media to increase quality reporting of violence against women and their children.²⁴ The evaluation of this project carried out in 2017 makes up part of the emerging evidence referred to in this report. Key findings are summarised in Appendix A.

The Media Intervention project

An Australian Research Council (ARC) Funded research project – ‘Violence Against Women: A Media Intervention’, which makes up a part of the emerging evidence regarding the media’s reporting of violence against women discussed in this report.

3 Context

The landmark *Change the Story* framework developed by Our Watch, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) provides a 'roadmap' for Australia's approach to the primary prevention of violence against women.²⁵ Primary prevention includes actions and interventions that seek to prevent violence *before* it occurs. Evidence gathered in the *Change the Story* framework underscores gender inequality as one of the key drivers of violence against women and sets out a number of prevention actions including to:

- challenge the condoning of violence against women
- promote women's independence and decision-making
- challenge gender stereotypes and roles
- strengthen positive, equal and respectful relationships.

Given this set of actions, it is clear why media in Australia is identified in public policy as one of the settings with the potential to influence those social and cultural norms that drive violence against women. However, like many industries, organisations and workplaces in Australia, the media itself has struggled with gender equality in almost all facets of its work from the production of news to equal representation of men and women in the newsroom and in senior executive positions.

The most recent report from the Global Media Monitoring Project indicates very little progress has been made towards closing the gender gap in media employment, with women vastly unrepresented in front of, and behind, the journalistic lens.²⁶ More locally, research suggests that Australian newsrooms are male-dominated workplaces, adhering to male stereotypes and undervaluing the female voice with high levels of sexual harassment. Male dominance in decision making roles persists even when women in the newsroom are present in equal numbers to men.²⁷ Although the impact of this on media reporting of violence against women is not well understood, gender disparities in the newsroom and among key decision-makers should at least be considered as a potentially significant influence on media culture.

In addition to the *Change the Story* framework, the media are identified in numerous other state and national policy documents as a priority area for action, including in the Council of Australian Government's *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. The *Second Action Plan 2013-2016* included a commitment to "improve media engagement on violence against women and their children..." The current *Third Action Plan 2016-2019* once again reinforces media as a key priority setting in which to "drive nationwide change in the culture, behaviours and attitudes that lead to violence against women and their children."

3.1 The role of news media in primary prevention

The media features as a priority area in primary prevention because of its potential influence on public understanding of violence against women. News media, in particular, is thought to play a role in shaping the public discourse because it reports on current events and provides a framework for interpretation.²⁸ By making visible the issue of violence against women, news media helps to construct and regulate public understanding.²⁹ The Australian news media can potentially create a space for violence against women to be understood not as a private or shameful matter, but as a problem that should and can be prevented.

Although most research, to date, has focused on the content of media messages (as opposed to audience impacts or journalistic practice), this extensive body of work provides compelling evidence about predominant patterns in the way news stories on violence against women are presented; namely that they offer audiences with overly-simplistic, inadequate and distorted representations of the nature, extent and seriousness of the problem.

In the most recent review of the literature published in 2015³⁰ (as part of a study jointly funded by Our Watch and ANROWS), the authors noted the following key themes arising from national and international research on media reporting of violence against women including:

- not reporting the *social context* in which male perpetrated violence against women occurs
- *sensationalising* stories through language or by disproportionately focusing on violent crimes that fit key news values, but which are statistically unlikely
- perpetuating *myths and misrepresentations* which can skew public perceptions about who perpetrates violence against women, who is most at risk of violence and where violence occurs
- directly and indirectly *shifting blame* from male perpetrators of violence and *assigning responsibility* for violence to women by focusing on the behaviour of women and their role in the violence
- relying on law enforcement as the *expert “voices”* that inform public debate mediated through news stories

Research conducted as this report was being prepared included a series of focus groups held around Australia with the aim of understanding how media reporting influenced attitudes to violence against women, and confirmed the potency of media reports in influencing attitudes, including the apportionment of blame. Overall, the findings reinforced the importance of media as a primary prevention tool, its potency in influencing community attitudes, and the increasing importance of social media and its interaction with traditional news media, for young people in particular.³¹

News media is thought to play a role in shaping the public discourse around violence against women.

The purpose of this report is to build on this knowledge by identifying approaches most effective in promoting positive change in media reporting. Informed by analysis of existing resources and studies, the report extends upon previous reviews of the evidence by examining international scientific and grey literature, drawing on both published and unpublished reports. We also use research and evaluation work in progress that offers important insights into emerging evidence. In interpreting this evidence, however, it is important to consider both the complexity of the media as a setting for primary prevention, as well as the added complexities associated with the considerable pace at which the media landscape in Australia, and in most of other parts of the world, is changing. These considerations are briefly outlined below.

3.2 The changing face of the media

Working with media has always been, and is increasingly fundamentally different from working with other sectors on the primary prevention of violence against women. For example, the media industry is not like the education sector, where promising interventions (such as Respectful Relationships Education in Schools) can be embedded within national curriculum, or the welfare sector where there are recognised, universally agreed protocols, together with government regulation, cyclical funding arrangements and relatively stable stakeholder relationships. While there are influential peak bodies in the Australian media industry, they do not enjoy complete regulatory reach. For the most part, the media industry is lightly regulated or completely unregulated. Concerns for editorial independence can cause newsrooms to resist external scrutiny and intervention by governments and non-government organisations (NGOs). The media is also fragmented. It includes both large media organisations, but also individual journalists and increasingly, ‘citizen journalists,’ where members of the public play an active role in collecting, reporting, and disseminating news.

In addition, there is no industry changing faster than the media, and these changes will only gather pace in the coming years. Understanding the nature of these changes is critical to future engagement strategies and means that effective approaches to changing practices based on ‘old media’ may not be relevant to ‘new media’.

As any householder can attest, the audience no longer assembles in the same concentrations. The family no longer gathers around the television news or shares a newspaper. Most homes have multiple screens and news is absorbed as it happens. This changes the way that media influence works. In the last five years the landscape has shifted again because of the dominance of Google (which also owns YouTube) and Facebook. These social media engines have quickly become the world’s most powerful publishers, serving news content to audiences on the basis of algorithms that measure what those audiences have previously sought and bought. Thanks to the impact of social media, the industry has porous boundaries, with media aggregating and responding to content generated by audience members and other members of the public. Research shows that the

There is no industry changing faster than the media... and at the same time, there are many new players.

debates that take place in the comments sections of online mainstream media articles and on social media between readers, and between readers and journalists, alter how people interpret the credibility of the original news report, and the journalists who wrote it.³²

At the same time there are new players in Australian media. Institutions such as universities are now producing journalistic content, as are an increasing range of NGOs and private businesses. Australia has in the last few years also become home to new online local versions of the *British Daily Mail*, the *Guardian*, the youth oriented news and entertainment outlet *Buzzfeed*, the *New York Times*, and the *Huffington Post*. There are also many small, specialist outlets made possible by the economics of online publishing, where reaching the audience is cheap, and does not require a printing press or a broadcasting license. Meanwhile the business model that has supported most mainstream newsrooms is under strain, and possibly broken.

It is likely that in the next few years the media will continue to change and fragment, with social media continuing to be influential in how news media content is absorbed and shared. Longer term, we can expect to see many more newsrooms and media outlets with smaller staffs, together with an increasing dependence on social media and content generated by non-traditional newsmakers.

4 Method

To identify effective approaches to engaging with, and building the capacity of the media in the primary prevention of violence against women we drew on multiple sources including:

- An update of the literature review published in 2015³³ that aimed to synthesise evidence on media representations of violence against women. For the update, we paid particular attention to studies investigating interventions responsive to best practices in news gathering and reporting.
- Online searches of the grey literature to identify practical models for engaging with media. This included programs or projects where engagement with media formed a component of the work.
- Emerging evidence, including research work in progress, including an Australian Research Council (ARC) Funded research project – Violence Against Women: A Media Intervention (referred to as the Media Intervention Project).
- An evaluation of Our Watch’s National Media Engagement Project (NME Project) conducted in conjunction with this report, which included interviews with key informants from the primary prevention sector, journalists with experience reporting on violence against women and representative from media industry regulators in Australia (as summarised in Appendix A).

We gathered case study examples of national and international projects to illustrate evidence-informed practice models for engaging media. These models were selected for inclusion because their approach has been informed by research and evaluation including ‘on-the-ground’ monitoring of activities. We profile each case study in terms of its context, location, funding, formative research/baseline data, program components, accompanying intervention and outcomes and evaluation, where relevant and applicable. Although we identified other programs of work in media and primary prevention of violence against women and have referenced them within the report, they have not been included as case study profiles when implementation appeared to be ‘top down’ rather than evidence-based.

In addition, we have remained cognizant that at the heart of primary prevention is social change and that imparting knowledge and changing awareness, while important, are often not enough to bring about social change. We have not, therefore, considered within this review initiatives such as *16 Days of Activism*, which have a singular campaign-style focus.

5 Findings

Overall, empirical evidence on the media's impact on public understandings of violence against women, and how this operates, is surprisingly thin. As a consequence, the evidence-base on which to inform effective approaches to influencing and improving media coverage on violence against women is also limited; often hampered by the complex web of causation within which the media operates. Even among the few longitudinal studies of media coverage of violence against women³⁴, there is little evidence available to help us understand which factors, or combination of factors, are the key drivers of change. This is likely because a myriad of factors impact on media reporting practices including individuals in the newsrooms and the social and political contexts in which they work.

In the most recent addition to the literature, Simons and Morgan³⁵ examined decision making in two newsrooms that had deliberately campaigned on violence against women. The campaigns, in and of themselves, were significant as these were the first mass reach mainstream media outlets in Australia to make a concerted commitment to campaigning for political action on the issue. The research highlighted that the key factors influencing the decision to devote space and time to reporting on this issue were the availability and attitude of sources and newsroom awareness of individual cases of domestic violence, prompting the realisation that violence against women was a significant social problem. Simons and Morgan also found that individual journalists and editors were of crucial importance, and that when these individuals moved on, attention to the issue declined. This research is an important and timely addition to the international literature about the inner workings of newsroom and decision-making and points to opportunities for intervention, as well as the challenge of sustaining and fostering improvements in media reporting.

5.1 Key approaches

Taking into account the complexities of media and the substantial rate at which it is changing, our synthesis of the key national and international scientific and grey literature, together with emerging evidence from research and evaluation projects showed that approaches to engaging with media in primary prevention are more likely to be effective when strategies are:

- evidence-informed
- developed collaboratively
- multi-faceted
- integrated
- appropriately resourced.

That prevention is ‘everyone’s business’ is as relevant when discussing the media, as any other sector involved in the primary prevention of violence against women. The key elements presented below are not mutually exclusive but represent the sum parts of a complex and layered approach. The case studies provide illustrative examples of effective practice models; each supported by research and evaluation. They share many of these common elements.

5.1.1 Media training

One of the lead strategies used in effective models of engaging media in primary prevention of violence against women and in other contexts, such as media reporting of suicide, is training - both for the media and for community spokespeople who may be used as sources of information by the media. We investigate each in turn on the following pages.

CASE STUDY 1: *MINDFRAME* NATIONAL MEDIA INITIATIVE

Context: suicide and mental illness

Location: Australia

The *Mindframe* National Media Initiative (known as Mindframe) is a suite of interconnected strategies that aims to encourage responsible, accurate and sensitive representation of mental illness and suicide in the Australian mass media.

Program components:

- resources and support for media professionals
- tertiary education curriculum for students training in media, public relations and other communications courses
- resources and guidance for mental health and suicide prevention sectors to support effective engagement and communication with media
- online resources for other key media sources, such as the police and courts

One of the key underlying principles to support change is building collaborative relationship with the media and other sectors that influence the media.

Social media: Mindframe issue media alerts on issues of public interest involving suicide and/or mental illness that may attract media attention, including upcoming coronial case findings or celebrity deaths by suicide and are active on Twitter.

Funding: Mindframe is funded the Australian Government Department of Health: the Hunter Institute of Mental Health manages its research, education and training programs.

Formative/Baseline research: Mindframe program components are informed by an extensive international evidence-base. The work is also informed by ongoing consultation, evaluation and research funded by Mindframe in Australia, including a large longitudinal Media Monitoring Project that investigated reporting against key quality criteria set out in Mindframe resources. They also regularly update reviews of the international literature to keep abreast of emerging evidence and trends and monitor the uptake, reach and impact of activities.

www.mindframe-media.info

CASE STUDY 2: DART CENTRE FOR JOURNALISM AND TRAUMA

Context: violence, trauma, conflict and tragedy

Location: United States, with regional hubs servicing Asia-Pacific and Europe

The **DART Centre** for Journalism and Trauma (known as the DART Centre) engages in a range of strategies that aim to improve media coverage of violence, conflict and tragedy, including compassionate and professional engagement with victims and survivors. It is increasingly focused on supporting media professionals who encounter and report on violence and tragedy.

Program components: Strategies include:

- resources and training for media professionals on a broad range of topics including terrorism, natural disaster, intimate partner violence and sexual violence, war, homicide and mass shootings
- tertiary education curriculum for journalism students
- media awards that recognizes exemplary reporting
- a fellowship program for journalists

These program are underpinned by a commitment to create and sustain interdisciplinary collaboration and communication.

Social media: The DART Centre issue media alerts via their blog on issues of public interest involving tragedy and violence that may attract media attention, including events such as the Iraq war, the Indonesian tsunami, mass shootings in US and most recently the Manchester bombing (May 2017) and are active on Facebook and Twitter.

Funding: The DART Centre is supported by philanthropic funding, primarily the DART Foundation. It has a dedicated research unit (DART Research Lab) that manages research, evaluation and monitoring activities at the University of Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Formative/Baseline research: DART Centre resources are informed by a broad selection of international studies. As well as conducting primary research, the primary role of the DART Research Lab is to bring together the evidence-base together to inform approaches to media reporting and acts as an interdisciplinary clearinghouse via the DART Research Database.

www.dartcentre.org

Training for university students and practicing journalists

Content specific training and curriculum materials for university journalism students and for practicing journalists are a key feature offered by effective models of media engagement including by the Mindframe National Media Initiative (referred to here after as Mindframe, see Case Study 1) and the DART Centre for Journalism and Trauma (referred to as the DART Centre, see Case Study 2).

Mindframe initially developed pilot undergraduate training materials (funded by the Australian Government under the Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy) almost two decades ago – known then as the *Response Ability* project.³⁶ Designed to provide students with information and the background knowledge needed to confidently approach news reporting about suicide or mental illness, a key feature was the collaborative nature of the development work that involved Australian mental health professionals, journalism educators, academics and consumer organisations. An advisory panel of key stakeholders and journalism educators has overseen both development and implementation of Mindframe's media training materials.

Similarly, training materials developed by the DART Centre emphasise the importance of collaboration and relationship building. The DART Centre has changed its approach in recent years to include online resources to assist journalists experiencing or at risk of experiencing vicarious trauma, as a response to priorities identified by the media industry and academia. Both Mindframe and DART Centre staff regularly visit journalism schools seeking information about where their materials can fit in the many different pre-existing curricula. They are also regular attendees at key conferences of journalism educators, such as the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia annual conference.

Evaluations of Mindframe's *Response Ability* project showed that students found the training materials to be interesting and relevant to their studies.³⁷ Results also showed that exposure to content-specific teaching and learning improved their understanding of the issue and was associated with increased confidence to develop a story on suicide and/or mental illness. Mindframe has since extended its undergraduate training materials so that it can be incorporated into tertiary curriculum for students studying journalism, public relations and communication.

In recognition of the potential value of influencing the way journalists think about and report on violence against women in the pre-professional phase of their education, Our Watch's NME Project commissioned the Centre for Advancing Journalism at the University of Melbourne, together with the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria and the DART Centre to develop training curriculum material for both university journalism students and practicing journalists.

The curriculum for universities included a series of lectures, essay questions, reading material and a DVD featuring journalists and survivors, constructed around the two essential elements of a journalists' job: (1) sourcing information and (2) communicating the results clearly and

ethically. The industry curriculum, on the other hand, was designed specifically for delivery within the workplace, or newsroom, and concentrated directly on the immediate challenges of ethical interviewing and reporting on violence against women.

Development work on both sets of curriculum materials was completed and piloted in 2016 and was provided to Our Watch ready for up scaling to university programs and for use in the industry. However, government funding did not extend beyond the development phase and as a consequence implementation has stalled. It is likely the curriculum would require some updates prior to implementation. It would also be important to resource a program of engagement with industry and tertiary institutions' journalism courses to ensure that the curriculum is used and remains responsive to changing news processes and agendas.

Interviews with journalists, industry peak bodies and those representing the prevention of violence against women sector undertaken as part of the NME Project evaluation indicated a strong appetite for media training broadly, but also for the curriculum materials commissioned by Our Watch but not yet available. The Australian Press Council, in particular, noted that it would normally have developed training materials to accompany their *Family and Domestic Violence Reporting Advisory Guidelines*³⁸ (released in March 2016) but had not done so knowing that Our Watch was in the field.

Training for community spokespeople

It is commonly acknowledged among journalists and journalism scholars that sources are the main determinant of how a story is 'framed'.³⁹ Previous research shows that the way journalists construct stories around their sources including who is quoted, who is quoted first and who is only referred to can impact on audience interpretation and understanding.⁴⁰ The structure of journalistic-source relations both endows power and privileges those who already have social power.⁴¹ As Franklin and Carlson put it, "to be a news source is to have the power to define the world".⁴² When it comes to the reporting of violence against women, issues of power endowed by sourcing relationships interact powerfully with issues of gender relations and power politics. The research on the shortcomings of media reporting of violence against women underlines the importance of media being able and willing to access a wider array of sources, including survivors of violence, advocates and sector representatives. Nearly all the guidelines aimed at media reporting emphasise the desirability of accessing this kind of expertise to inform media reports. Building the capacity of such sources to respond to media requests and to proactively set news agendas is therefore vital for supporting primary prevention through media.

Models shown to be effective in engaging with media almost always include a component designed to build capacity of potential spokespeople or organisations to communicate effectively with media, with the ultimate goal of improving reporting practices. Mindframe, for example, have a website and print resources dedicated to meeting the needs of those

working in mental health, as well as those with direct experience of mental health issues. These resources are supported by face-to-face interactive workshops and staff who actively and consistently engage with journalism educators and journalists.

New Zealand's *It's not OK* campaign for action on family violence (see Case Study 3) developed a network of media spokespeople who were trained in how to engage confidently with reporters, including how to get important family violence and prevention messages into local media. The campaign resulted in 176 trained community spokespeople who regularly engaged in media activity around the country.

We also note, work already undertaken by some sector organisations in Australia to manage the way they work with media on primary prevention of violence against women messaging. This includes the recently released practical guide for sector workers produced by Domestic Violence Victoria - *Eleven ways to boost your work with news media: How you can help the media report prevention of violence against women*.⁴³ Although not designed to be an evidence-based approach to engaging with media, it is clear that this type of resource is increasingly required. The report fittingly described working with media as "lively, demanding and complex".⁴⁴

A recent publication arising from the Media Intervention Project noted that the availability of media 'talent' – particularly survivors of violence who are prepared to tell their story – was a key driver of media reporting on violence against women.⁴⁵ Although results pertained to only a few media outlets, qualitative data indicated that without women prepared to be interviewed, a story was at risk of not being aired or published.

This means that sector representatives, in their dual role of community spokespeople and as the traditional 'gatekeepers' between the media and survivors of violence, will need to be increasingly responsive to media requests. In the primary prevention space, it is important that sector representatives also enhance their capacity to proactively influence news agendas. To date, cases where the sector has taken the lead in setting the news agenda are rare.⁴⁶

Although we will address new technology later in this report, it is important to note that social media is fundamentally changing, and will increasingly influence the way journalists identify and engage with sources. Social media enables journalists to avoid the traditional 'gatekeeper' sector organisations in reaching out to victims, survivors and perpetrators. This new approach has the potential to leave victim survivors exposed and without support networks.⁴⁷ As a result, media capacity training must be responsive to these new sourcing practices. Currently, there is no evidence to inform what such training might look like.

CASE STUDY 3: IT'S NOT OK CAMPAIGN

Context: family violence

Location: New Zealand

The key objective of the *It's not OK* campaign is to increase understanding, personal relevance and responsibility for family violence in order to create the necessary social climate for change.

The campaign is a community driven, behavior change campaign that among its multi-layered strategies taps into and supports already existing community strategies. It has a strong focus on perpetrators of family violence

Program components: The strand of the campaign include:

- mass media communications
- media training and advocacy, including workshops, guidelines and training and networking for community spokespeople
- telephone information line
- a grant scheme designed to enable local organisations to bring the *It's not OK* message to life in their own communities
- web-based collection of personal stories

The campaign was founded on multi-dimensional evidence-based practices underpinned a collective process approach to large scale social change

Social media: No social media presence in initial stages of campaign, but is now active on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter

Funding: The *It's not OK* campaign is funded by the New Zealand Government's Ministry of Social Development and was originally an initiative of the Taskforce for Action of Violence within Families

Formative/Baseline research: Program components were informed by various types of research including key stakeholder consultations, focus groups and interviews with perpetrators and other community members, a baseline audit of media coverage of family violence from which to measure change, attitudes surveys. The campaign is also involved in ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities and acts as a clearinghouse for research on family violence

www.areyouok.org.nz

5.1.2 Cross sector collaboration, communication and learning

One of the more compelling findings from the NME Project evaluation was that implementation of key Our Watch initiatives, namely online media guidelines and the Our Watch Awards, achieved their greatest reach when multi-stakeholder relationships were formed and/or initiatives provided avenues at which key stakeholder relationships could be facilitated. For example, evaluation outcomes based on qualitative interviews with key industry and sector representatives indicated that one of the most beneficial aspects of the Our Watch Awards was the relationships formed, information shared and informal networking opportunities that the awards ceremony provided. Similarly, the Australian Press Council indicated that one of the more useful outcomes of developing its *Family and Domestic Violence Reporting Advisory Guideline*⁴⁸ was the development work that provided opportunities for relationships to be formed between sector representatives, advocates and senior media personnel. The Council noted that many of these relationships have been sustained to this day.

Similar to the Our Watch's NME project, other approaches to engaging with media that have shown some level of effectiveness (as described in the case study examples) all include elements of relationship building. In another example, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV) specifically notes that "Its work to deepen relationships with journalists, represented just one aspect of a comprehensive, state-wide strategic communication plan covering police, judicial, legislative, health, educational and grassroots or community arenas".⁴⁹

In Australia, research investigating the nature of media reporting of violence against women suggests building relationships with the police may be a potential avenue for driving positive change. Although one of the ultimate goals may be to move away from police and other criminal justice personnel as the dominant 'voices' in media coverage of violence against women, they should not be ignored and may actually be a powerful ally in communicating messages about prevention.

Data suggests that Australian police respond to a call in relation to domestic and family violence every two minutes.⁵⁰ The nature and extent of violence against women in our community means that police officers deal with the issue on a very regular basis and in some cases may be the first to field media enquiries. Each of the ten police forces that operate in Australia has a dedicated media communication team that handles media enquires, coordinates media conferences and issues press releases. As a result police agencies provide a large output of media releases on crime incidents – of which violence against women is one. For these reasons, they have an important role to play in supporting appropriate coverage of violence against women and represent an important potential avenue of intervention.

A singular focus on the police, however, means that the emphasis will inevitably be on the kind of violence against women that is more likely to be reported and end up in court – namely high level physical assault

and homicide. As such, other forms of violence against women, such as psychological, economic, emotional and sexual violence and abuse will continue to remain at the margins of public understanding about the issue. A holistic approach to building effective collaborative models of engaging with media should therefore focus on building better source relationships with a broad range of sector and academic experts, adding to and providing alternatives to the traditionally dominant voices.

While there are benefits to working collaboratively, including finding innovative solutions to complex problems, it must be acknowledged that working in this way, in this space, is far from simple. Relationships and trust take time to build and require ongoing fostering and attention.

5.1.3 Guidance for industry responsive to identified needs, news agendas and the exigencies of journalistic practice

Resources for journalists in the form of media guidelines or fact sheets are one of the most widely used approaches for guiding best-practice reporting of violence against women. Media guidelines commonly provide practical advice for journalists, editors and other media professionals and are used in a variety of contexts, including for example reporting on suicide, mental health, drugs, drug addiction, asylum seekers and refugees. In a recent review of the evidence on media portrayals of violence against women, Sutherland et al.⁵¹ critiqued 23 different sets of English-language media guidelines and found the content was broadly similar and included advice to:

- report the social context in which male perpetrated violence against women occurs
- use correct language and terminology
- avoid blaming the victim
- avoid offering excuses for men's use of violence
- consider how source selection shapes the story
- provide women with information on where to seek help

In Australia, women's organisations and the prevention of violence against women sector have been particularly active in this space with numerous guidelines developed and available for journalists to use. Other agencies have since followed suit and there are now guidelines available from national sector and industry organisations including Our Watch (released in 2014) and the Australian Press Council (released in 2016). Overall however, evidence for the effectiveness of guidelines in changing journalistic practice is weak, particularly as an intervention in isolation.

Research on media guidelines on the reporting of suicide developed by Mindframe found that without active dissemination and engagement, guidelines often have limited reach and uptake.⁵² They found, however, that guidelines that were supported by face-to-face in-house briefing sessions provided opportunity for discussion and professional development were well received by practicing journalists who indicated they intended to use them in their work.

Longitudinal research suggested that the quality of media coverage of suicide improved in the period after the introduction of the guidelines in comparison to the period before.⁵³ However, the Mindframe initiative (as described in Case Study 1) consisted of a number of different elements and it is not possible to distinguish the guidelines from the sum of all the Mindframe activities aimed at improving media reporting on the issue. Further evaluation specifically noted that improved understanding on the sensitivities involved in reporting suicide and mental illness were likely the result of Mindframe's multi-faceted approach to media engagement.⁵⁴

Recent research shows that media coverage of court cases makes up a large quantum of reporting on domestic violence in Australia.⁵⁵ While media guidelines universally encourage journalists to situate individual incidents within the social context in which violence against women occurs, there remain unresolved problems associated with the interaction of sub judice contempt and various other pieces of legislation that mitigate journalists being able to present incidents in this way. For example, journalists are likely to shy away from reporting about a perpetrator's history of violence because of legal overlays that restrict the reporting of intervention order proceedings.

Despite a lack of evidence of effectiveness and complexities in adhering to media guidelines, in more recent qualitative research, conducted as part of the NME Project evaluation and the Media Intervention Project, journalists working in Victoria expressed that they continue to find particular aspects of reporting on violence against women challenging and were seeking input and advice. Apart from guidance on legal restrictions relating to court reporting, including sub-judice contempt, rules of evidence and restrictions in the Family Violence Protection Act (2008), journalists also expressed particular challenges in reporting about violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

Recent research on Victorian-print based media reporting of Aboriginal family violence supports these conclusions. Undertaken in collaboration with the Aboriginal owned communications company Kalinya, as part of the Victorian Government's Strategic Framework for Working with Media to Prevent Aboriginal Family Violence, the research noted that an absence of reporting on violence against Aboriginal women in Victoria "arguably renders Aboriginal women as invisible, further marginalising women who are disproportionately impacted by intimate-partner violence".⁵⁶ They found that the paucity of reporting on Aboriginal people was in large part because of a lack of confidence among reporters in dealing with the cross-cultural issues and sensitivities. The key recommendation arising from their research was that journalists and those responsible for media releases "need encouragement and guidance" in reporting on the complexity of violence experienced in Indigenous communities.⁵⁷

5.1.4 Attention to social media as a means of interacting with journalists and their sources

Recent Australian research has established that one of the key ways of engaging and gaining the attention of professional journalists is the use of social media, with many media workers engaging in a constant dialogue with sources, peers and policy makers on Twitter, in particular.⁵⁸ Social media networks have become everyday work tools in newsrooms.⁵⁹ Social media therefore offers a means of engaging an often fragmented and difficult to reach group of journalists.

None of the effective models of media engagement, as illustrated through our case study examples, consider social media as a key element in their work, even though both Mindframe and the DART Centre issue media alerts via social media in response to events of public interest. This is likely because most were developed and evaluated prior to the shift in journalistic practices that are more relevant in today's social media environment. Although Mindframe acknowledges that social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter offer media professionals a larger audience reach and the ability to promote stories, it does not as yet provide guidance for journalists or the wider community. The Domestic Violence Victoria report, *Working with news and social media to prevent violence against women and their children: A strategic framework for Victoria*,⁵⁰ similarly highlights social media as the new frontier, but apart from recommendations that include training and guidelines, offers no further guidance on what effective social media engagement might look like.

Certainly none of the effective models described in the case studies, are responsive to evidence about the role that social media now plays in sourcing practices. In recent Australian research exploring how mainstream newsrooms make decisions about stories on violence against women, one news outlet identified social media as the key – both in sourcing media 'talent' and spurring journalists to do more reporting on violence against women when their initial stories attracted a large social media response.⁶¹

Of particular significance here is the social media intervention *Uncovered*, created as part of the Media Intervention Project.⁶² Developed as a partnership between journalists, academics, and the prevention of violence against women sector, *Uncovered* is a website and social media presence that seeks to directly address journalists by providing them with resources and the opportunity to engage in peer to peer dialogue.

Early evaluation outcomes suggest that *Uncovered* has had some success in creating informed dialogue about the nature and causes of violence against women including the challenges of reporting it in an ethically responsible way. Launched in May 2016, *Uncovered* was active until March 2017, and continues to operate at a lower level of activity since funding has been exhausted. Although still in its infancy and lacking robust evidence of impact, *Uncovered* is an example of an innovative and promising strategy of media engagement by taking on a critique of media

Social media networks
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reporting, offering guidance in the context of particular news stories as they break, and acting as a proactive ‘clearing house,’ responding to domestic and family violence issues in the news by making relevant and appropriate research and expertise easily accessible to journalists and other communications professionals. This type of social media presence has the potential to tap into recognised shortcomings in advice and appropriate sources for journalists reporting on violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (as previously described).

Any discussion of social media in this space must acknowledge that social media platforms, like Facebook and Twitter enable violence against women and journalists are no exception. There are well-documented negative consequences for journalists, particularly female journalists, and their ‘visible’ sources when they engage in online reporting, discussion and debate about violence against women.⁶³ While Australian journalist Clementine Ford is one of the few to openly speak about her experiences, online trolling, harassment and intimidation of female commentators is commonplace. A survey of women journalists conducted by the Women in Media networking and mentoring group found that 41 per cent of female journalists working for mainstream media reported being ‘trolled’ online, while 18 per cent of female freelance journalists reported being “cyber-stalked”.⁶⁴ This raises troubling questions; not just about who is proliferating the violent and abusive comments, but who is controlling its dissemination.

5.1.5 Acknowledgement and celebration of high quality reporting practices

Although recognising and rewarding journalists for excellence is not a commonly used approach to changing media practice, there is emerging evidence that it may be influential in raising awareness of violence against women as an important social and political news story. Among the case studies included in this review, the DART Centre is the only one that includes, in its suite of engagement strategies, an awards scheme. The DART Awards for Excellence in Coverage of Trauma aims to honor journalists that contribute to better public understandings of trauma-related issues through innovative and ethical reporting practices. Although the DART Centre notes that the awards enhance community awareness of the complexity of trauma and its effects, there are no published corresponding evaluations. Similarly, Zero Tolerance – the high profile Scottish charity – include among their media engagement strategies an awards scheme known as the Write to End Violence Against Women Awards,⁶⁵ but also have no published data to evaluate its effect.

There are, however, local examples of evaluations of journalism awards schemes. In 2015, Our Watch launched the Our Watch Awards, a national scheme designed to recognise and encourage high quality reporting of violence against women and their children. The Our Watch Awards were inspired by a Victorian-based awards scheme, the Eliminating Violence Against Women Media Awards (known as the EVAs Media Awards). The EVAs Media Awards were a successful initiative of Domestic Violence Victoria. An unpublished Master’s Thesis⁶⁶ exploring the impact of

Awards ceremonies
help create a
supportive network of
peers for journalists.

winning an EVAs media award among a small sample of female journalists found that the beneficial aspects were mostly in relation to ‘collateral impacts’. For example, the journalists indicated that the awards helped create a network of peers and sector professionals outside the immediate control of the newsrooms, which rewarded journalists for challenging traditional news-making norms and provided contacts, emotional support and much needed acknowledgement not available elsewhere in the notoriously male dominated profession. Results indicated that the main enabler of this network creation was the awards ceremony itself, which brought journalists who reported on violence against women together in one place. The benefits of the event itself were far more significant than the actual receipt of an EVA award, which had limited profile within the media industry at that time.

Administered by the Walkley Foundation, entries to the Our Watch Awards are judged against a different set of criteria than the EVAs and include a combination of industry-relevant criteria similar to those for the Walkley Awards, including newsworthiness, research writing and production, originality, innovation and creative flair, as well as criteria that reflect Our Watch’s mission and guidelines for the media. This includes, for example, promoting public awareness and understanding of violence against women and challenging gender inequalities and stereotypes.

An evaluation exploring the reach and impact of the Our Watch Awards largely echoed that of the previous research exploring the EVAs.⁶⁷ Those interviewed for the evaluation noted the awards night itself as a significant influencer on the quality of reporting on violence against women. Interview participants from the sector indicated that they appreciated the opportunity the awards night presented for them to meet and discuss domestic violence issues with journalists and senior newsroom executives. Interview participants from the media industry thought that attendance and participation in the awards ceremony served to make journalists more aware of things happening around the country rather than just in their state.

There was, however, one key point of difference from the previous research. Our Watch Award recipients indicated that their employers held the award in high regard. Award recipients described that receiving an Our Watch Award had a strong encouraging and affirming effect and was influential in reporters ‘sticking to the topic’ and gaining recognition in the newsroom for doing so. Some noted that the Our Watch Award assisted in raising awareness of the issue in the newsroom, and giving it ‘credence’ with editors and other key decision makers.

5.1.6 Ongoing monitoring and evaluation and investment in further research

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation are critical elements when considering the effectiveness of models of media engagement. It provides important information on which to lobby for policy, legislation or other types of regulatory change. Both Mindframe and the DART

Centre, which represent ongoing models of media engagement, are supported by external organisations that are specifically funded to facilitate development work and associated research and evaluation projects (the Hunter Institute of Mental Health and the University of Tulsa Department of Psychology, respectively). While New Zealand's *It's not OK* was a one-off strategy, ongoing monitoring throughout the campaign enabled it to be responsive to evaluation outcomes and adapt where necessary. Our Watch recently undertook an evaluation of two of their NME Project initiatives (conducted in conjunction with this report), the outcomes of which will impact on future directions for media engagement in that organisation. Ongoing attention to evaluation and monitoring is particularly important now given the rate at which the media industry is changing. Previous strategies, or elements there in, may no longer be appropriate, relevant or effective.

One of the key elements in effective approaches to engaging with media is having a clear set of mutually agreed upon indicators that clarify, from the outset, what is trying to be achieved. Mindframe, for example, has based its approach on a vast body of research evidence, spanning many decades, demonstrating unequivocal links between media reporting of suicide and suicidal behavior. Mindframe strategies, as a result, coalesce around a shared understanding across media and many other sectors about which aspects of reporting are associated with risk and which approaches can bring about positive community understanding about suicide and mental illness.

While evaluating the effectiveness of strategies for engaging and supporting the preventive role of news media is vital our synthesis of the international scientific and grey literature showed that the evidence-base on which to inform effective approaches is limited. While there are some emerging findings, particularly insights from the Media Intervention Project, key gaps in our knowledge remain. There is a distinct lack of empirical data on the impact of news coverage on attitudes and behaviours and how to best craft mediated messages to more effectively promote positive social change.

Although our updated literature review found a few recent examples of research exploring violence against women and social media, particularly Twitter communications⁶⁸, research in this area is very much in its infancy. Social media has transformed the way people seek and exchange information, including those inside the media industry. It is clear that newspapers in their traditional form have reached, or at least are fast approaching, a point of no return as news consumption habits are changing for good. What effect this might have on reporting practices and audience impact is as yet unclear.

The wide net cast by the 2016 post on *BuzzFeed* titled '*Here is the powerful letter that the Stanford victim read aloud to her attacker*' suggests this may be new frontier for intervention in media reporting of violence against women. The post was in relation to the sentencing of a former Stanford University student convicted of three counts of

Ongoing attention to evaluation and monitoring is particularly important now given the rate at which the media industry is changing.

sexual assault. After the sentencing, the victim directly addressed the perpetrator. *BuzzFeed* obtained the victim's statement and published it in its entirety, prefaced by only a short introduction. The story not only attracted an unprecedented international media audience, but data provided by *BuzzFeed* suggests the story got the majority of views from 'social word of mouth:' for every one person who shared it, 12 more people saw it. Although this represents a one-off news event, it shows the need to invest in research that explores the way audiences interact with online news media including how they react to what they encounter including the way news is presented within social networks.

6 Conclusion

Attempting to change media reporting is a complex endeavor, made even more so by the fast pace at which the media landscape is changing. In fact, the nature of changes to media in Australia and elsewhere raises fundamental questions about engagement: indeed, who are the media in an age where anyone with a social media account can publish to the world?

These complexities, however, offer areas of opportunity as well as challenge. Overwhelmingly our findings indicate that the key features of effective approaches to engaging media were contingent upon being developed collaboratively. Creating sustainable change will require building and fostering strong relational ties between the media who produce the news and the sources, such as the police, the prevention of violence against women sector, survivors and advocates, who are pivotal in how that news is framed and communicated to the public. On the other hand, 'top down' directives are less likely to be effective, both because they typically fail to recognise the realities and challenges of journalistic practice, and because they fail to build the relationships that allow for trust and dialogue between stakeholders. Organisations that can gain the trust and attention of media professionals for providing access to reliable, responsive and authoritative information and guidance for ethical practice are likely to be highly valued by journalists.

For optimal effectiveness, it was also clear that it is vitally important for program components to work in tandem. As such, the key elements described in this report are not mutually exclusive but represent the sum parts of a complex, multifaceted and appropriately resourced approach including:

- Media training for university students, practicing journalists and community spokespeople.
- Cross sector collaboration, communication and learning.
- Guidance for industry responsive to identified needs, news agendas and the exigencies of journalistic practice.
- Attention to social media as a means of interacting with journalists and their sources.
- Acknowledgement, reward and celebration of quality reporting practices.
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation and further research.
- Within the ecological model – influential in Australian public policy and programs preventing violence against women – the importance of organisational cultures and settings is highlighted.

Effective approaches to engaging media were contingent upon being developed collaboratively.

7 Acknowledgements

Our Watch and Melbourne University would like to acknowledge the various organisations, advocates and journalists who have pioneered engagement with media to improve reporting on violence against women. In particular, we would like to acknowledge Domestic Violence Victoria who lead the EVAs Media Awards (Eliminating Violence Against Women Media Awards) until 2013, honouring journalists for excellence in the reporting of violence against women. Their efforts and advocacy allowed other initiatives, including the Our Watch NME project and this Emerging Evidence Guide to be realized.

8 Appendix A: An evaluation of Our Watch's National Media Engagement Project

In 2014 Our Watch established the National Media Engagement Project (NME Project). Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, in its two years of funding (2014-2016) it has undertaken a significant program of work to develop and implement strategies to engage with the media to promote quality reporting of VAW. This has included four key initiatives:

- Development of a web-based portal with resources and guidelines for media professionals involved in the reporting of VAW (online media guidelines)
- Initiation and administration of a national annual awards scheme to recognise and encourage high quality reporting of VAW (the Our Watch awards)
- Development of a curriculum on the reporting of VAW for use in tertiary journalism education and in the industry (media capacity training)
- Media skills training for advocates, including victim survivors of VAW (advocacy training).

Two of these initiatives – the online media guidelines and the Our Watch Awards have been 'in the field' since late 2014 and form the main focus of the project evaluation. Media capacity training and advocacy training have been developed, but because implementation has not yet occurred these initiatives were not included in the evaluation (implementation was not funded in the initial phase of the NME Project).

In December 2016, Our Watch commissioned an independent evaluation conducted by researchers at The University of Melbourne (Dr Margaret Simons and Ms Annie Blatchford from the Centre for Advancing Journalism and Dr Georgina Sutherland from the Centre for Mental Health).

Findings are based on an objectives based evaluation drawing on multiple data sources of including: (1) a review of Our Watch organisation and NME Project specific documentation, (2) 18 semi-structured interviews with key informants from the media and the prevention of VAW (PVAW) sector and (3) outcomes from previous local evaluation and research relevant to the NME Project.

Results showed that many of the lower-level objectives had been achieved. Four separate media guidelines, providing advice on reporting on sexual violence; domestic violence; child sexual abuse and violence

in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities were launched in September 2014. Even though the NME Project engaged in a variety of activities to extend the reach of the guidelines, interviews suggested that awareness was limited. They were, however influential in triggering media industry bodies in Australia to take action. In particular, the Australian Press Council (APC), Commercial Radio Australia and Free TV Australia all indicated that their approach to industry compliance activities were influenced by their interactions with Our Watch and NME Project initiatives including the online media guidelines.

The Our Watch Awards, administered by the Walkey Foundation, were launched in June 2015 with two award events held in Sydney 2015 and 2016. Awareness of the awards was relatively high in the capital city based print media industry, but less so elsewhere, such as in rural areas and in commercial broadcast media. For those who had attended the awards, there was widespread acknowledgement that the event was particularly useful for building relationships across and between media and the PVAW sectors.

Although the evaluation did not focus on two NME Project initiatives that have been developed but not yet implemented (i.e., training curriculum material for university journalism students and for practicing journalists and a national training package to help survivors become more effective media advocates), there was broad support that these two further aspects of the NME Project were important in and of themselves, but also important to support a multi-faceted approach to media engagement on VAW.

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