

Breakout

Reporting on violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

This additional material on reporting violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women includes 11 PowerPoint slides including resources and references. This can be edited down to suit.

Australian journalism schools are full of students who have never met an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person and who do not know their history. Journalism educators are ill-equipped to redress this imbalance as the large majority are themselves non-Indigenous and many have had little or no experience with the coverage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues or knowledge of Indigenous affairs. These issues are largely outside the scope of this curriculum, but the combination of the high rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who suffer from violence, plus the lack of knowledge about covering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues has led us to include this extra material, which can be incorporated into the other lessons, or used elsewhere in the curriculum as required.

The notes below suggest how the material should be presented. It is of course understood that lecturers will adapt the content to their curriculum and inject their own personal style.

ACTIVITIES AND TRAINER NOTES	SLIDE NO. & MATERIALS
<p>Make some clear statements about the confronting nature of the material, and how students can take care of themselves. Make it clear that the classroom setting is not a therapeutic environment and is not the place to reveal sensitive personal information. Experience in the violence against women (VAW) sector tells us that people who make personal revelations in the classroom can be left feeling unsupported and exposed. Alert students to the student counselling resources are available at your institution. Emphasise the need for respectful debate and argument, even when people strongly disagree. Discussion is encouraged, but respect is not negotiable</p> <p>The statistics alone make it clear that reporting violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is a vital journalistic job. Yet inexperience, timidity and legitimate sensitivity to cultural and social concerns will inhibit many reporters. There are good reasons for this. It is important when reporting other cultures to be aware, so far as is possible, of our own cultural biases. There are extra difficulties to doing a good job of reporting in communities and cultures that are not our own.</p>	2-3
<p>Antoinette Braybrook has spoken strongly against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women’s stories being covered up by their communities. The legal service she runs has 97 per cent female clients, and strongly supports women speaking out about violence, rather than holding back for fear of further damaging marginalised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. The context is not an excuse, she asserts.</p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women may be particularly reluctant to talk to reporters about the violence against them if they fear further damage to their communities because of stereotyping or insensitive treatment by the media, followed by political responses.</p>	4
<p>Context</p> <p>It is important to keep in mind the context in which family violence occurs. There is international consensus that there is a strong relationship between gender inequality and violence against women.</p> <p>Family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities occurs in an historical context of colonisation; dispossession, loss of culture resulting in the breakdown of kinship systems and of traditional law, racism, and government policies of forced removal of children from families (the ‘Stolen Generation’). Related to all of this is the enormous socioeconomic disadvantage that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live with.</p> <p>Family violence is not part of traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, however, and is unacceptable in any cultural context.</p>	5

Guidelines

These suggestions are drawn from *How to report on violence against women and their children* (2019 National Edition) and Sheridan-Burns, L. and McKee, A. (1999). The national guidelines are a useful quick-reference guide, including statistics and information about health, social and economic impact of family violence.

It is difficult to sum up all the challenges involved in doing a good job of reporting violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. All communities are different.

As well, just because the victim is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander does not necessarily mean that the story is “about” Aboriginality. We should strive to be aware of our own cultural context and prejudices. However, we should not neglect to report this important aspect of VAW.

Don't assume that all perpetrators of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. Often, the perpetrators are non-Indigenous.

A list of further resources on reporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues is included at the end. Not all of these are in the reading pack and some may be of use in other parts of the curriculum.

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ACTIVITIES AND TRAINER NOTES	SLIDE NO. & MATERIALS
<p>Examples</p> <p>Three examples are given here: examples 13, 14 and 15. We strongly suggest that additional, current and locally relevant examples be sought and added where possible.</p> <p>Example 13: Domestic Violence behind spike in indigenous jail numbers: John Rau</p> <p>This is a report of remarks by the SA Attorney General. They therefore fit into the “events and response” style of story mentioned in Lesson Two. These can be opportunities to not only report the news, but also provide context and information as well as asking questions.</p> <p>Mr Rau’s comments are very general. He seems to be suggesting that ALL Aboriginal people lack role models and are perpetrators. Without having heard the remarks, it is difficult to tell if these generalisations are an accurate account of what Mr Rau said, or the reporter’s interpretation.</p> <p>Despite the fact that Mr Rau was defending the system for which he is the minister, there is no sign he was asked any questions. Questions might have included the proportion of DV charges among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prison population, what action the SA government is taking, spending on women’s refuges, the proportion of Aboriginal women who fall victim to violence by non-indigenous men, and so forth.</p> <p>The article also does not include any information about support services, or the rates of VAW in the mainstream community.</p> <p>Example 14: Bagot Indigenous leader slams broadcast of Darwin domestic violence offender sentencing</p> <p>This is in part a crime and court story, and in part an event and response story. A diversity of views are reported on the judge’s decision to broadcast the sentencing - a good microcosm of the dilemmas faced by Aboriginal people around this issue. No information is given on the prevalence of VAW in the mainstream community. No information is given on help and information services. Ms Fejo Frith is a frequently quoted community leader. Did the reporters have other contacts they could have used?</p> <p>Example 15: I can’t hide my scars: Woman who lost eye in hammer attack speaks out against domestic violence</p> <p>This survivor story concerns an Indigenous woman, but does not focus on her Aboriginality as a “cause” of the violence. There is no information on the identity of ethnicity of the perpetrator. No information in the story on the rates of DV either in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or the broader community (although the side bar does include some of this). Information on help and information is included in the side bar, which also contains other information about DV. Points for discussion might be what “difference” it makes for reporters, if any, that the survivor is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.</p>	<p>9</p> <p>Examples 13, 14 and 15</p>
<p>References and Resources</p>	<p>10-11</p>

Reading

- ABC (2014), 'ABC Reconciliation Action Plan 2013-15: First report against the Plan, January-December 2013', <http://about.abc.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/ABC-RAP-Report-2013-2.pdf>
 - ABC (2015), 'Indigenous Content Guidelines' <https://edpols.abc.net.au/guidance/abc-indigenous-content/>
 - Bowden, T. (2015), *ABC Online*, "I can't hide my scars": Woman who lost eye in hammer attack speaks out against domestic violence', 25 November, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-25/marlene-tighe-loses-eye-teeth-after-being-beaten-by-partner/6973972>
 - Braybrook, A. (2015), Aboriginal Family Violence & Legal Service Victoria, 'The Long Walk Women's Luncheon – keynote address', 16th October, <http://www.fvpls.org/images/files/Long%20Walk%20Women's%20Luncheon%20AB%20speech.pdf>
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 - Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1991), 'Racist Violence: Report of the National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia', <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/NIRV.pdf>
 - Korff, J. (2015), *Creative Spirits*, 'Mainstream media coverage of Aboriginal issues', <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/media-coverage-of-aboriginal-issues#axzz3swOseRcy>
 - McCallum, K., Meadows, M., Waller, L., Dunne Breen, M., Reid, H. (2012), *The Media and Indigenous Policy: How media reporting and mediatized practice impact on Indigenous policy – A preliminary report*, Journalism & Communication Studies, University of Canberra.
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 - Our Watch (2014), 'Reporting on Family Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities', https://www.ourwatch.org.au/MediaLibraries/OurWatch/Images/ourwatch_reporting_on_a-ts_family_violence_aa_v1.pdf
 - Owen, M. (2015), *The Australian*, 'Domestic violence behind spikes in indigenous jail numbers: John Rau', 15 September, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/indigenous/domestic-violence-behind-spike-in-indigenous-jail-numbers-john-rau/news-story/c6b4a43dabbc638d8752a7e7862be08f>
 - Porter, A. (2015), 'Riotus or Righteous Behaviour? Representations of Subaltern Resistance in the Australian Mainstream Media', *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 26(3), 289-304.
 - Sheridan-Burns, L. and McKee, A. (1999), 'Reporting on Indigenous Issues: some practical suggestions for improving journalistic practice in the coverage of indigenous affairs' *Australian Journalism Review*, 21(2), pp.103-116
- Stockwell, S. and Scott, P. (2000), *All-Media Guide to Fair and Cross-Cultural Reporting: For Journalists, program makers and media students*, Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy