

Lesson one

Understanding violence against women

Lecture notes

The first lecture includes 34 PowerPoint slides. This can be edited down to suit.

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.

Welcome and introduction

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.

Men may face particular challenges in confronting this material. We are not targeting men. **Emphasise that both men and women have a positive role to play in preventing violence**, and that most men are not violent.

In this lesson, we will be learning about the nature of family violence (FV) and VAW in Australia and beginning to think about the challenges it presents to us as reporters.

VAW is, as we shall see, both an enormous story in itself and presents us with a case study that is relevant to covering other complex issues. For example, journalists need to gain some perspective on the society of which are form part. We have to think about how and why the media matters. We have to think about news values, and how they are formed. We have to think about how we select sources, and how we protect those who may be vulnerable. We have to think about what objectivity might mean. Lastly, we are confronted with the role the media might have in an area of fundamental social change - the power and the limitations of journalism, and what being a good journalist means.

Briefly mention that in tutorials/seminars students will be asked to apply some of this material to analysing real-life news reports, and ultimately to think through some scenarios.

Mention any assessment tasks based on this part of the curriculum. (See suggested assignments and essay questions in the handbook.)

1-4

Definitions

There are a lot of different terms that are used interchangeably to describe family violence, VAW, or domestic violence. Other terms students might hear include intimate partner violence, domestic abuse, and so on.

All of them have different nuances of meaning. The United Nations definition makes it clear that violence can take many different forms. Australian law also emphasises that violence is not only physical. It is about power and control.

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women is broad. It is reflected in much of the legislation about VAW. Note that it includes threats, verbal abuse, bullying and psychological harm.

The terms “family violence” and “violence against women” are related but not the same. We know that most VAW takes place in family settings. However, others can be victims of domestic violence, including children and men. Most perpetrators are male.

Men, on the other hand, are more likely to be victims of violence in public places and outside the home. Again, most perpetrators are male.

So when we talk about VAW in Australia we are overwhelmingly talking about family violence, including violence from intimate partners. Family violence is the course focus, because:

- VAW is almost always perpetrated in private, that is at home and in domestic settings
- Family violence overwhelmingly involves male perpetrators and women and children as victims/survivors.

Types of violence

Refer students to the list of different kinds of violence included in their reading pack.

Examples:

- Emotional
- Financial
- Intimidation
- Manipulation
- Verbal
- Sexual
- Pet abuse
- Social
- Spiritual

5-7

Drivers

Change the Story is a framework prepared by Our Watch, ANROWS and VicHealth. It incorporates over 160 pieces of research and the contributions of more than 400 experts to arrive at a shared framework for collaborative action. It is a world-first, and the national standard from which experts across sectors will address family violence. It is provided in the reading list.

There is international consensus that there is a strong relationship between gender inequality and violence against women. In particular there are four expressions of inequality that consistently predict violence:

- **Condoning violence against women**
 - justifying, excusing, trivialising or downplaying the seriousness of violence, or shifting blame onto the victim
- **Men's control over decision-making and limits to women's independence**
 - suggesting women have lower social value, making them economically independent on men and undermining their participation in public;
- **Rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity;**
 - reinforcing a sense of entitlement associated with traditional masculinity and isolating women through gendered divisions of public / private labour;
- **Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women;**
 - particularly an emphasis on aggression and sexual conquest and reluctance to take a stand against their peers.

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Misconceptions

The next few slides present some common beliefs about violence against women. Many of these are false but are widely held. Indeed, it would be surprising if some of us don't hold these beliefs, given we are part of the society that supports them.

PP 10: We tend to think family violence happens to "other" people. **Many people also believe it takes place only or mostly in poor families.** This isn't necessarily the case. Police reports are not a reliable indicator, and we know that violence can take place in all homes. It's fair to say that gender inequality interacts with other kinds of disadvantage, including poverty, racism and so forth. But in these instances we must still ask ourselves why it is the women who disproportionately suffer? **Change the Story refers to these factors (poverty, racism, disadvantage, etc) as reinforcing factors – they do not themselves drive violence against women or cause it to happen, but rather when violence against women already exists or is likely to exist, these reinforcing factors can increase the frequency, severity or longevity of the violence suffered.** In fact, we simply don't have the evidence to say with confidence that family violence is more common in poor families. Women in wealthier families are more likely to have more resources and therefore are less likely to rely on police and refuges and so forth.

PP 11: **Many people think alcohol and drugs are to blame.** In fact the research tells us that while they **can increase the severity of violence, they are not causes. Most drug addicts and alcoholics are not violent.**

PP 12-13: One of the **most persistent beliefs is that women should leave violent relationships and can do so if they wish (therefore are in part to blame if violence continues).** It can be hard for outsiders to understand why women don't leave. There are many reasons why women can't or don't leave. And **we know that if she does leave, that is the point where she is most likely to be seriously assaulted or killed.** Consider the views of the women quoted on PP 13. How easy is it to put yourself in her shoes?

10 - 13

Depending on the time available (or in tutorials and seminars) encourage students to name more myths. For example:

- Myth: Family violence is over-emphasised
- Fact: The research suggests it is still under-reported.
- Myth: Men are victims too.
- Fact: True, but **men who are victims of family violence are often experiencing that violence from another male** (for example, a father, brother, uncle, male partner or their partner's ex-partner). **Violence that men experience from women is far less lethal** than that experience by women and **typically has far less impact over the course of life than that experienced by women**. All violence is unacceptable. Both men and women can be and are victims and both men and women can be and are perpetrators. **But overwhelmingly, violence in the home is something committed by men against women and children.**
- Myth: Conflict is natural in relationships.
- Fact: All couples will disagree at one time or another. But it is important to remember that anger is a feeling while violence is a behaviour. It is possible to be angry without becoming violent and it is possible to have high conflict or even unhealthy relationships without violence. Family violence is a crime of power and control. **The difference between family violence and conflict or an unhealthy relationship is the element of fear.**
- Myth: Violence happens because men can't control themselves or become out of control.
- Fact: Most male perpetrators can control themselves. **They don't beat their colleagues or friends, but control themselves in those contexts. They are less likely to abuse their partner in public where they will be seen by others, rather than choose to perpetrate violence only once behind closed doors where their actions cannot be seen.** This indicates a high level of control. Violence against women isn't about perpetrators being 'out of control'. On the contrary, violence against women is about a pattern of being in control.

The kind of family violence that makes its way to the courts and the mortuary is not the only kind, and is not the most prevalent. Reporters may be limited in how they are able to "see" and therefore report family violence.

Family violence is largely revealed when somebody reports it, and we know that most is not reported. Murders and serious assaults are more likely to come to light because the police get involved, but they are the most visible forms of a bigger problem. It can help reporters to realise this context.

10 - 13 cont.

ACTIVITIES AND TRAINER NOTES	SLIDE NO.
<p>Family violence as a news story</p> <p>The quote from Ellen Whinnett comes from interviews conducted as part of a major research project into how and why the reporting of VAW is changing. As the quote describes, for most of the careers of today’s senior reporters, family violence hasn’t been considered a news story. That doesn’t mean it wasn’t happening. The media’s attitude reflects that of the major institutions of society, including the police.</p> <p>As the graph (generated from a Factiva search) on PP 16 shows, in 2015 there was a big spike in media reporting of family violence. It is unlikely that this is because there was a significant increase in incidents, although it is certainly true that it is more likely to be reported.</p> <p>We have moved from family violence being considered a private thing, hidden within the domain of family and home, to being the subject of a Royal Commission in Victoria, and policy action by governments throughout Australia. See the table “Historic Responses to Family Violence in Victoria – DVRC Introduction to Domestic Violence” in this week’s readings.</p> <p>Why has this happened? Why is a social problem of longstanding suddenly newsworthy? Interviews with reporters and editors suggest that all the factors listed on PP 17 have had some impact. Encourage the students to discuss this.</p> <p>How sustainable is this interest? The graph on PP 16 shows that coverage is already falling off from the 2015 high. Students may be interested in discussing.</p>	<p>14</p> <p>15</p> <p>16</p>
<p>Is it news?</p> <p>The slides PP 18-24 all give information on the prevalence and impact of family violence in Australia. They are very challenging figures. It is quite likely you will strike some scepticism. Students who question the slides might be encouraged to engage more deeply with the reading provided with these course materials. As with all journalism, if they uncover some reason to doubt the figures, they should raise this and perhaps report it. However, they will have to back their claims with verified facts and find some fault with the research on which these figures are based.</p> <p>Take some time to run through the slides on prevalence.</p> <p>PP 18: tells us that even on conventional news values – which tend to emphasise violent and extreme crime – VAW is one of our biggest stories. Most family violence will not be reported to police. Homicides always are. These figures are the most extreme manifestation of a phenomena of control and assault, most of which is probably still invisible to us, despite increased reporting. Not all family violence stories are obvious. Sometimes family violence underlies other stories in ways that are not immediately apparent. For example, the impact on homelessness.</p> <p>PP 19: tells us something about the gendered nature of family violence. Both genders experience violence. However, the nature of the violence is very different. Women are most likely to be assaulted in their homes, men in places of entertainment. In all cases, men are most likely to be the perpetrators.</p> <p>PP 20: is a shocking slide, suggesting that family violence is not only our biggest crime story, but also our biggest health story. Intimate partner violence is the greatest health risk factor (greater than smoking, alcohol and obesity) from women in their reproductive years.</p> <p>PP 21: tells us that family violence is also an economic story. This slide may need some explanation and context for the figures to be absorbed.</p>	<p>18-24</p>

The figures include:

- premature mortality costs
- public and private health system
- absences from work and employer administrative costs
- property damage
- defaulting on debts and moving
- child protection services
- increased juvenile and adult crime
- criminal justice system costs
- counselling and violence prevention program costs
- payment of government benefits
- impact on homelessness

PP 22: Women who experience multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage are particularly targeted for violence and abuse. It is important to note that this is not about these groups being 'vulnerable.' 'Vulnerable' implies that she is inherently likely to experience violence. People are perfectly capable of being vulnerable with each other without violence, abuse or control occurring. **Rather this is about these groups being targeted for violence – this shift in language places the responsibility for this violence with perpetrators who hold the view that they are entitled to act violently towards women in general, but even more so when the woman is from a marginalised background.**

Some points worth making at this stage include:

- It would be wrong to assume that the perpetrators are always Aboriginal men
- Violence in Aboriginal communities takes place in a context of long term disadvantage, inequality and violent dispossession

With women who are newly arrived in Australia we see gender issues intersecting with other kinds of disadvantage, such as language barriers and racism.

PP 23: Women with disabilities are also particularly targeted for violence, and not only from their intimate partners. Here we can see again that violence is about power and intersects with other forms of disadvantage.

If appropriate and possible in your lesson, encourage students to think about other social issues that have this level of impact, and are this big a story.

18-24 cont.

The challenges

Reporting VAW and family violence is deeply challenging, raising multiple issues both practical and principled.

Family violence is an enormous problem by itself, but it is also a pervasive social problem, and thinking through how to report it is also relevant to other social problems that challenge our beliefs and hopes for the kind of society we live in. This makes this issue a great case study to use in thinking about yourself as a journalist.

Suggestion: invite the class to discuss each of the points on the slide, and add more challenges.

Point out that news organisations and individual journalists are embedded in the society that they are writing about, and talk through how to be self-aware in this.

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Reading

Undergraduate Reading

Essential Reading

- Hill, J. (2015). 'Home Truths: The costs and causes of domestic violence', The Monthly, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2015/march/1425128400/jess-hill/home-truths>
- WATCH: OurWatch, DART and Centre for Advancing Journalism, (2015). 'Behind Closed Doors' DVD, https://vimeo.com/156921533?utm_source=email&utm_medium=vimeo-cliptranscode-201504&utm_campaign=29220
- Our Watch, (2014). 'Reporting on domestic violence'. <http://www.ourwatch.org.au/News-media/Reporting-Guidelines>

Further Reading

- Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (2015) 'Historic Responses to Family Violence in Australia' pp. 23-26 in Introduction to Domestic Violence Participant Handbook.
- WATCH: McCormack, F. (2014). ABC 7:30, 'High-profile domestic violence murders 'tip of the iceberg' 12 April, <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2014/s3989316.htm>
- Morgan, J. & Simons, M. (2017). Changing Media Coverage of Violence Against Women: The role of individual cases and individual journalists. Journalism Practice <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17512786.2017.1366866>
- Our Watch, ANROWS and VicHealth (2015). Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/1462998c-c32b-4772-ad02-cbf359e0d8e6/Change-the-story-framework-prevent-violence-women-children.pdf.aspx>
- Sutherland, G., Simons, M. & Blatchford, A. (2017). Emerging Evidence, Insights and Lessons: News media and the primary prevention of violence against women and their children. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/0c1126a1-4a75-4271-8fc4-81862ed20a86/Emerging-evidence-guide-media.pdf.aspx>
- VicHealth (2014) 'Australians' Attitudes to Violence Against Women. Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS)', <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/2013-national-community-attitudes-towards-violence-against-women-survey>, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, Australia.

Graduate reading list

Essential Reading

- ANROWS and Our Watch (2015). 'Media representations of violence against women and their children: Final Report', Horizons, Issue 3, <http://anrows.org.au/publications/horizons/media-representations>.
- Davoren, H. (2015). 'Domestic violence and the media: maintaining the veil of silence and secrecy', The Drum, 8 May <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-08/davoren-maintaining-the-veil-of-silence-around-domestic-violence/6455060>
- Hill, J. (2015). 'Home Truths: The costs and causes of domestic violence', The Monthly, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2015/march/1425128400/jess-hill/home-truths>
- Morgan, J. & Simons, M. (2017). Changing Media Coverage of Violence Against Women: The role of individual cases and individual journalists. Journalism Practice <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17512786.2017.1366866>
- Sutherland, G., Simons, M. & Blatchford, A. (2017). Emerging Evidence, Insights and Lessons: News media and the primary prevention of violence against women and their children. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/0c1126a1-4a75-4271-8fc4-81862ed20a86/Emerging-evidence-guide-media.pdf.aspx>
- WATCH: Our Watch, DART & Centre for Advancing Journalism (2015). 'Behind Closed Doors' DVD https://vimeo.com/156921533?utm_source=email&utm_medium=vimeo-cliptranscode-201504&utm_campaign=29220

Further Reading

- ANROWS and Our Watch, (2015) 'Media representations of violence against women and their children: State of knowledge paper', Landscapes, Issue 15, <http://anrows.org.au/publications/landscapes/media-representations-violence-against-women-and-their-children-state>.
- Garcia-Moreno, C., Jansen, H.A., Ellsberg, M., Heise, L. and Watts, C. (2005). WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women: initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses.
- Our Watch, ANROWS and VicHealth (2015). Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/1462998c-c32b-4772-ad02-cbf359e0d8e6/Change-the-story-framework-prevent-violence-women-children.pdf.aspx>
- Morgan, J. and Politoff, V. (2012) 'Victorian print media coverage of violence against women', <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/victorian-print-media-coverage-of-violence-against-women>
- Maher, J., Segrave M., Pickering S. & McCulloch, J. (2005). Honouring white masculinity: culture, terror, provocation and the law. Australian Feminist Law Journal, 23(1), pp. 147-164.
- VicHealth (2014) 'Australians' Attitudes to Violence Against Women. Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS)', <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/2013-national-community-attitudes-towards-violence-against-women-survey>