

Case Study: Violence Against Women: It's Against All the Rules

The state-wide public education campaign '*Violence Against Women: It's Against All the Rules*' was a project of the Violence Against Women Specialist Unit as part of the NSW Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women in New South Wales, Australia. The campaign ran from 2000-2001, and specifically aimed to build community capacity to confront the issue of VAW by involving high-profile sportsmen to deliver the message to young men that such behavior is unacceptable.

The campaign's organizing committee prioritized key principles to guide their work including: the use of community or public education and information exchange as important prevention strategies; an emphasis that the campaign be part of a broader continuum to prevent violence; the involvement of a wide range of partners and agencies, including important 'bottom up' grassroots consultation; and the drawing on national and state research to develop and evaluate the campaign. Importantly, the campaign sought to target mainstream community attitudes rather than portray specific groups as 'perpetrators' or 'victims'. It also clearly focused on prevention and/or reduction of VAW, rather than promotion of services.

Key elements of the campaign strategy

- **Constructive rather than fear-based approach** to contribute to community capacity and willingness to confront and air the issue of VAW – building trust and optimism for the potential for change.
- Use of **positive, authoritative messaging from high-profile non-violent men who are role models for younger men**. The overall message was that there is no link between masculinity and VAW, but rather VAW in all its forms is unacceptable.
- **Sport used as the primary promotional vehicle** to target men aged 21-29 years of age. This reflects the salience of sport in Australian culture, and its influence particularly on men and boys either as participants or spectators. Sport is considered a 'common language' across all socio-cultural groups and therefore offers a wide, receptive audience for the campaign message.
- Emphasis on **encouraging men to have a broader understanding of the types of behaviour that constitute VAW, and the ramifications of violent acts** (on the perpetrator, victim, children and community at large), as well as **stimulating discussion** among men who would not normally discuss the issue of VAW.

Formative research and campaign development

The campaign's development was grounded on formative research that included sourcing input from government and community groups with experience of similar education campaigns, consultation with regional specialists on violence prevention (who were familiar with grassroots concerns in particular), and analyzing evaluation reports of other relevant State campaigns. In addition, relationships were established with agencies running current VAW campaigns (e.g.

Freedom from Fear campaign in Western Australia) as well as proposed future campaigns on community education initiatives. Campaign materials were tested by formative evaluation methods to assess strengths and weaknesses of images, messaging, etc. Finally, the implementation of the campaign was informed by process evaluation on an ongoing basis throughout its lifespan.

Communication Strategy

The campaign created advertising resources (logo, slogan, key message and visuals) and used these in high-profile mass media promotion. At the same time, targeted public relations activities with statewide and regional media, and community-based events also helped to promote the campaign and generate public awareness and interest.

Three main communications channels were used: **posters** featuring well-known sports figures from four popular sports – cricket, soccer, Aussie rules and rugby – were advertised on buses, and distributed to various agencies and sports clubs; **comprehensive information booklets** were produced and distributed to agencies state-wide to assist them on how to participate in the campaign and become local partnership advocates; and **radio** advertising and a radio public service announcement targeted at the youth demographic was placed/distributed to both regional and community radio stations. In addition, the promotion of the campaign also frequently **combined activities with local or regional sporting, social or community events**, where the presence of the campaign’s spokesmen would pique public interest and draw local media attention.



Ashley Gordon (left) and Butch Hayes (right) - two of the sportsmen featured on posters.

Evaluation and key findings of the campaign

The campaign's objectives were translated into six research domains, and a series of 'evaluation hypotheses' then devised to measure each of these domains:

- Penetration of the campaign message
- Provocativeness of the campaign message
- Understanding of the campaign message
- Strengthening of attitudes as a result of the campaign
- Knowledge of the range of violent behaviours as a result of the campaign
- Knowledge of the nature of consequences of violent behaviour as a result of the campaign

In addition, data was also collected to examine the receptiveness of men in general to a campaign on VAW, and men's response to the sports theme of the campaign.

Data collection involved the use of quantitative and qualitative standardized questionnaires, as well as community focus groups. A research collaboration with the Technical and Further Education Commission (TAFE) of NSW, the major provider of technical and vocational training, saw the evaluation process incorporated into student training in research methods at selected campuses, where the role of students was to collect data from men in the community using the standardized questionnaires. This helped significantly expand the data collection effort. In addition, sporting clubs, men's groups and libraries (especially in rural areas where these are an important community resource) facilitated access to men, by connecting data collectors with groups who convened in these venues for particular events.

Key findings

- The majority of the men in the evaluation sample (75.5%) confirmed seeing or hearing something about the campaign, with bus posters being by far the most common source of exposure for those who had seen something about the campaign.
- The strong, clear image of sportsmen was the 'hook' that captured men's attention – the majority of men (89.06%) could recall at least one of the sports personalities featured.
- Almost half were able to correctly recall the campaign slogan, with another 36% at least knowing that it had something to do with violence being 'not on' or 'wrong'.
- In terms of thinking more about the issue of VAW since seeing or hearing about the campaign, respondents overwhelmingly agreed they had not. Only 17% said they had given it more thought.
- Many respondents (68%) said that men are open to messages about VAW and that the campaign message was regarded as a helpful reminder about the issue, but men do not generally discuss this topic in general conversation. 91% of the target group (21–29 year olds) said that the issue was not one they would talk about with their peers, irrespective

of the campaign. Focus group respondents generally agreed that they would challenge a friend about his behaviour directly if they thought it constituted violence, but the issue would not be broached in general. Among Aboriginal men however, there were some nuanced differences: the data identified that Aboriginal men felt that VAW was an issue that should be discussed by men, that the campaign material made it easier to broach the subject, and that it was important to talk especially to younger men in the community.

- The majority of respondents (54%) thought that the campaign message was aimed at all men in the community. Smaller percentages felt that it was aimed at perpetrators, or particular ethnic groups, or younger men who idolize sportsmen.
- The use of 'sports language and terms' to phrase the campaign message (e.g. 'marking' in soccer = stalking) added to the masculine appeal of the campaign, as it stressed the fact that the message was being delivered by men to men (and importantly, 'iconic/role model' men to other men). This aided men's comprehension of the message – 'violence against women is wrong'.
- Respondents overwhelmingly (91%) thought the same about VAW after they had seen the posters as before – there was strong agreement that the campaign had not acted to change men's thinking about VAW, although it was found to be useful in creating awareness about non-physical forms of violence. Two-thirds (79%) could name at least four behaviours considered to be acts of violence.

- For additional information on implementation of the Campaign, see a [workshop presentation](#).

Source: Extracted from Hubert, Carol. 2002. [Violence against Women: It's against all the rules. Evaluation of the NSW Statewide Campaign to Reduce Violence against Women](#), Violence against Women Specialist Unit, NSW Attorney General's Department, Australia.