

3 Why a Media Advocacy Program?

3.1 Violence against women is serious and prevalent

Men's violence against women is widely recognised as a global problem and one of the most widespread violations of human rights.¹ Research indicates that since the age of 15, one in five women have experienced sexual violence and one in three women physical violence, and over half of all women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.² The impact of violence has profound consequences for women, children, families and whole communities.

In Australia, on average one woman per week is killed by a current or previous male partner and intimate partner violence contributes to more death, disability and ill health in Victorian women aged 15-44 than any other preventable health risk factor.^{3,4} Evidence demonstrates that family violence and sexual assault are gendered issues, predominantly perpetrated by men against women, with 77% of reported family violence experienced by women or girls, while the overwhelming majority of perpetrators are men. Furthermore 92% of reported rape incidents are perpetrated by men against women and girls.⁵

Compared with male victims of intimate partner violence, women are:

- five times more likely to require medical attention or hospitalisation
- five times more likely to report fearing for their lives
- five times more likely to be killed by an intimate partner.⁶

While violence against women is serious and prevalent, the evidence tells us that it *is* preventable.^{7,8}

3.2 Violence against women is preventable

Understanding the gendered drivers of violence against women (from *Change the Story*)⁸

Violence against women is serious, prevalent and driven by gender inequality. Research has found that factors associated with gender inequality are the most consistent predictors of violence against women, and explain its gendered patterns. These factors are termed *gendered drivers* of violence against women (figure 1).

To prevent violence against women, we need to address these drivers to stop it from occurring in the first place. This is known as primary prevention.

The following particular expressions of gender inequality have been shown in the international evidence to be most consistently associated with higher levels of violence against women:

- condoning of violence against women
- men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence
- rigid gender roles and identities
- male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

This section provides a rationale for media advocacy work to prevent violence against women. It helps make the case for establishing a Media Advocacy Program.

It strengthens your resolve to fight back and stand up for women's rights and for families and children and not just accept the societal norms at the moment.

Speaking Out advocate

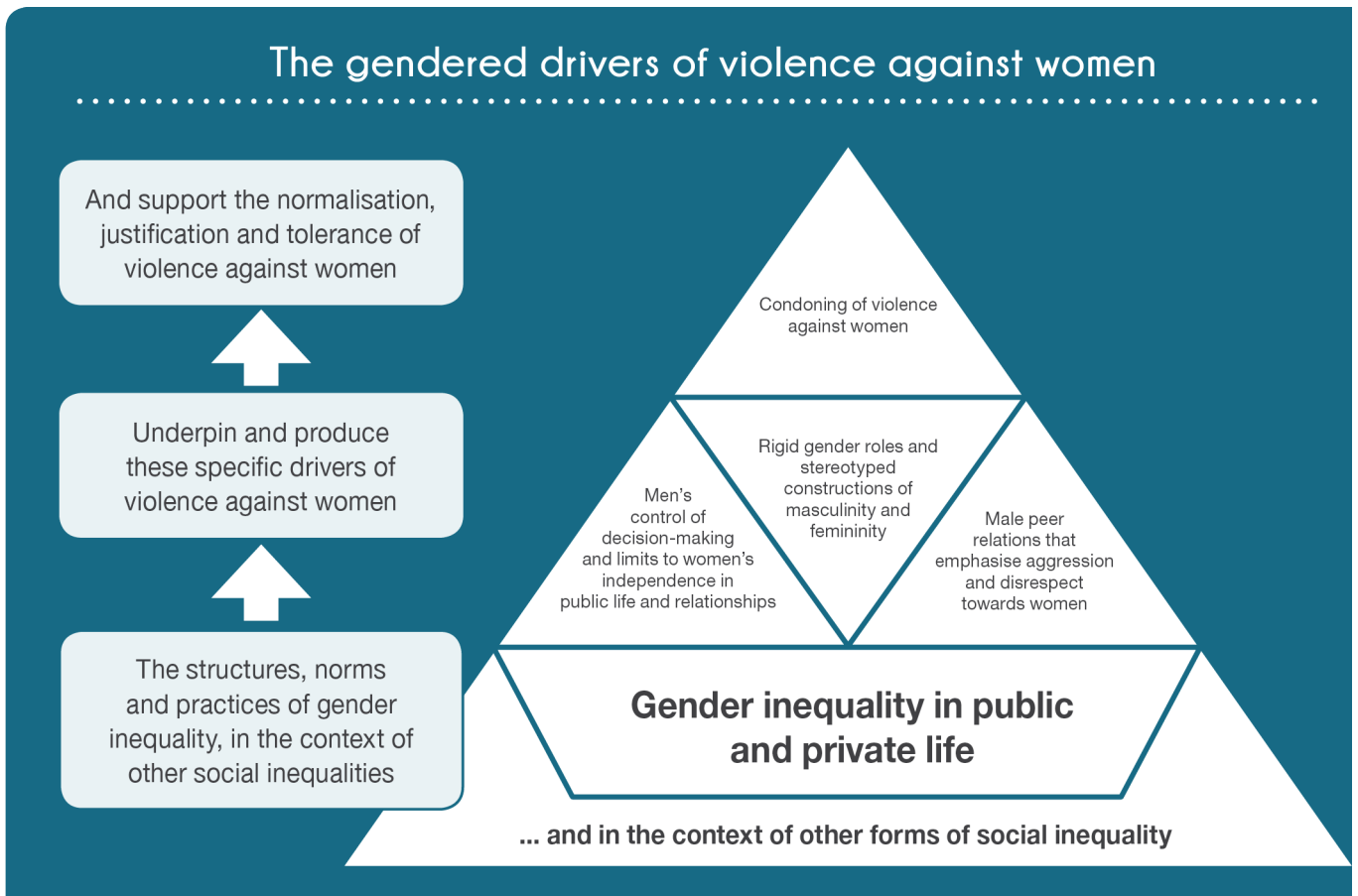


Figure 1. The gendered drivers of violence against women⁸

If we address these gendered drivers through our work, we are most likely to have long-term impact on the prevalence of violence against women in Australia. Addressing these drivers of violence is the focus of *Voices for Change*.

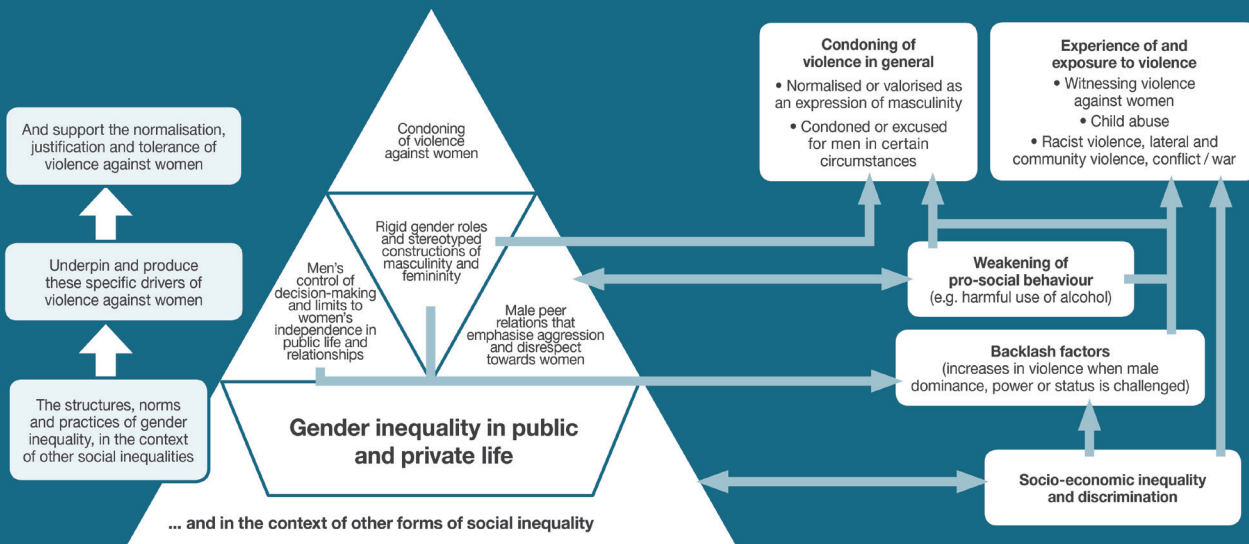
Change the Story also articulates the factors that reinforce the gendered drivers (figure 2). While not sufficient in themselves to predict violence against women, they can interact with the gendered drivers to increase probability, frequency or severity of such violence. These reinforcing factors are:

- condoning of violence in general
- experience of, and exposure to, violence
- weakening of pro-social behaviour, especially harmful use of alcohol
- socio-economic inequality and discrimination
- backlash factors (when male dominance, power or status is challenged).

What drives and reinforces violence against women?

The triangle represents the gendered drivers of violence against women

Factors outside the triangle can reinforce the gendered drivers to increase the probability, frequency or severity of violence against women



The socio-ecological model (figure 3) is a useful way of both understanding individual behaviour in a social context, and illustrating the dynamic interrelations between relevant factors located at the individual, organisational and community, and systemic and societal levels. The model highlights that in order to prevent violence against women we need to act at all levels of society.

It is also known that to prevent violence against women we need to address norms, practices and structures across our society that reinforce and maintain gender inequality. These include for example, social norms such as the belief that women are best suited to care for children, practices such as differences in childrearing practices for boys and girls and structures such as pay differences between men and women.

Figure 2. The interactions between gendered drivers of violence against women and the reinforcing factors⁸

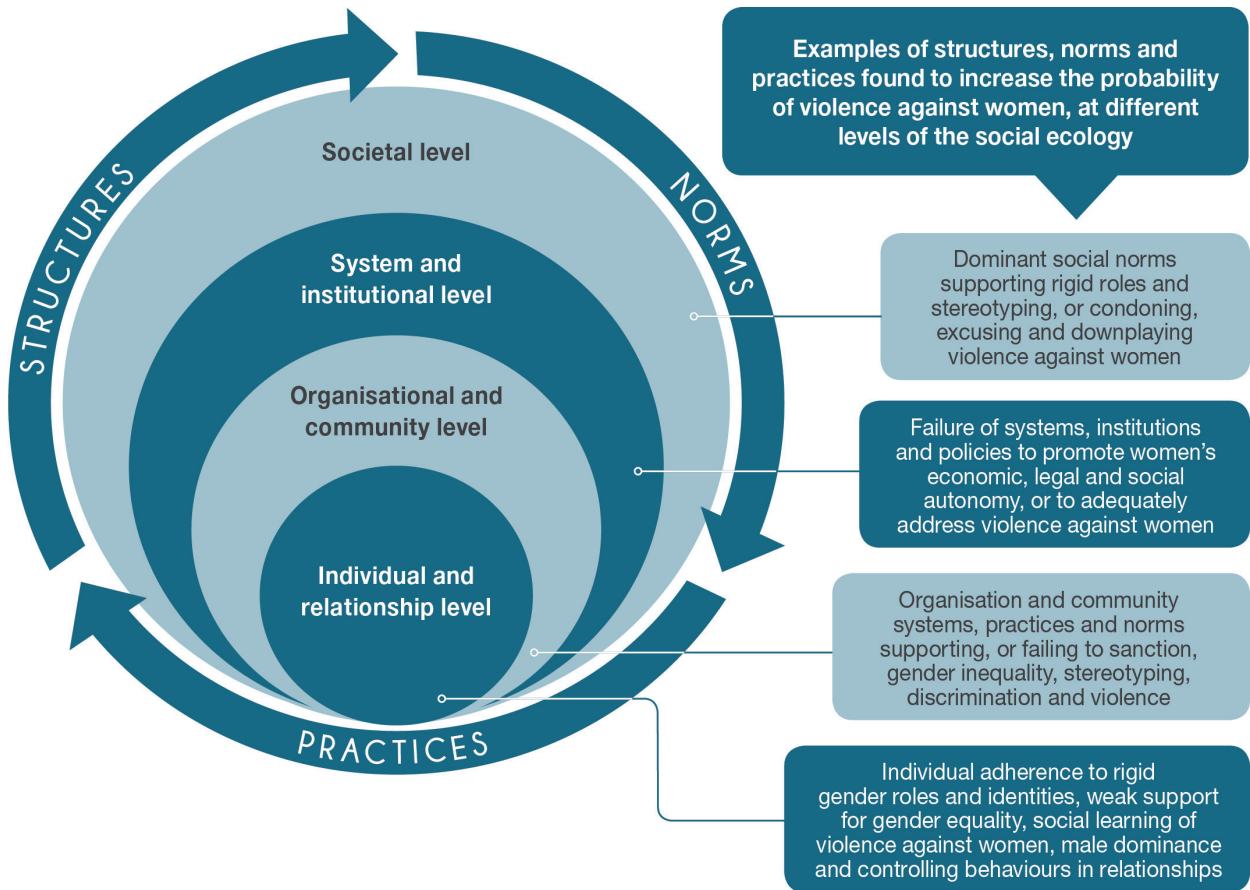


Figure 3. A socio-ecological model for individual behaviour⁸

Prevention initiatives will be most successful when they reach all levels of society: individuals, communities, organisations and institutions.

DESIRED FUTURE

Violence against women
IS PREVENTABLE
if we all work together

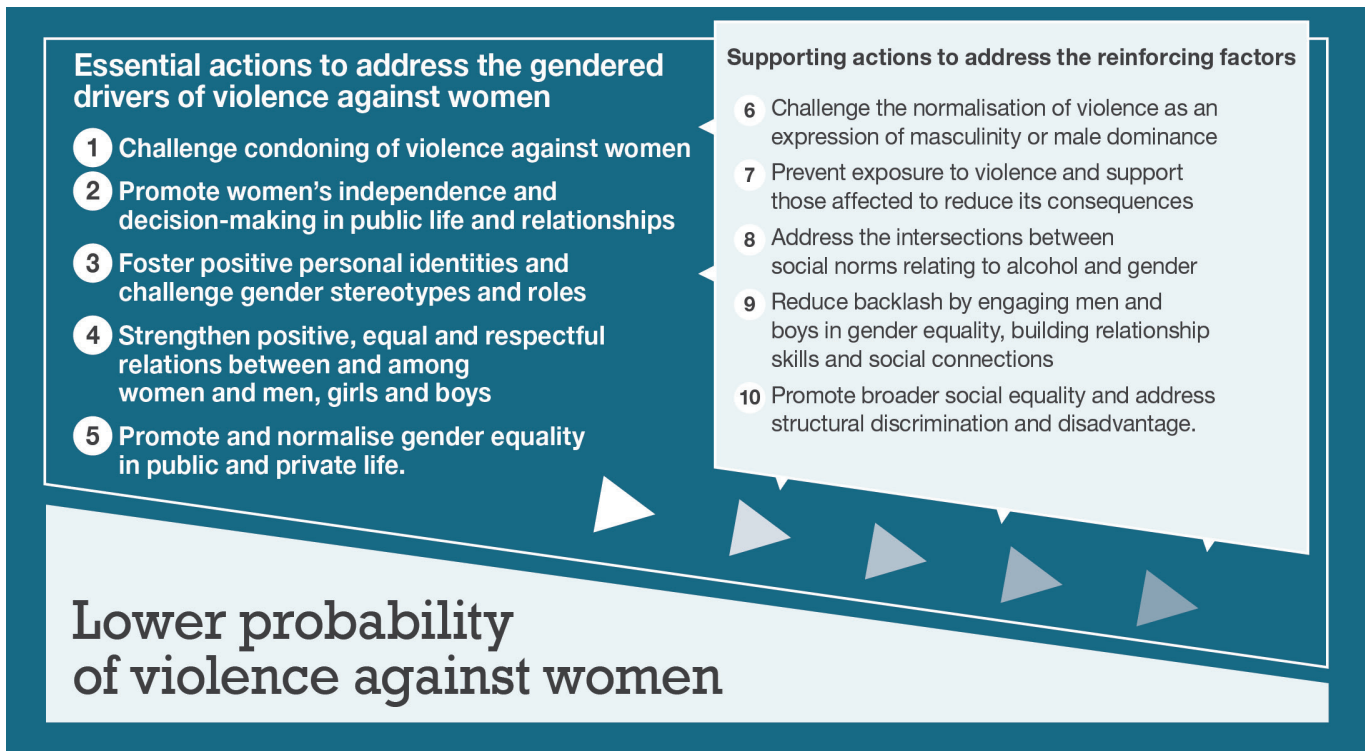
ACTIONS
that will prevent violence against women:

- CHALLENGE condoning of violence against women
- PROMOTE women's independence & decision-making
- CHALLENGE gender stereotypes and roles
- STRENGTHEN positive, equal and respectful relationships

Promote and normalise GENDER EQUALITY in public and private life

Mutually reinforcing actions that promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life are needed through legislation, institutional, policy and program responses:

- by governments, organisations and individuals
- in settings where people live, work, learn and socialise
- tailored to the context and needs of different groups.



Violence against women affects all sections of the community. The probability of violence against women is higher when gender inequality intersects with other forms of inequality and discrimination, such as racism, discrimination against people with disabilities, or discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Women's experiences of violence are also shaped by factors such as race, class, religion, Aboriginality, migrant or refugee status, age or disability. All efforts to prevent violence against women need to address gender equality, however in many cases other forms of discrimination will also need to be addressed.

3.3 The media is a valuable advocacy tool

Media advocacy has been successfully used to target public health issues such as road accidents, breast cancer and tobacco control.^{9,10,11}

The media offers a powerful avenue to provide information and education about health issues to a broad and varied audience. The media's reach into the community cannot be underestimated. It has enormous potential to shape what is perceived as 'news', and thereby influence public perceptions and attitudes, and the agenda of public policy.¹²

Media advocacy works with the media (papers, television, radio, social media) to draw attention to a public health issue and to find solutions.¹³ Community members with firsthand experience of an issue who are able to speak out are important advocates for change to public health policy.

3.4 Media Advocacy Programs are effective in the prevention of violence against women

Influencing the way violence against women is reported, in particular emphasising the drivers and what we as a society can do to ‘stop it before it starts’, is an important part of prevention. Women who have experienced violence are uniquely positioned – with the right support – to help influence this change.

Media Advocacy Programs focused on the prevention of violence against women promote the use of women’s voices in the reporting of violence against women, support and promote accurate and sensitive discussions of violence and widely disseminate messages about prevention.

Media Advocacy Programs address myths and stereotypes and offer a powerful way of challenging violence supportive attitudes, behaviours and societal norms.⁷

Media Advocacy Programs have the potential to challenge gender norms and gender inequality at all levels of society, and promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life.

Through women speaking out publicly about their experiences and by breaking down misconceptions that act to shame and blame women, media advocacy programs can also encourage other victims of violence to come forward.

Women with a lived experience of violence can identify the changes needed to end violence against women. Media Advocacy Programs that engage women who have experienced violence are a powerful way to work with the media to raise awareness of violence against women, promote equal and respectful relationships, and lobby for action that will keep women safe and importantly, prevent violence against women in the future. For example, Rosie Batty’s advocacy assisted in the reversal of national funding cuts to the legal assistance sector across the country, including Community Legal Centres who provide help to women experiencing family violence.

By sharing their experiences, advocates put a human face to the statistics about violence against women, and highlight the gendered nature of violence in our community. When the community can see and hear women tell their stories they are more likely to empathise and engage with the issue.

Media Advocacy Programs therefore aim both to influence behaviour of individuals and to create change at a societal level. The media’s interest in women’s stories gives a platform to address the underlying drivers of violence. Through women’s stories, a Media Advocacy Program is able to link individual experiences of violence with the broader context of violence, and what we can do as a community to prevent it. Effectively making these links is vital to the prevention of violence against women, as it is through doing so that the wider community will be able to understand and address the underlying, societal drivers of violence.

Independent evaluations of the Speaking Out Program and of the safe steps Media Advocacy Project in 2013-2014 found that both had positive impacts on the mental wellbeing of individual advocates, improving their self-confidence, knowledge and skills and enabling empowerment and additional skill development. The programs assisted all advocates to move forward in one way or another on their personal journey. For example, advocates have reported new career directions, taking up study and writing a blog as examples of activities that have flowed from their Media Advocacy Program involvement.

Evaluations of existing Media Advocacy Programs (see [Section 2.2.1: Case studies of Media Advocacy Programs](#)) show that they had many positive impacts on local print media’s knowledge, attitudes and reporting practices. The news articles that have been guided by these Media Advocacy Programs have demonstrated accurate and sensitive reporting evaluated against responsible reporting guidelines.¹⁴

What I’ve found is when you tell people you’ve become an advocate and you are a survivor of family violence... you get friends’ friends, friends’ relatives who are in that situation, ...want(ing) you to speak with them.

Speaking Out advocate

As an advocate you can impact on different levels... policy makers, the system and personal friends.

Speaking Out advocate

I found it quite empowering to have my experience validated and feel like you’re not the only one who’s been through difficult things....

Speaking Out advocate

Community myths and misconceptions

Media Advocacy Programs work with advocates to increase their confidence to recognise and challenge myths and misconceptions about violence against women.

The 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey¹⁷ found that in relation to sexual violence:

- 2 in every 5 Victorians believed that rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex.
- 1 in 6 believed that, in relation to sex, ‘women often say no when they mean yes’
- almost 1 in 5 believe that if a woman is raped while drunk or affected by drugs she is at least partly responsible.

Many of these attitudes are based on gender stereotypes and the different roles that society attributes to men and women. These stem from culturally and historically held beliefs about gender; male sexuality is primal and irrepressible, men are unable to control their actions and sexual behaviours, and violent behaviour is excused under the belief that ‘boys will be boys’.

Women are held accountable for protecting their modesty and femininity, and are expected to dress and behave in ways that the public erroneously believe will prevent violence. While men are lauded as trustworthy and respectable, rigid attitudes render a woman’s voice as ruled by emotion and therefore unbelievable and unreliable. These are among the many community misconceptions about violence against women that advocates may challenge.

3.5 Media advocacy can support trauma recovery

The quotes from media advocates themselves highlighted throughout this section demonstrate the important role that involvement in a Media Advocacy Program can play in the recovery process for women who have become advocates.^{14,15} A positive impact on mental wellbeing, support in their personal journey of recovery and an increased feeling of empowerment are documented in evaluations of current programs.

This impact on recovery is supported by the literature on trauma recovery. Drawing on her own research and a vast array of literature, psychiatrist Judith Herman’s work on trauma and recovery after violence outlines the stages of recovery¹⁸, the last of which is reconnection. This stage involves survivors of violence reconnecting with meaningful activities that can help them to heal and grow. Social action is discussed as a common way in which people use their experience to create a greater awareness of violence in the wider public sphere through sharing their personal stories with the community in order to influence educational, legal and political efforts to prevent violence, and stop others from being victimised.¹⁹

Ensuring that women are progressing through the stages of recovery is important in recruiting women to a Media Advocacy Program. See [Section 6: Working with advocates](#) for more on recruiting advocates.

I think what I’m doing, and hopefully I’m successful in getting done, will help the next generation in some way.

Speaking Out advocate

3.6 A Media Advocacy Program can benefit your organisation

By strengthening relationships and connections with the local media, a Media Advocacy Program will increase access to the media for other advocacy purposes and issues that may be important to your organisation's vision and priorities.

Implementing a program grows your organisation's reputation and profile as experts in the prevention of violence against women, and places you in a prominent position to provide comment on future articles that include reference to violence against women.

Media Advocacy Programs are helpful in strengthening partnerships with organisations within your area and potentially allow you to connect with organisations that you may not otherwise have the opportunity to work with.

Overcoming common objections to developing a Media Advocacy Program

Doesn't running a media advocacy program take too much time and resources?

Like any program or project, implementing and running a Media Advocacy Program does take work and commitment by organisations, but implementing your program in partnership can mean that responsibilities are shared.

See [Section 5: Program planning](#) for more information on the information and tools needed to start planning your Media Advocacy Program.

Isn't it risky for women who have experienced violence to talk publicly about their experiences?

Actually the opposite – involvement in a Media Advocacy Program increases the support for women as they are encouraged to speak out safely about their experience of violence.

The safety of advocates is central to the program. Speaking out about their experiences can be emotional for women who have experienced violence, but a Media Advocacy Program is run in such a way that the advocates are fully supported at every stage.

Media Advocacy Programs have thorough support systems in place to minimise and handle the risk of further perpetration of violence because of an advocate speaking out.

As detailed in [Section 3.5](#), engaging in meaningful opportunities such as telling their stories to the public can contribute towards recovery for advocates.

Doesn't this type of program contribute to a greater media focus on individual incidences of violence, rather than looking at the bigger picture of the drivers and how to prevent it?

Not so. Media Advocacy Programs are designed to provide training to advocates on the underlying drivers of violence and how to prevent it. This assists them in making the links between their individual experiences of violence and the broader social issue, enabling them to advocate for societal change to address and prevent violence.

Isn't there a risk of re-traumatisation for advocates involved in the program?

Yes, however advocates face the risk of re-traumatisation in their everyday lives. Through the media advocacy training, advocates learn skills to manage situations where there is a risk of re-traumatisation. This helps them in formal advocacy activities and in daily life.

By participating in the program, advocates have access to debriefing and support mechanisms before, during and after advocacy opportunities to be able to safely tell their story. Thorough screening and recruitment strategies ensure that the women are adequately progressed in their trauma recovery to participate in the program.

Safety planning is a key feature of Media Advocacy Programs and advocates have talked through what they are and are not comfortable to talk about and do, giving them control over the media advocacy opportunities that they are involved in.

[Section 6: Working with advocates](#) provides further important information on advocate safety and support.

Summary of positive outcomes of Media Advocacy Programs

For women who have experienced or are currently experiencing violence:

- Provide opportunities to take on supported advocacy roles
- Support individual advocates' trauma recovery (see Section 3.5)
- Assist women who are at risk of violence to recognise early warnings signs
- Encourage women who are experiencing violence to come forward for help and support, and report their experience of violence
- Erode the stigma attached to being a victim of violence.

For the media:

- Encourage and support sensitive and accurate media reporting of violence against women
- Provide access for interviews to women who have experienced violence, knowing that they are supported and their safety is not being compromised
- Encourage media articles to draw on women's lived experiences of violence and of what needs to change to keep women and children safe, and to prevent violence in the first place
- Encourage media articles and campaigns that focus on gender inequality and stereotypes as a driver of violence against women.

For your organisation:

- Support organisational goals and directions
- Raise your profile as experts in the prevention of violence
- Increase your access to the media and build strong relationships
- Strengthen partnerships in your community.

For the wider community:

- Connect incidences of violence against women to the broader context of gender inequality
- Build recognition of gender inequity and adherence to rigid gender stereotypes as the key drivers of violence against women
- Facilitate increased knowledge, awareness and discussion of equal and respectful relationships
- Promote non-violent norms in the community
- Promote community awareness of violence against women, and supportive responses to women who have experienced violence, including attributing the responsibility for violence to perpetrators
- Identify systems and public policy changes to keep women safe and end violence against women
- Prevent violence against women.

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