The risks of linking extremist behaviour and mental illness

Please cascade to all appropriate staff

Mindframe and SANE StigmaWatch would like to remind media of the impact of linking mental ill-health with extremist behaviour.

SANE StigmaWatch, along with Mindframe promote the responsible and safe reporting of mental ill-health and suicide. Mental ill-health and suicide are important issues for media to cover and when these are reported responsibly, the media can help reduce stigma. However, research shows when mental ill-health and suicide are reported irresponsibly, media stories can do harm.

National and international media stories speculating on a link between mental ill-health and extremist behaviour, can contribute to stigma. StigmaWatch commonly receives feedback from people living with mental illness that such reporting affects their interaction with community members as well as public perceptions.

Dr Michelle Blanchard, Acting CEO of SANE Australia would like to remind Australian media of the dangers of stigmatising language.

“Linking extremist or terrorist behaviour to mental illness has a very real impact on people affected by mental illness who report feeling stigmatised,”

“People with a mental illness are an important part of our community and it’s important that we ensure that they are not further isolated or discriminated against,” said Michelle.

Everymind Acting Director, Marc Bryant encourages the Australian media to remember that Mindframe has a library of resources to refer to when developing news media to avoid perpetuating stigma.

“Many violent people have no history of mental illness and most people with a mental illness have no history of violence,”

“Certain language and stereotypes can lead to negative community attitudes and stigmatise people living with a mental illness, as well as present inaccuracies about mental illness or mental health care,” said Marc.

Journalist and editors are strongly encouraged to refrain from linking the motivations of perpetrators of violent acts, to mental illness until motives have been established. Research shows us that less than 4% of criminal behaviour has any link to mental illness.
Reminder: safe use of language
Language used in media reports can have an impact on interview participants directly, and indirectly on vulnerable audiences. This is specifically in relation to reporting on mental health issues, suicide and self-harm.

It is also important to remember that suicide, self-harm and mental ill-health are complex issues and certain ways of reporting these issues can adversely impact on vulnerable members of the community. To help provide context, refer to the following quick tips for safely reporting on suicide, mental ill-health and self-harm.

Taking care of your audience
It is important going forward that stories that are of public interest which are receiving ongoing coverage, continue to be reported responsibly. Mindframe urges caution that details of graphic and distressing information can increase the risk to those who are vulnerable or distressed.

Help advocate for appropriate help-seeking information in all media stories. Individuals are more likely to seek help and support when appropriate services are included in stories. Mindframe recommends media add help-seeking information to stories (online, print and broadcast) which can provide somewhere for people who may be adversely impacted by the coverage, to seek professional support.
Tips to help support your staff

Mindframe acknowledges the potential impact on journalists and news room staff following exposure to distressing content when reporting on recent local and international incidents. We encourage Editors, Chief of Staff and Heads of News to look out for staff welfare, in particular cadets or new recruits. To support media professionals Mindframe, in consultation with the DART Centre Asia Pacific, has developed journalism self-care resources which include helpful tips for journalists as well as advice for editors and line managers. These resources can be found here.

National 24/7 Services
Lifeline: 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au
Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au
MensLine Australia: 1300 78 99 79 www.mensline.org.au
Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636 www.beyondblue.org.au

Support services

Contact information
Please contact Mindframe for further information or advice:

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SANE Media Centre
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