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The role of mass media in facilitating community education and child abuse prevention strategies

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In the second part of their analysis of the role of mass media in child abuse prevention, the authors discuss the benefits of

mass media programs as a tool to advocate for children's rights and more specifically, to promote awareness of, and to prevent, child abuse. The authors emphasise that campaign strategies may only be successful to the degree that they are backed by community education and direct support programs. Information gained from evaluations is highlighted, and recommendations for future media campaigns and initiatives are made.

INTRODUCTION

A previous Issues Paper focusing on the prevention of child maltreatment noted that "the African proverb, 'It takes a village to raise a child', epitomises the importance of the role of the wider community in raising children and young people" (Tomison and Wise 1999: 1). Increasingly, responsibility for children is not entrusted solely to parents or guardians but to whole communities (Cohen, Ooms and Hutchins 1995; Korbin and Coulton 1996). Strategies that aim to optimise the experiences of children and young people, and to prevent child abuse and neglect, are therefore required to ascertain, and perhaps confront, commonly held community attitudes and responses to *all* children and young people, and to increase community awareness of issues that may affect children and young people.

According to the National Child Protection Council (undated: 9, cited in Hawkins, McDonald, Davison and Coy 1994): "Prevention of abuse involves changing those individual and community attitudes, beliefs and circumstances which allow the abuse to occur."

The media play a significant role in forming and influencing people's attitudes and behaviour. Issues Paper 14, *Child abuse and the media* (Goddard and Saunders 2001), drew attention to the essential role of the media in increasing society's awareness of, and response to, child abuse and neglect. Of particular note was the part played by news and features that reported on specific child abuse cases, research

and intervention strategies. Such media attention to child abuse has, at times, positively influenced public, professional and political responses to the circumstances in which children and young people find themselves. Understanding media influences, and how to use the media constructively, may thus be an essential tool for those who advocate for children, young people, and their families (see Brawley 1995).

In addition to news stories, feature articles, and investigative journalism, sporadic mass media education and prevention campaigns are launched. These campaigns usually endeavour to broaden community knowledge of child abuse and neglect, to influence people's attitudes towards children and young people, and to change behaviours that contribute to, or precipitate, the problem of child abuse and neglect in our communities.

For several reasons, however, the effectiveness of these campaigns remains contentious. Primarily, the effectiveness of mass media in the prevention of child abuse and neglect is debatable. For example, Rayner (1996) argues that "media campaigns are bloody expensive" and their impact is difficult to determine. Expensive media campaigns may be hard to justify in a political climate where limited funds and resources are provided to address children's needs. Further, McDevitt (1996: 270) cites O'Keefe and Reed (1990: 215) to note that: "At best, the media are 'effective at building citizen awareness of an issue' but more complex attitudinal or behavioural

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change requires 'more direct forms of citizen contact and intervention'."

Others argue, however, that mass media campaigns and media coverage of the abuse and neglect of children perform an important and significant role in placing issues such as child abuse on the public and political agenda. Lindsey (1994: 163) maintains that: "Media has a central role in mediating information and forming public opinion. The media casts an eye on events that few of us directly experience and renders remote happenings observable and meaningful."

As Wurtele and Miller-Perrin (1993) have observed, media coverage of child sexual assault has contributed to demystifying and reducing the secrecy that has characteristically surrounded its occurrence. Similarly, a review of the literature on mass media campaigns reveals many examples of campaigns impacting on public knowledge about issues such as work safety, drug and alcohol use, drink-driving, speeding, cigarette smoking, obesity, AIDS, and domestic violence. Attitudinal and/or behavioural change may also occur during campaigns, although this result may be short-lived, lapsing when campaigns end (Reger, Wootan and Booth-Butterfield 2000; Freimuth, Cole and Kirby 2001).

Mass media present the opportunity to communicate to large numbers of people and to target particular groups of people. As observed by Gamble and Gamble (1999: 478), mass communication is significantly different from other forms of communication. They note that mass communication has the capacity to reach "simultaneously" many thousands of people who are not related to the sender. It depends on "technical devices" or "machines" to quickly distribute messages to diverse audiences often unknown to each other. It is accessible to many people, but may be avoided. It is orchestrated by specialists whose intent is to persuade potential audiences of the benefits of their attention. It is "controlled by gatekeepers" who censor the content of messages. And finally, unlike one-to-one communication, it produces only minimal, delayed feedback to its senders.

However, mass communication simultaneously presents opportunities *and* limitations, both of which require consideration when planning mass media assisted eradication of social problems such as child abuse and neglect. According to Wellings and Macdowall (2000: 23), drawing on Tones et al. (1990): "The strength of the mass media . . . lies in helping to put issues on the public agenda, in reinforcing local efforts, in raising consciousness about . . . issues and in conveying simple information . . . The limitations of the mass media are that they are less effective in conveying complex information, in teaching skills, in shifting attitudes and beliefs, and in changing behaviour in the absence of other enabling factors."

Campaigns, and other forms of media education and entertainment (such as television programs, film and live productions), may be targeted at all families with a view to encouraging positive attitudes toward children and stopping abuse before it starts or is even considered (primary prevention). Groups of people identified as particularly susceptible to abusive behaviour may be targeted (secondary prevention). Further, a campaign or program may target families in which abuse has already occurred with the intention of preventing recurrence of the abuse (tertiary prevention).

WHY COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND PREVENTION CAMPAIGNS?

Thus, a well-focused mass media campaign, educational program or live-theatre production has the potential to contribute successfully to community education and the prevention of child abuse and neglect. However, as will be emphasised throughout this Issues Paper, campaign strategies may only be successful to the degree that they are backed by community education and support programs:

“A media campaign can be effective, but it means nothing unless the campaign is integrated into an overall approach dealing with the various aspects of the problem being addressed.” (Peter White, then NSW Coordinator for the Drug Offensive, quoted in Burrows 1988: 16)

“Whatever happens at the mass level must be complemented and supported at a grass roots level for any long-term behavioural change to occur.” (Julie Urquhart, then campaign manager of the *Drink-Drunk; the Difference is U* NSW Youth Alcohol Strategy, quoted in Wood 1994: 18)

A report on a recent Western Australian mass media-based campaign, “Freedom from Fear”, which targeted male perpetrators of domestic violence, identified “five potential message strategies” for mass media prevention campaigns (Donovan et al. 2000: 80):

- *Criminal sanctions*: a traditional emphasis on legal threats;
- *Community intervention*: an approach encouraging friends and neighbours to report domestic violence or intervene with the perpetrator or victim;
- *Social disapproval*: a theme emphasising shame and embarrassment (that is, “real men don’t hit women”);
- *Consequences*: a theme based on the impact of the violence on their partner or children; and
- *Help is available*: emphasising that help is available if the man desires to change.

These strategies grew out of a review of the literature and interviews with domestic violence workers. Each of these five strategies has strengths and weaknesses that warrant consideration in the formation of media messages for education and prevention campaigns.

This Issues Paper describes some recent and past mass media education and prevention campaigns, television programs, films, and live theatre productions. Their *raison d’être*, their justification in the current economic and political environment, and their impact are discussed. Information gained from evaluations is highlighted and recommendations for future media campaigns and initiatives are made.

The primary focus of this paper is the media-assisted prevention of all forms of child abuse and neglect. However, examples of mass media-based prevention in other areas such as health and safety are drawn upon, and each of the message strategies noted above (Donovan et al. 2000) will become apparent in the context of current or past campaigns and media approaches to prevention.

In the year 1990–1991 reports of child abuse and neglect to Australian child protection authorities numbered 49,721. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 2002), in 2000–2001 reports had increased to 115,471; following investigation, 27,367 cases were confirmed or substantiated as involving child abuse and/or neglect.

The physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect of children have a long recorded history. In the mid to late 1800s, Toulmouche, Tardieu, Bernard and Lacasagne reported that children were often sexually assaulted, that children reported honestly about their abuse, and that the perpetrators of abuse were often the children’s fathers and brothers (Olafsen, Corwin and Summit 1993).

Corby (1993) notes that Kempe’s “discovery” of the battered child syndrome in 1962, and the “discovery” of child sexual abuse in Britain in the 1980s were in fact “re-discoveries”. According to Corby (1993: 16): “Child abuse is not a new phenomenon, nor is public or state concern about it. Nevertheless fresh attempts to tackle child mistreatment are usually accompanied by the declaration that it is a new and as yet undiscovered problem. This ‘newness’ is seen as an important part of the process of establishing it as an issue requiring resources to tackle it.”

Historically, children have been accorded little, if any, status in society. Deprived of rights and perceived as the property of their parents or guardians, children could be treated any way their “owners” saw fit (see Cleverley and Phillips 1987; Archard 1993). In this context, community awareness and acceptance of the reality of child abuse, particularly child abuse perpetrated by family members, has been slow. “Stranger danger”, beliefs that children’s stories are untrustworthy, and beliefs that parents always act in the best interests of their children, appear to be easier for communities to accept.

Such beliefs may present people with a means of turning a blind eye to the reality that child abuse is often perpetrated by adults well known to children, in children’s own homes, and in other trusted environments. In relation to child sexual abuse, for example, Kitzinger and Skidmore (1995: 53) quote one interviewee from Kidscape in the United Kingdom: “People don’t want to be associated with child abuse as incest . . . it’s a message we try to get across to the press but they’re very wary . . . it’s easier and safer to concentrate on strangers and bullying.”

Olafsen, Corwin and Summit (1993) have argued that cycles of awareness followed by suppression have typified society’s response to child sexual abuse. Arguably, this has been society’s response to all forms of child abuse and neglect of children. Mass media education and prevention campaigns present one means of breaking cycles of suppression and denial. The media have played a key role in *periodically* placing the issue of child abuse on the public agenda.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

This section discusses: images of children and young people in society and in the media; media influences on children and children's rights; and the impact of media campaigns on the victims of child abuse.

Images of children in society and the media

Journalists willing to advocate for children and young people face the challenge of counterbalancing negative images or "demonisation" (Franklin and Horwath 1996) of children and, particularly, of adolescents, in print, television and film. Starkly contrasting with once popular views of childhood as a time of innocence, less than positive images of children and young people in the media may place obstacles in the path of attempts to prevent their abuse and neglect.

It is notable that child abuse media prevention campaigns rarely, if ever, focus on the maltreatment of adolescents (rather attention is given to societal problems, perhaps stemming from child abuse, such as drug use, youth suicide and chroming (see Goddard and Tucci 2002: 11)). Similarly, as observed by Mendes (2000: 50), drawing on Vinson (1987), Aldridge (1994) and Wilczynski and Sinclair (1999): "Structural disadvantages contributing to child abuse and neglect such as poverty, unemployment, and gender or race-based discrimination are rendered invisible [in the media]."

A comparison of the media coverage of three child murder cases – two in the United Kingdom and one in Australia – highlights significantly different images of children created, or reinforced, by media comment.

Alder and Polk (2001) observe the language used and attitudes portrayed in the media coverage. In 1968, 11-year-old Mary Bell murdered two boys, aged three and four in the UK. Twenty-five years later, in 1993, two ten-year-old boys murdered two-year-old Jamie Bulger in the UK, and in Australia in 1998, a ten-year-old boy was charged with drowning a six-year-old playmate.

According to Alder and Polk (2001), while media commentary in the Mary Bell case expressed "concern for the offender" who was perceived by many as the "surviving child of this tragedy", the latter two cases predominantly yielded media commentary that described the child offenders as "evil", callous and reckless. Alder and Polk (2001: 134) contend that: "What may have changed in the years since the Bell case is the gradual evolution of an internationalised media, capable of the instantaneous transfer of 'infotainment' around the globe . . . these outlets have a special appetite for the bizarre and unusual."

Franklin and Horwath (1996) further observe a concerning change in society's perception of children which, as Tomison (1997) has noted, extends to adolescents. Less often perceived as "innocent" and "innately good", it seems a child or young person may now be portrayed as a "powerful,

destructive human being" (Franklin and Horwath 1996: 315).

The cases described above are distressing and uncommon. Negative images of children (perhaps stemming from such cases), and media reinforcement of feelings that children and young people are a burden on families and on society, do not assist in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Further exploration of the lives experienced by young offenders, while not detracting from the horror of events that occur, almost invariably reveals their own victimisation as children or as adolescents.

Moreover, as Tomison (1997: 22) claims, perceiving children as "powerful" and "evil" beings may "dehumanise" children and serve to justify child abuse. He further contends that the negative portrayal of children in the media may result in victims of abuse blaming themselves for their abuse. Victims may be led to believe that they deserved the assaults perpetrated against them, and thus accept their abuse as justified.

Further, Tomison (1997) cites Winn (1993) and Garbarino (1992) to note that these negative images of children may indeed be magnified once the child becomes an adolescent. Negative stereotypes of young people, he contends, may contribute to the incidence of adolescent maltreatment, exacerbating "the problems of troubled youth in troubled families, providing a justification for unresponsive parenting and increasing the probability of serious family conflict" (Tomison 1997: 23).

By putting pressure on governments to increase community supports for children and families, and by presenting positive, empathetic images of children and young people, the media may have a powerful influence in preventing, rather than perhaps indirectly promoting, child maltreatment. As Walby (1996: 25) argues: "Children and childhood need to be better appreciated; families with children need a more supportive environment; issues affecting children need more sophisticated debate; and services for children and the people who work for them need more support from the public."

Media influences on children and children's rights

The impact of media advertising on children and adolescents is well documented, as is concern about some aspects of the media's powerful influence on children's attitudes and behaviours (see, for example, Macklin and Carlson 1999; *Inquiry into the Effects of Television and Multimedia on Children and Families in Victoria* 2000). Television may be "a more powerful socialisation agent than peers and teachers" (Hutson, Watkins and Kunkel 1989 cited in Walsh, Laczniak, and Carlson 1999: 119).

As acknowledged in a major New Zealand newspaper, it is notable that: "The media promote violence as an effective way of dealing with conflict through television, films, videos, and interactive video games" (*The New Zealand Herald*, 28/11/01).

In evidence given to the Victorian Government Inquiry into the Effects of Television and Multimedia on Children

and Families in Victoria, Michael Carr-Gregg (2000: 68) further endorses this view: "Contrary to some claims, many people in the medical, public health, and scientific communities are in agreement that the relationship between television violence and aggression and violence in young people does exist. Exhaustive reviews of the evidence accumulated over 40 years – and we are talking about 3000 different studies – have led researchers to conclude unequivocally that mass media significantly contributes to the aggressive behaviour and attitudes of many children, adolescents, and, of course, adults."

However, this power of the media to negatively influence children's attitudes and behaviours may be used to impact positively on the lives of children and adolescents. According to the Inquiry into the Effects of Television and Multimedia on Children and Families in Victoria (2000: 35): "Qualitative evidence suggests that quality children's television can enhance child development by providing positive role models of cooperation and collaboration as a responsible way of acting in the world."

Indeed, the constructive use of mass media can assist in teaching children and young people socially desirable ways of dealing with conflict, knowledge of their rights to integrity and protection from harm, healthy eating habits and lifestyles, and ways to assert themselves and their rights in a positive, acceptable manner.

As noted in the Inquiry into the Effects of Television and Multimedia on Children and Families in Victoria (2000: 37), evaluations of educational television programs, designed either for pre-schoolers or for older children, have suggested their effectiveness in "heightening a range of social behaviours" (Friedrich and Stein 1973), diminishing "the effects of stereotyping" (Johnston and Ettema 1982), increasing "preparedness for adolescence" (Singer and Singer 1994), and stimulating the discussion of "solutions to general social issues" (Johnston, Bauman, Milne, and Urdan 1993). Research suggests that, at least in the short term, television viewing of such programs may increase children's and young people's knowledge and positively change attitudes and behaviours. Unfortunately, longitudinal studies exploring sustained effects are rare and thus inconclusive.

The Inquiry into the Effects of Television and Multimedia on Children and Families in Victoria (2000: 33) further notes that television "is one of the most popular forms of mass communication and entertainment in Australia [and] has been under-utilised as an educative tool", and suggests that perhaps narrow vision has meant that the deliberate use of television simultaneously to entertain and educate has not been fully recognised. Despite this, Postman (1994) has argued that television is rapidly becoming "the first curriculum", with educational institutions such as schools following behind.

According to the Inquiry into the Effects of Television and Multimedia on Children and Families in Victoria (2000: 1): "The one thing on which the critics and the defenders of television agree is that it is a central and pervasive part

of modern life. Children can spend more time watching television than any other activity except sleep . . . it is a major socialising force in children's lives."

Mass media education and prevention campaigns may be designed to target children and young people, providing them with useful information and alerting them to avenues for further information, help and support. Campaigns can also use regular television programs for children. Drawing on the research of Baran, Chase and Courtright (1979) and Forge and Phemister (1987), the Inquiry into the Effects of Television and Multimedia on Children and Families in Victoria (2000: 15) states: "Children . . . have shown cooperative behaviour following one observation of just one episode of positive social behaviour in a commercial television drama . . . and cartoons with a positive social message have produced positive behaviours in pre-schoolers . . . Discussions of complex issues and approaches to conflict resolution have also been successfully utilised in Australian drama."

Campaign organisers can approach producers of popular children's television requesting that they incorporate messages, such as a child's right to physical integrity and to protection from harm, and depict desired protective behaviours, such as seeking help if a child feels threatened or unsafe.

Further, campaigns may be designed to give children and young people an opportunity to express their views on issues that affect them, specifically targeting adult audiences that habitually ignore the views and experiences of children and young people. Research on the physical punishment of children (Saunders, in progress) suggests, for example, that adults may be interested to hear children's views on the issue of physical discipline, and children interviewed in the research were keen for adults to hear their views. To date, however, the media rarely, if ever, consults children and takes their views into account before reporting on the physical punishment of children. Indeed, the media often trivialises the issue of physical punishment (Saunders and Goddard 1998, 1999 (a) and (b), 2000).

Tomison (1996: 77) has noted that The United Kingdom Commission of Inquiry into the Prevention of Child Abuse made a recommendation that the media "take a more balanced and sympathetic view of children". Tomison (1997: 25) highlights that: "In line with a belief in the importance of 'listening to children', the Commission felt that the media should take the views of children into account when presenting on an issue in which children have some interest. The Commission (1996) recommended that the media should have an obligation to consider a child's best interest in stories in which children feature, and that the failure to do so would constitute grounds for a complaint to a relevant authority."

As reported in Issues Paper 14 in this series, *Child abuse and the media* (Goddard and Saunders 2001), children can be encouraged to express their views through the media. The UK *Children's Express* is one example, as is *Youth Forum* in Melbourne's *Herald Sun* newspaper.

Impact of media campaigns on victims of child abuse

The impact of media campaigns on the lives of victims is sometimes reported in print media stories about them. Writing about Annie, a victim of sexual assault by her stepfather, Dixon (1993: 1) reported how Annie remembered her reaction as a child to an advertisement about sexual abuse: "Her grandmother caught the fleeting look of despair and pain in her face. Her grandmother [who had previously had unconfirmed suspicions] asked [Annie] again about her stepfather. Annie says she burst into tears."

In the same year, the *Sydney Morning Herald* (1993: 6) published a piece about another victim of sexual abuse, assaulted by her stepfather. It was reported that shortly before driving over him with her car, causing long-term injuries, the victim saw "a televised community announcement about standing up against child abuse". As in many cases of incest, the victim's stepfather had been released from prison after serving a sentence which was perceived by his victim as not fitting the crime she had suffered.

In *The Age* in 1998 Kissane wrote about Cathy Freeman and other celebrities who, through the media, have revealed their sexual abuse as children. She also reported on the experience of Karen Hogan who heads the Melbourne Royal Children's Hospital's Gatehouse Centre for abused children: "For one little girl, this week, something has changed. Her mother recently rang Hogan . . . for advice. The family suspected that the girl had suffered sexual abuse some time ago, but had been unable to confirm it. This week the girl told her mother, 'Mum, you know what happened to Cathy Freeman? That happened to me'." (Kissane 1998: 4)

Cathy Freeman, Derryn Hinch, Angry Anderson, Debra Byrne, Oprah Winfrey, Roseanne Barr and Roger Moore are a few of the celebrities who have exposed their own experiences of child sexual abuse through the media. Kissane quoted Joe Tucci, Executive Director of Australians Against Child Abuse, an agency that offers counselling to abused children, who commented on the possible effect of celebrity disclosures through the media: "The most important result of someone like Cathy Freeman speaking out is that it helps lessen the shame for people who come after her . . . It hooks into exactly what the kids are struggling with. They say, 'Look at the courage it took them to come out and talk about it; I'm courageous, I did a similar thing to Cathy Freeman and Angry Anderson.' It gives them hope about success, that they, too, will recover from the abuse." (Tucci, as quoted by Kissane 1998: 4)

The impact of a media campaign may be dramatic and far-reaching as it is occurring, and perhaps for a short time afterwards. However, campaigns drawing attention to child abuse will be more effective if they are ongoing (Calvert 1992). Mass media campaigns have the potential to confront society with the horrific nature of much child abuse. Such campaigns can also educate the public about the many, often co-existing, forms of abuse suffered by children. They can also draw attention to the status of children

in society, highlighting children's dependency and vulnerability to abuse and neglect.

According to Hall and Stannard (1997: 5): "The physical and emotional impacts of child abuse are very clear. However, the long-term loss of productivity through lower achievement levels, unemployment and family dislocation are less apparent. Research shows that the child abuse can also lead to criminal behaviour among young people. These costs must be met by the taxpayer for years to come through increasing [financial] claims as well as health, counselling, welfare, police and prison services."

Mass media education and prevention campaigns present a viable means for governments to be seen to be doing something in relation to the problem of child abuse and neglect. Campaigns may assist not only in the prevention of immediate harm to children and young people but also in allaying the long-term social and economic consequences of child maltreatment. Campaigns must, of course, be backed by supportive services for children, young people and their families.

MASS MEDIA EDUCATION AND PREVENTION CAMPAIGNS

Drawing on the research of Nielson (1998) and the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (1995), Sanders, Montgomery and Brechman-Toussaint (2000: 939-940) note that: Australian adults spend about three hours per day watching television; 61 per cent of Australian adults choose television viewing to stay informed and to access news; and 79.65 per cent of Australian adults consider themselves to be most influenced by television advertising.

An article in *The Age* in 1993 demonstrated the potentially powerful influence of the media on people's attitudes. Milburn (1993: 5) reported on the cancellation, after five days sitting, of a trial against a foster parent charged with the sexual penetration and sexual abuse of an 11-year-old boy in his care. Concerns were raised by the accused's defence lawyer about an *Age* article describing a television mini-series to be screened on Channel 10. In reply, the judge ordered that the trial be cancelled: ". . . the boy's lawyer said the article was unlikely to prejudice the jury . . . [The article] focused on the Catholic Church and priests in a Canadian orphanage, whereas the charged foster parent was not a priest, had no particular religious affiliation, and the sexual abuse was alleged to have occurred in his private home." Nevertheless, the trial was cancelled, causing great distress to the child victim and others.

Clearly, the perceived power of the media, as exemplified in this case, may be used in child abuse prevention campaigns (Tomison 1997). Krugman (1996: 259) notes that in 1990, faced with what they perceived to be a national emergency, the United States Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect ". . . called on the media to avoid raising public awareness that child abuse exists, and rather help the public understand the complexity of the problem and how it could be prevented".

This view appears to be turning a blind eye to the reality of child abuse and neglect. Importantly, the literature documenting past and present media campaigns consistently stresses a dual role for the media – to portray the existence of child abuse *and* to present ways of addressing and preventing it: “Media prevention needs to provide information about both the problem behaviour and how to deal with it effectively” (Sanders et al. 2000: 939-940).

As noted above, the success of a child abuse education and prevention campaign will be influenced by available funding, existing support services, and other educational activities, such as prevention programs in schools (Calvert 1992; Donovan 1992; Scott 1993; NAPCAN 1994). Writing about the impact of a media campaign in the United States designed to increase public action to help maltreated children in addictive families, Andrews, McLeese and Currant (1995: 929-930) made the following recommendations:

“Public awareness about effective ways to help is likely to lead to citizen action. Too often, media messages focus on the nature and extent of the problem without suggesting what can be done to change it . . .

The services system needs to be prepared for the public’s response to a media message. Increasing public awareness raises demands for assistance and information . . .

Increased efforts are needed to promote personal ways of helping, without formal system intervention . . . many people believe in their own capacity to help. This is consistent with the ‘neighbors helping neighbors’ approach recommended by the US Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (1993). With encouragement and information more people might act on their beliefs.”

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOME MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

This section discusses the characteristics of some present and past media campaigns.

Media-driven child abuse prevention strategies

The distressing details of the murder in 1990 of two-year-old Daniel Valerio at the hands of his mother’s de-facto, Paul Aiton, were very briefly outlined in Issues Paper 14 (Goddard and Saunders 2001). It was noted that the media coverage of Daniel’s murder, and of related child protection issues, was the primary force behind the introduction in 1992 of laws requiring mandatory reporting (by some professionals) of child abuse and neglect (Goddard and Liddell 1993, 1995; Mendes 1996). Such “policy development by press release” (Goddard and Liddell 1993: 24) provides a significant contrast to policies and preventive strategies “developed through community consultation, research and reflection” (Goddard 1996: 305).

Susan Wilson has observed: “For advocates, the press is a grand piano waiting for a player. Strike the chords through

a news story, a guest column, or an editorial, and thousands will hear. Working in concert, unbiased reporters and smart advocates can make music together.” (Quoted in Duncan, Rivlin and Williams 1990: 4)

Press releases are one of the most important primary sources of media news stories (Brawley 1995). Journalists spend much of their time “rewriting” press releases (Karpf 1988: 118) and creating stories from written information provided to them by individuals, groups, and organisations. Many news stories are derived from “facts created for journalists by individuals and bureaucracies” (Surette 1992: 57). Thus, information provided to media outlets that sheds light on an issue such as child abuse, may occur either in an organised manner through well-researched and planned mass media education and prevention campaigns, or through press releases, opinion pieces, and letters to newspapers focussing on current cases or significant issues or events. As (Brawley 1995: 4) states: “There are abundant opportunities to engage in valuable public information, community education and prevention activities through the print and broadcast media.”

“Advocacy journalists” (Dennis and Merrill 1996: 114) can be a powerful ally. The media “can sway hearts and minds . . . define center stage” (Levy 1999: 996). The media can bring pressure to bear on governments. Media coverage of a particular issue may assist in initiating or consolidating attitudinal and behavioural change (see Goddard and Saunders 2001). As noted in Issues Paper no. 15, “mere coverage of issues affecting children places journalists in the role of advocate” (Giordano and Stan 1992: 29).

A recent example of media-driven action in response to child abuse occurred as a result of a letter sent to a major newspaper. The headline TRAPPED BY A LETTER, in the South Australian newspaper, *The Advertiser* (7/6/01), preceded the paper’s “top story” released by reporter Sam Weir:

“An anonymous letter sent to *The Advertiser* more than two years ago triggered a chain of events which ended in former magistrate Peter Michael Liddy’s conviction on child sex abuse charges.

The two-page letter – handed to police five months before Liddy’s arrest . . . alleged that he had been molesting children and using the Surf Life Saving Club for ‘his supply of victims’.

Sent to the Family Forum section, the letter was referred to the Police Exploitation Investigation Section.”

Written anonymously, the author of this letter correctly anticipated the power of the media to advocate on behalf of the victimised children. The actual letter could not be printed in the paper prior to the conviction. Nevertheless, the story (two years later) emanating from the fact that the letter had been sent to, and acted upon, by the newspaper reveals the sense of achievement the newspaper employees gained from being able to assist in bringing this man to justice. It also demonstrates the important role of the media as an instigator of political, social or legal action when other avenues may have proven unproductive.

A current mass media campaign

In Victoria in May 2000, Australians Against Child Abuse launched a child abuse prevention campaign “Every Child is Important” (Tucci, Goddard and Mitchell 2001). This primary prevention campaign used a “comforting” approach and incorporated a significant mass media component.

As outlined in “More action – less talk! Community responses to child abuse prevention” (Tucci, Goddard and Mitchell 2001: 9), the campaign sought to: elicit a commitment from adults to adults to develop safe and non-abusive relationships with children; persuade adults to stop behaving in ways which are harmful to children; educate adults about the important needs of children; and better inform adults about the causes and consequences of child abuse.

The campaign encouraged all adults to: think and view children as a source of hope; understand the developmental variables of children; respect the meaning children give to their experiences; engage positively with the principles of children’s rights; and appreciate more fully the capacities and contribution of children to the cultural and emotional life of families and communities.

The campaign also addressed: the commonly held belief that children are a cost to society; the perceived suspicion that any application of the notion of children’s rights will mean an erosion of parent’s rights; and the public’s lack of understanding about the extent and nature of child abuse in Australia.

The campaign continued until the end of 2001. A song, written by Van Morrison and performed by Rod Stewart, “Have I Told You Lately That I Love You”, was the focus of a television advertising campaign that aimed to stimulate people’s thoughts about the importance and value of children and how this is communicated to them. Television commercials were backed up by press and radio advertisements. In addition to advertising, the campaign sought media attention by involving Tracy Bartram, FOX FM radio personality, as an ambassador for the campaign. Media attention was drawn to the campaign’s launch. A free information kit for parents was made available, parent’s seminar sessions, featuring Michael Grose, were conducted, and a website made readily available to the public. The campaign did not receive state or federal funding but relied heavily on in-kind support from individuals and Victorian businesses.

Quantum Market Research monitored the effectiveness of the campaign. In May 2000 and October 2000 telephone interviews were conducted with a representative sample of 301 adults. Public dissemination of research outcomes formed part of the campaign strategy.

Tucci et al. (2001: 20-21) report that the initial research findings, five months into the campaign, revealed that: “Child abuse is as serious social problem that is poorly understood by the Victorian public . . . While 51 per cent of respondents believed the community recognised child abuse as a serious social problem and another 21 per cent believed they

accurately understood the extent and nature of child abuse in Australia, this is clearly not the case . . . 59 per cent were unable even to guess the number of reports of child abuse received annually . . . only 4 per cent of respondents accurately estimated the size of the problem. Twenty-nine per cent of respondents underestimated the problem by at least 90,000 reports. The idea that adults can hurt children is disturbing and likely underpins the belief by 51 per cent of respondents that the community treats this issue seriously, but when asked to account for the extent to which children are being abused by adults, community awareness is sadly lacking.”

Eighty per cent of respondents strongly supported the need for a campaign against child abuse. Australians Against Child Abuse thus feels confident that the “Every Child is Important” campaign will significantly influence public attitudes and responses to children and to child abuse. Ongoing research into the impact of the campaign will in itself be valuable in contributing to the debate about the educative and cost effectiveness of mass media campaigns aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect.

The NSPCC Full Stop Campaign – Primary Prevention

The NSPCC Full Stop Campaign, launched in the United Kingdom in May 1999, has the ambitious aim of ending cruelty to children within 20 years. Costing three million pounds, it proposes to change attitudes and behaviour towards children, to make it everybody’s business to protect children, and to launch new services and approaches (Boztas 1999; Hall 1999). The campaign is supported by Prince Andrew, popular personalities such as the Spice Girls, the English football star Alan Shearer, and companies such as British Telecom and Microsoft.

As Rudaizky (quoted in Hall 1999) explains, a pictorial theme of the campaign is people covering their eyes: “The theme of the eyes being covered is about people not facing up to the reality of what is happening. Our intention was not to shock but to move people into doing something about it. Child abuse is not nice to talk about. It is an upsetting subject but unless we talk about it, we will not end it.”

This objective highlights the suppression/awareness phenomenon mentioned above, and draws attention again to the need for ongoing rather than intermittent prevention campaigns.

Two mass media primary prevention campaigns

In Issues Paper 5, *Update on Child Sexual Abuse*, Tomison (1995) drew attention to the arguments of Oates (1990) and Wurtele and Miller-Perrin (1993). These authors highlighted deficiencies in the community’s perception of child sexual assault and in the community’s knowledge of how to seek help, and what resources are available. Gaps in knowledge and misconceptions about child sexual abuse appear to persist despite media campaigns such as those conducted in Victoria and New South Wales. In spite of this, both campaigns were evaluated and deemed for the most part to have been successful.

The Victorian (1992) and New South Wales (1986–1988) mass media campaigns sought to draw the public's attention to the sexual assault of children. With prompting, people may remember the slogans used for the campaigns: "Child Sexual Assault, It's Often Closer to Home than You Think"; "Child Sexual Assault Offenders. No Excuses Never Ever"; "Child Sexual Assault is a Crime"; and "Stand Up Victoria: Stand Up Against Child Sexual Abuse".

The Victorian and New South Wales media campaigns comprised television commercials and community service announcements, press advertisements, information booklets, stickers, posters and telephone hotlines.

In Victoria, the criteria used to evaluate the success of the campaign included:

- an increased acceptance of the seriousness of child sexual assault;
- a higher perception of the prevalence of child sexual assault;
- a higher awareness of the potential for sexual abuse to be perpetrated by adults known to the child;
- an increase in awareness of the types of organisations who could be approached for help;
- an increasingly strong belief that there is a need to take action to address child sexual assault; and
- an increase in the belief that a child is best out of the home if child sexual assault is occurring. (Wallis Consulting Group 1992)

Apparently, removing the perpetrator rather than the child from the home was not considered either at this time or in this campaign.

Issues documented as needing to be addressed following the Victorian campaign included:

- there was little acknowledgment of the existence of female offenders;
- a number of mothers believed that the child victim of sexual assault might be to blame, and a number of males blamed the female in the home for the occurrence of child sexual assault;
- there was resistance to reporting child sexual assault to doctors, the police or to Community Services Victoria (as the Department of Human Services was then known); and
- there was a retention of the misconception that children provoke men who sexually assault them. (Wallis Consulting Group 1992)

The campaign in New South Wales was conducted over three years and involved three stages. The first stage lasted seven weeks and began in October 1986. The second stage lasted eight weeks and began in May 1987. The third stage, which replayed the radio and television advertisements of the first two campaigns, began in June 1988. The campaign was deemed to have been successful "to the extent that it achieved improved knowledge about child sexual assault . . . [the campaign] broke the taboo" (Calvert 1992: 35, 37).

One of the main messages the campaign set out to communicate to the community was that children are at a greater risk of sexual abuse by relatives and family friends than by strangers, and child sexual offenders ought to take responsibility for their actions (Calvert 1992).

The campaign aimed to promote community awareness of why perpetrators of child sexual assault commit this crime, how attitudes in society influence their behaviour; and how these attitudes arise in the first place (Calvert 1992).

Concerns documented following the evaluation of the media campaign included:

- an increase in the number of people who would talk to the offender as a means of addressing the issue, perhaps further endangering the child;
- that by concentrating on one form of abuse important connections with other forms of abuse may not have been made; and
- that the campaigns could have been even more multi-lingual and culturally specific. (Calvert 1992)

Calvert (1992: 39-40) also stressed that: "Mass media campaigns will only have an impact on attitudes and behaviour if they are run over a long period of time . . . supported by a range of other activities . . . prevention strategies obviously require a sustained effort and commitment to resources if they are to be successful . . . additional and adequate funding must be provided. Unless these things are achieved, the prevention campaigns will be like pouring water on sand: gone as soon as it is poured."

Depending on their content, the messages of the Victorian and the New South Wales campaigns were targeted at a dolescents, men and/or families. Consideration was given to viewing times and programs, favoured by males, such as sports programs.

The important messages that these campaigns set out to convey are unlikely to be retained by communities that characteristically change in nature and composition, unless they are conveyed to people continually rather than in short bursts over a relatively short period of time.

Confronting campaigns

In New Zealand, Roberts (1998) has written about a recent confronting Rape Crisis awareness campaign focusing on incest. The campaign was called *It's okay to talk about incest*. Its aim was to break the silence, "to drive home the message that incest exists and everyone needs to talk about and challenge it" (Roberts 1998: 37).

The campaign's media advertisements carried the personal messages of five incest survivors. One survivor of sexual abuse by her father revealed in an advertisement:

"Nobody forced him to come into my bedroom two or three times a week from when I was four. Nobody held a knife to his throat to make him lie on top of me. There was no-one blackmailing him to pinch what weren't even nipples yet". (Julia, in Roberts 1998: 36)

Graphic detail in the survivors true stories was followed by evidence of the emotional suffering of victims of incest:

“I haven’t been able to get close to people, to trust anyone. I feel that time’s running out for me to have a really close, fulfilling relationship with someone I can trust.” (Brian, a male survivor of his father’s sexual, physical and emotional abuse, in Roberts 1998: 36)

The success of this media campaign in terms of public exposure to the problem of incest and government recognition of the effects of incest was considerable. Unfortunately, the campaign ran only for one week.

In the United Kingdom, a recent Barnardo’s advertisement attracted censorship because of its confronting nature. The Committee of Advertising Practice discouraged newspapers from publishing a digitally altered advertisement depicting:

“A 10-month-old boy sitting on a dirty floor wearing only a nappy, clutching a syringe and gripping a tourniquet in his teeth. The text reads: ‘ John Donaldson. Age 23. Battered as a child, it was always possible that John would turn to drugs. With Barnardo’s help, child abuse need not lead to an empty future.’” (Leonard 2000)

The advertisement was the fifth in a confronting Barnardo’s campaign intending to demonstrate what can happen to abused or disadvantaged children who do not receive the help they need when they are young. In retaliation against the censorship, Barnardo’s director of marketing and communication argued: “They’re not making due allowance for a charity talking about its work. If this was a supermarket trying to use shock tactics just to sell products from its shelves one might agree with the committee.” (Nebel, quoted in Leonard 2000)

It appears that the reality of child abuse and its impact may be too confronting for some members of the community to absorb and to address. Other mass media campaigns in England have run without censure. Two recent examples include the NSPCC Full Stop Campaign (outlined above) and another NSPCC campaign.

The NSPCC “Campaign Against Baby Battering”, costing 1.7 million pounds, was launched in April 2000. It was prompted by the fact that: “At least one baby is killed every fortnight in domestic violence in England and Wales” (Harrison 2000), and recent British research that revealed that, in a period of 12 months, 92 babies suffered serious brain injuries caused by shaking (Harrison 2000).

The campaign’s message, aimed at parents overly stressed by crying infants, was: “Before you cross that line, stop.” Posters showed happy images of parents cuddling babies. Captions underneath read: “By bedtime she wanted to shake him like a rag doll”, and “That night he felt like slamming her against the cot”. For three weeks advertisements were shown on prime time television, supported by 7500 billboards and the distribution of one million leaflets.

Four secondary prevention campaigns

In this section four secondary prevention campaigns are discussed.

A campaign targeting businessmen

A notable example of how a mass media campaign can target a particular group of people was run in the United States in 1994. Brown (1994) reported on a campaign, “Children: An investment that’s guaranteed to grow”, that targeted businessmen:

“This spring’s major ad campaign to prevent child abuse won’t picture a bruised toddler or an out-of-control parent. It will show a stack of books on business.

And it won’t move you to tears. Instead it will suggest you see children much as you might view a stock portfolio – an investment, as one of the ads says, ‘that’s guaranteed to grow’.”

The advertisements for this campaign were displayed on television during baseball games, in *Money Magazine*, *Fortune* and *Newsweek*, and on public transport.

This “investment” campaign followed a previous campaign that encouraged parents to turn to family, friends or a help line for support before they hurt their child (Brown 1994):

“In a TV spot, a parent yells in the background, ‘Can’t you do anything right?’ and ‘How’d you like a reason to cry?’, while the announcer urges parents to seek help . . . ‘This is one time a few words can’t hurt’.”

This campaign was found to be successful in getting the message across to many women. Surveys revealed, however, that richer and well-educated men believed that “what happened in their families was nobody’s business but their own” (Brown 1994). The follow-up campaign was thus designed to reach businessmen.

Violence - You can make a difference

Godenzi and De Puy (2001) describe a campaign launched by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters working cooperatively with Canadian Government Departments of Health, Justice and Defence. Focusing on violence against women and children, the campaign included radio and television commercials, information leaflets outlining both facts about violence and tips on how to deal with it. Tips addressed “managing anger, helping abused persons, devising safety plans, coping with family violence, and getting help” (Godenzi and De Puy 2001: 460).

The campaign also raised and addressed the issue of media violence. It further specifically targeted potential or current abusers by asking questions such as: “Do you always have to be the one in charge? Do you blame your partner for everything that goes wrong?” These questions were followed with strategies that help to control one’s feelings and information on ways to access professional assistance (Private Broadcasters On-Air for Canada 1996).

The Western Australian “Freedom from Fear” campaign, and the Missouri ParentLink campaign “When you’re under the influence, they’re under yours.”

The *Freedom from Fear* campaign in Western Australia targeted male perpetrators of domestic violence. As noted in the introduction to this paper, five media strategies used in mass media prevention campaigns were identified prior to the campaign’s implementation. They are “criminal sanctions”; “community intervention”; “social disapproval”; “consequences”; and “help available” (Donovan et al. 2000). Through formative research which involved interviewing domestic violence workers, the organisers of this campaign found strategies four and five to be the most effective for their campaign. Perpetrators were concerned about the impact of their violence on their children, and they were interested to know how to seek help.

ParentLink, a collective of Missouri agencies in the United States, similarly uses these strategies in their media campaign *When You’re Under the Influence, They’re Under Yours: “When he gets to work, he sees a poster with this same caption. He begins to wonder about his drinking and its impact on his children. For more information, he calls ParentLinks’ Warmline . . . he has an opportunity to problem solve over the phone, and learns more about his substance abuse and its impact on his family. He obtains materials to read and information about substance abuse counselling programs in his community.”* (Mertensmeyer and Fine 2000: 261)

A campaign targeting people from non-English speaking backgrounds

King et al. (1999) report on a New South Wales campaign, “First aid for Scalds”, primarily involving advertisements on ethnic radio and ethnic newspapers, designed to reach people from non-English speaking backgrounds, specifically Vietnamese, Chinese and Arabic. While similar campaigns have been successful in educating the English-speaking community about prevention and treatment of scald injuries to children, clearly there is also a need in a multi-cultural society such as Australia to ensure that everyone gets exposure to campaign messages that are culturally and linguistically appropriate. King et al. (1999: 105), drawing on Meiser and Gurr (1996), suggest that: “Multicultural radio (community and government sponsored), television, multicultural print, translated materials, community networks, and family and friends have all been identified as significant information pathways for people from non-English speaking backgrounds.”

Evaluation of the campaign, through before and after telephone surveys, revealed that the campaign was successful. The knowledge of all three groups had increased, though there were differences in absorption of the campaign material by the three targeted groups. Greater exposure to campaign material appears to

have resulted in greater campaign effectiveness in the Vietnamese community. King et al. (1999: 107) conclude that: “This initiative provides a model of how community based injury prevention can target several language groups, with adjustments in messages and media according to cultural differences. It illustrates the success of this approach, as well as the significant variability between groups.”

IMPACT OF OTHER MEDIA ON PERCEPTIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse is now increasingly the subject of television dramas, documentaries, films, and live theatre productions. Some of them, characteristically controversial, have attracted comment in the literature and have been reviewed in the print media (Campbell 1989; Donovan 1992; Scott 1993; Hellen 1998; Musiel 1999; Pristel 1999; Edwards 1999). Television programs are often followed by information about where victims and offenders/potential offenders can seek help, and phone numbers to ring (helplines) are often displayed.

Discussion about the impact of these types of media on the public’s perception of child abuse and on efforts to combat the abuse of children presents both positive and negative comment. The following discussion presents some examples and commentary.

“Families” – an Australian television series on disruptive child behaviour and family adjustment

Sanders et al. (2000) at the University of Queensland, evaluated *Families* – a 12-part prevention-focused television series “designed to provide empirically validated parenting information in an interesting and entertaining format” (2000: 940). The series presented a parenting model, suggesting strategies parents could use with their children. It aimed to reassure parents that it is normal for parenting to be challenging, and it hoped to increase parents’ confidence that positive changes in children’s behaviour were achievable. The series also aimed to increase awareness in the community of the importance of “positive family relationships” to the positive development of young people (Sanders et al. 2000).

This “media-based television series” was considered to be successful, specifically in relation to its impact on increasing the parenting confidence of mothers. However, Sanders et al. (2000: 945) concluded that the impact of the series could have been increased: “by the strategic provision of service support systems, such as telephone information contact lines or parenting resource centres, which could be advertised as part of a coordinated media strategy planned to coincide with the airing of the television program. These services could provide information and back-up resources, such as parenting tip sheets, to parents seeking further advice after viewing the program. Staff at these centres could also identify and refer families who may need more intensive help.”

“Edutainment”

Donovan (1992) insists that “edutainment” incorporating educational messages in television soap-operas and drama requires very close liaison between writers, producers and experts in the field, such as child sexual abuse counsellors. Moreover, according to Donovan (1992: 30): “Documentaries and feature articles should not relate solely to child abuse but should deal also with family and child welfare issues. They should include positive modelling behaviours as well as highlighting unacceptable practices and the consequences of these unacceptable practices.”

Cooper, Roter and Langlieb (2000) report on an initiative on United States television called *Following ER*. Designed to provide factual follow-up information on medical and social issues dramatised on *ER*, the popular television program, *Following ER* forms part of the evening news. Cooper et al. (2000: 225) state: “The prime time link is maximised by prefacing the segments with a brief rendition of *ER*’s distinctive theme music and a relevant video clip from the show . . . *Following ER* borrows some of the intensity and action of *ER* to build a context for prevention news stories.”

Links of this nature may make some prevention information more appealing thus maintaining audience attention to, and retention of, messages (Cooper et al. 2000).

A screenplay by the BBC

It has been suggested that sometimes “drama reaches the parts the documentary cannot” (Campbell 1989: 44). Writing about *Testimony of a Child*, a BBC screenplay that presents “the other side of the Cleveland child sexual abuse saga – the story of an abused child going home to [the] abuser”, Campbell argues that sexual assault “presents television with terrible problems. Television is about seeing. But it censors what we need to see if we are to understand because it bows to propriety and thus contains what is knowable . . .” (Campbell 1989: 45)

Despite this, Campbell (1989: 45) notes the power of fictitious drama based on fact to: “invite you to think: what would you do if faced with that child’s face, his fantasies full of terror and death, his starvation, his stubborn silences, his sore bum. And what would you do if those riddles were amplified by his little sister showing you a sexual relationship with a daddy dolly?”

A television documentary

A documentary screened in the United Kingdom in 1992 entitled *Beyond Belief* claimed to show new evidence of satanic/ritual abuse in Britain. Following the program, helplines were overloaded with calls from people who had experienced sexual or ritual abuse. Counsellors noted that: “The program appeared to have given callers permission to speak of their experiences and their gratitude that someone, somewhere took what they said seriously.” (Scott 1993: 249)

Henderson, a fellow at Glasgow University’s mass media unit, as quoted by Hellen (1998) commented that:

“A lot of people who have suffered child abuse quite simply lack the vocabulary, because of shame or fear, to come to terms with what has happened. Provided a drama does not place blame on the child, it can be very helpful.”

Films for child sexual abuse prevention and treatment

Some writers promote film as being helpful in education about child abuse. In her review of 17 films for child sexual abuse prevention and treatment, Byers (1986: 545) argues that: “Filmmakers have provided a vehicle that in some ways surpasses any other in the ongoing endeavour to educate children and adults in the prevention of child abuse.”

Film presents the opportunity for various issues, such as children’s stories not being believed, perpetrators not being punished, and painful experiences of child sexual abuse being remembered, to be brought to life. The impact of these issues on the people involved may be powerfully explored.

However, some writers express concern that with the increasing numbers of dramas and books concentrating on child sexual abuse and paedophilia there are “dangers either that we become comfortable about the crime and start to regard it as acceptable, which it must never be, or that we become hysterical” (Rantzen, founder of ChildLine in the UK, as quoted in Hellen 1998).

Live theatre productions

In 1993, two plays opened in New South Wales within a month of each other. Reporting on a controversial play entitled *Cold Hands*, Armstrong (1993: 11) argued that the play: “...portrays a week in the life of a 12 year-old girl . . . sexually assaulted by her father and . . . pregnant. The play’s focus allows the audience to gain an insight into the child’s fear and trauma, the father’s feeble rationalisation and defence, and the mother’s fear of confronting the truth.

Armstrong noted that the New South Wales Child Protection Council showed professional interest in the play and that plays have been used as part of child abuse awareness campaigns. The play’s director, Ritchie (as quoted by Armstrong 1993: 11) remarked that: “The play is powerful, dramatic, presenting practical and emotional reality. It is confronting, but it emphasises the fact that there is no excuse. Ever.”

The second play entitled *In Relation to Inadmissible Evidence* was written by Helen Zigmund. Between the ages of four and a half and five and a half, Helen had been sexually abused by her parents’ gardener. Helen hoped that the play would: “open the issue up for debate . . . I want [the audience] to have listened, to have borne witness . . . in theatre the monodrama is a wonderful medium for exploring the random, chaotic thoughts of a person trying to come to terms with something like this” (Zigmund, as quoted by Evans 1993: 19).

Documentaries as part of a mass media campaign

“Some secrets you have to talk about” – Western Europe

Hoefnagels and Baartmann (1997) have documented a mass media prevention campaign in Western Europe. This campaign, which was directed at children, aimed to increase disclosures of abuse. It began with the screening of a television program entitled *Some secrets you have to talk about* and this became the campaign’s slogan. The initial television program was followed by 20 other programs and documentaries on the subject of child sexual abuse. The campaign also included television commercials, newspaper and magazine articles, stickers, billboards, leaflets and booklets. The campaign ran for nine months. Phone calls to ChildLine services promoted as part of the campaign almost tripled as a result of the campaign. Mass media clearly influenced the process of disclosure (Hoefnagels and Baartmann 1997). However, as is the case in many social and political climates where child sexual abuse is prevalent and short term media campaigns are run, Hoefnagels and Baartmann (1997) noted that the resources needed to meet the needs of abused children continue to be deficient.

Media campaigns that raise awareness of child abuse and neglect may only be effective if supported by at least a corresponding increase in human and material resources to address the problem.

“Questions 2: Killing Tomorrow” – New Zealand

A recent documentary, screened in New Zealand in 2001, graphically depicts the lives and abuse of three children (played by actors). During the documentary, a Detective Inspector informs the audience that the drama is based on the lives of real people, and the audience is told how life turned out for the children and their abusers.

“Only those with ice in their veins could fail to be moved – and there lies the problem. In each case, one adult or more had failed to take responsibility for the safety of a defenceless child” (Herrick 2001). Reporting in *The New Zealand Herald*, Herrick asks: “What can programs like this possibly expect to achieve? Twenty years ago, polite society didn’t even acknowledge abuse existed, let alone talk about it. So shows like this, which provoke thought and discussion, must be a sign of progress, even if the statistics say otherwise. Killing tomorrow was punishing if compelling viewing.”

Supported by New Zealand’s child protection authority, Child Youth and Family Services (CYFS), consider documentaries like “Killing Tomorrow” to be a powerful way of educating people about the issues and what can be done to protect children. “We want to create an environment where child abuse is less able to exist and we’re pleased Screentime-Communicado has decided to help raise these serious issues” (Brown, CYFS chief executive quoted in *The New Zealand Herald* 28/11/01).

After the program was screened there was a panel discussion of the issues presented in the documentary and CYFS booklets that provide tips on parenting were made available to the public. Child protection received 211

phone calls during the documentary and on the night it was screened. Fifty-three child abuse investigations resulted, five of which cases were considered “very urgent [and were] assigned immediately to social workers for investigation” (Ward, CYFS spokesperson, quoted in *The New Zealand Herald* 30/11/01).

Also quoted in the *New Zealand Herald* 30/11/01 was Simcock, the National Social Services spokesperson: “The documentary showed community groups were doing their best on the issue but government measures were sadly lacking . . . the most helpful thing the government could do was to change the law that allowed parents to hit children.”

While the documentary appears to have raised awareness of child abuse and prompted some people to act on their suspicions of abuse and neglect, Henare, a Child Abuse Prevention Services spokesperson, noted that “the objective of the documentary would not be reached without enough money for community providers” (quoted in *The New Zealand Herald* 30/11/01).

PLANNING AND EVALUATING MASS-MEDIA EDUCATION AND PREVENTION CAMPAIGNS – THE WAY FORWARD

Child abuse is a community problem and as such it ought to be everybody’s business. However, as noted above, as part of the ongoing campaign by Australians Against Child Abuse, *Every child is important*, Quantum Market Research found that: “Child abuse, as a serious social problem, is poorly understood by the public on a number of levels including its true extent and nature . . . only 4 per cent of respondents accurately estimated the size of the problem, 29 per cent of respondents underestimated the problem by at least 90,000 reports” (Tucci, Goddard and Mitchell 2001: 3).

These results, a good example of what Freimuth, Cole and Kirby (2001: 476) describe as “formative research or evaluation”, confirmed “the need for a major community awareness campaign to better inform the public about the problem of child abuse” (Tucci, Goddard and Mitchell 2001: 22). Research, such as that carried out by Quantum for Australians Against Child Abuse is integral to a successful campaign. Social marketing principles, which incorporate such research, are increasingly recognised for their relevance to campaign planning and evaluation.

Social marketing

The social marketing model has much to contribute to planned mass communication campaigns (Windahl, Signitzer and Olsen 1992). Successful commercial marketing involves an “exchange process” that results in the satisfaction of the needs of two or more groups of people (Kotler 1972). Communication thus plays a significant role: an offer is communicated to the client based on essential information received by the seller about the client’s “needs, wants and resources” (Windahl et al. 1992: 95).

Social marketing uses commercial marketing techniques “to advance a social cause, idea or behavior” (Kotler 1982: 490, quoted in Windahl et al. 1992). Indeed, commercial marketing practices may be applied “to the analysis, planning, execution and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of their society” (1995, quoted in Hall and Stannard 1997: 8).

New Zealand’s *Breaking the Cycle* child abuse education and prevention campaign, begun in 1995, was the first to successfully apply “social marketing as a social work intervention to change abusive parenting behaviours . . . increasing awareness and self-reported behaviour change, especially with Maori and Pacific Islands people” (Hall and Stannard 1997: 11). These writers (1997: 8-9) summarise the seven key elements of Andreason’s (1995) social marketing model (which was used in the *Breaking the Cycle* campaign) as follows:

- Consumer behaviour is the bottom line: learning new information is only important if it leads to the desired behavioural outcome (raising awareness and changing attitudes may be steps in this direction).
- Programs must be cost-effective: limited resources must always be used wisely in the social services arena.
- All strategies begin with the client: rather than attempting to make an audience accept and carry out the marketer’s values and beliefs, practitioners of social marketing recognise clients will only change their behaviour when they believe it is in their interests. It is therefore essential to start with an understanding of the target audience’s needs and wants, its values and its perceptions . . .
- Interventions involve marketing theory’s classic “four Ps” [see below for explanation].
- Market research is essential to designing, pre-testing and evaluating intervention programs.
- Markets are segmented: initial research inevitably points out how different the client groups are and highlights the limits of mass marketing. (The use of a budget will impact on the ability to segment markets.)
- Competition is always recognised: every choice of action by the client involves giving up some other action. What the client sees as major alternative behaviours must always be kept in mind so the deficiencies of these alternatives can be highlighted and the benefits of the new behaviour promoted.

Windahl et al. (1992) note that unlike commercial marketing, social marketing: often targets less accessible segments of the population; operates in a less competitive environment; promotes products and services that are freely accessible to those who need them; often challenges powerful interest groups, such as the tobacco industry; may promote a product or behaviour that the message’s recipient is reluctant to accept, such as a low fat diet; and may produce a demand for a product or service which remains unmet due to an insufficient supply /lack of available resources.

As noted above, the “classic” marketing approach is to focus on the four Ps – product, price, place, promotion. Windahl et al. (1992), drawing on McCarthy (1975) and Solomon (1989), contended that successful social marketing strategies should focus on *five* Ps, these are:

Product . . . a thing, an idea, a practice, or a service.

In a child abuse prevention campaign, the generic product would be child safety and wellbeing; the specific product might be reporting suspicions to child protection services, seeking help from various sources, or valuing and appreciating children. The target audiences may be likely perpetrators of child abuse, children, mothers, fathers, and/or professionals who come into contact with children.

Price . . . what is paid by the buyer in exchange. For example, various personal costs, such as lost time, income and clients, may deter mandated professionals from making a report of suspected child abuse to child protection authorities. However, the benefits to the child and to the community may counterbalance personal costs, as may the avoidance of a penalty for failing to report suspected abuse (see Goddard, Saunders, Stanley and Tucci 2002).

Place . . . the channel through which the product, service or idea is made available to the target group.

Promotion . . . the communicative/persuasive activities used to create awareness of the product among the target group . . . in Solomon’s words, it involves “activity reaching out to the right people with the right message at the right time in order to obtain the right effects”. Promotion must be adapted to its target public.

Positioning . . . refers to how the receiver perceives a product relative to other products.

A campaign designed to enhance people’s attitudes and behaviour towards children and young people, and to increase the availability of supports to children and families, might effectively stress the economic saving and social prosperity to the community resulting from a decrease in child abuse and neglect. Legal sanctions may need to be imposed to ensure a community approach. Campaigns to introduce mandatory reporting of child abuse are one example in the field of child protection.

In addition to the “rational interplay” of these five “P” strategies, Windahl et al. (1992: 98) argue the importance of “goal-setting” in social marketing. Generally, they suggest, the goal is “social change”, and they cite Kotler’s (1982) typology of social change, with examples (example in italics related to child protection: Saunders and Goddard):

1. Cognitive change

- campaigns to increase recognition of high pollution levels in an area
- campaigns to inform people of what refugees experience
- *campaigns to increase people’s knowledge of child abuse and neglect, and awareness of its incidence*

2. Action change

- campaigns calling for people to demonstrate against pollution
- campaigns asking people to sign petitions on behalf of political refugees
- *campaigns involving people in consultations about issues affecting children and young people and writing up an agenda for change to be given to relevant government authorities.*

3. Behavioral change

- efforts to make people routinely recycle paper and glass
- efforts to prevent prejudiced behavior against families or political refugees
- *efforts to encourage people to speak respectfully to children and to use non-physical means of disciplining children*

4. Value change

- efforts to convince people of the value of clean air and water
- efforts to create values in favor of the actions of political refugees.
- *efforts to encourage people to value children and respect their rights to integrity and protection from harm*

Windahl et al. (1992: 102) draw on literature reviews conducted by Rice and Atkin (1989) and Rogers and Storey (1987) to highlight the following factors as potential contributors to a campaign's success.

- *Mass media* may be successful in increasing public knowledge and awareness of issues. However, mass media is unlikely to change behaviour.
- *Interpersonal communication*, especially among peers and social groups, may instigate and maintain desired behavioural change.
- *The characteristics of the source or medium*, for example, credibility is important.
- *Formative evaluation*: "research carried out before the implementation of a health [or other social issue] communication campaign in the mass media" (Freimuth et al. 2001: 476) (see below for further discussion).
- *Campaign appeals* that are "specific rather than general in order to appeal to the values of individuals. For example, appeals in an AIDS campaign should stress the danger to the individual rather than referring to abstract national health standards" (Windahl et al. 1992:102).
- *Preventive behaviour*. As the benefits attributed to prevention may not become apparent in the short term, "delayed benefits must be related to immediate ones" (Windahl et al. 1992:102).
- *Timeliness, compatibility, and accessibility*. Educative messages will be most effective when they occur at the right time, are culturally appropriate, and are transmitted through channels that are accessible to those whom they are intended to reach.

Importantly, "campaign objectives and criteria for success should be reasonable" (Rice and Atkin (1989), cited in

Windahl et al. 1992: 102). Despite inherent difficulties, including resource constraints, "public communication campaigns . . . typically set higher standards for success than the most successful commercial campaigns" (Rice and Atkin 1989: 10)

In answer to the question: "Can communication campaigns succeed?" Windahl et al. (1992: 113) confidently cite Mendelsohn (1973) who suggests that the success of a campaign will depend on whether: its goals were "realistic" given that target groups will probably have only minimal, if any, interest in the campaign's message; "interpersonal communication" was considered along with mass communication (see, for example, Griffith, Mathias and Price 1994); and the target population was segmented and addressed in light of "their mass media habits, lifestyles, value and belief systems, and demographic and psychological attributes".

Recommendations for a national media campaign

Donovan (1992) completed a plan for a national, integrated, comprehensive media campaign aimed at the prevention of child abuse. The recommendations (Donovan 1992: 15) stated that:

"Media campaigns, both through mass and localised media, and through in-home (for example, TV, radio) and ex-home (for example, posters, cinema) media, should be directed to the general community, parents, children, perpetrators, victims and indirect professionals.

A wide range of media approaches should be used, including advertising, community service announcements, publicity (for example, feature articles and documentaries), and 'edutainment' (that is, the deliberate inclusion of educational messages in entertainment vehicles such as TV soap operas).

Media campaigns can serve a number of roles, but primarily: (1) placing the issue on the community's agenda; (2) framing the issue; (3) eliciting reports of abuse; (4) directing individuals to sources of assistance/further information; (5) changing social norms; (6) modelling appropriate and inappropriate behaviours; and (7) increasing the awareness of the target audience with respect to their own behaviour, and hence increasing the likelihood of the individual assessing his or her own behaviour and their self responsibility for such behaviour."

Using media campaigns focusing on the sexual assault of children as an example, Donovan (1992) draws on Finkelhor to note that child sexual assault is a behaviour that is both pre-meditated and planned, rather than impulsive. Media campaigns are therefore presented with a "window of opportunity" (Donovan 1992: 23). This "window of opportunity" is the time that lapses between a sexual abuser's thoughts and calculations in relation to the act of assault and the actual abusive episode. Media messages targeted at potential abusers during this lead time may, it is suggested, prevent initial or repeat abuse: "We need to target perpetrators when

they are in the initial stage of planning a sexual assault, and we need to focus on the rationalisations they use to remove the usual inhibitors to child sexual abuse" (Donovan 1992: 66).

Evaluation

McGuire (1981: 69) argues that: "Any undertaking as important and expensive as a public communication campaign should have evaluation procedures built into it." Further, as noted by Bauman (2000), clear guidelines for evaluation are required because mass media education and prevention campaigns "consume much public resource, but we do not always learn from them".

In order to evaluate the degree to which a mass communication campaign achieves its goals, it will be necessary to first identify the dependent and independent variables impinging on the outcome. Freimuth et al. (2001: 476) maintain that "a common set of variables is considered in the development of a mass-media campaign and that one can expect a common set of outcomes as a result of the communication experience". They identify four broad areas under which to organise the campaign's independent variables, the combination of which constitutes the "campaign strategy". These are: the psychosocial attributes of the receiver; the source or spokesperson; the settings, channels, activities and materials used to disseminate the messages; and the message itself, including content, tone, type of appeal, audio characteristics and visual attributes.

Additionally, Freimuth et al. (2001: 476) contend that "the outcomes or dependent variables of a mass health [or other] communication effort may be categorised into six broad areas – exposure, attention, comprehension, yielding, attitude change and behaviour".

The evaluation of a mass communication strategy, according to Freimuth et al. (2001), ought to occur in three stages which they term "formative research or evaluation", "process evaluation", and "summative evaluation". Drawing largely on Freimuth et al. (2001) a brief summary of these stages follows. (Also see Wellings and Macdowell (2000) for a clear outline of the evaluation process.)

Formative research or evaluation

As noted above, this is the first stage in the process of planning and evaluating a mass communication strategy. This stage involves research aimed at accurately profiling "target audiences", and the piloting of "strategies" and "tactics" prior to their planned implementation (Freimuth et al. 2001: 476-477). The four independent variables, listed above, are fully explored at this preliminary stage to determine: "homogenous sub-groups or audience segments"; "predictors of behaviour" in these audiences, such as "self-efficacy, social norms or knowledge"; and communication strategies most likely to be effective for each particular target audience.

Regarding this last point on targeted strategies, possible considerations are confronting messages, perhaps

creating reactions in the audience of "fear" or shock. Alternatively, more comforting approaches may be more effective. Peers of the target group could communicate the message and model positive behaviours such as desirable parenting techniques. Further, the predominant visual images could be of happy, healthy children and families rather than scenes of domestic violence and the misery it produces in victims' demeanours (Freimuth et al. 2001: 477).

According to Freimuth et al. (2001: 478), the next step in stage one is to "pre-test" strategies to determine which ones will be most likely to achieve the campaign's objectives, and the information needed by the intended audience. Focus groups of individuals fitting the profile of a particular target audience, or one-to-one interviews, are organised at this point to "ensure the strategy is feasible, produces intended cognitive effects in a sample . . . audience and does no harm".

A note of caution is found in the research findings of Collins and Zoch (2001) in South Carolina. Formative evaluation may reveal that a mass media campaign is not the most effective direct strategy for reaching some groups of people in the community. These writers stress the need to establish, through formative research, the target audiences' media preferences and habits. In focus groups of predominantly poor adult-education students (aged between 18-65, mainly female, rural white and urban African American) Collins and Zoch (2001: 209-210) found that this group of people were "media savvy" in a negative way: "Unlike other groups they zap, zip, flip or change the station when they hear a pro-social message . . . 'I gotta listen when a teacher or minister tells me what to do, I don't have to listen to somebody on TV'."

Resistant to media influence, the main source of influence for this group of people are friends, family, government officials and religious or opinion leaders. Clearly, to reach this particular target audience, and audiences like them, campaign messages may need to target "the opinion leaders in the communities" where the target group live (Collins and Zoch 2000: 210).

Process evaluation

The next step advocated by Freimuth et al. (2001) is "process evaluation" which determines the extent to which a campaign unfolds as intended. Process evaluation occurs while the campaign is still running. The results of the evaluation may be used to change, improve or bring the campaign back on track.

Through process evaluation campaign organisers can monitor the stages and progress of the campaign. As a result they may more accurately attribute campaign successes or failures (apparent through summative evaluation) to various aspects of the campaign's strategy. A process evaluation will accurately document how the campaign was actually implemented.

As Freimuth et al. (2001: 480) make apparent, process evaluation enables the distinction to be made between a "bad" campaign and a "poorly implemented" one.

Summative evaluation

The final step in the evaluation process, “summative evaluation”, determines whether the campaign achieved its goals. Did target groups pay attention to campaign messages, and were their attitudes and/or subsequent behaviour influenced in the manner the campaign intended? “Even if a program is implemented as planned and desired effects result, these effects cannot be attributed to the intervention without evidence that the campaign reached the intended audience” (Freimuth et al. 2001: 482).

Methods suggested by Freimuth et al. (2001) to determine whether target groups heard and understood campaign messages include:

- conducting a random survey to discover if people know about the campaign;
- adding pertinent questions about the campaign to an already existing general survey;
- adding contact information to campaign messages so that target audiences can contact a helpline or address for assistance: “a burst of calls just after the airing of a tagged message almost certainly indicates that the audience attended to it” (Freimuth et al. 2001: 484); and
- requesting that recipients of calls to a helpline, and/or requests for services, endeavour to find out whether the target audience understood the campaign’s message(s).

Target group exposure to, and understanding of, print media is harder to determine and may prove to be expensive. Freimuth et al. (2001) identify before and after surveys as the most common means of summative evaluation to assess whether a campaign achieved its intended effect on target audiences. However, they point out that this method is often criticised as “the lack of a control group prohibits establishing a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the campaign and its outcomes” (2001: 484).

Despite this, campaign evaluators should strive to use the best methods of evaluation available to them: “Formative research, conducted early in campaign development, is the best way to find the right channels to reach the right audiences with the right messages, delivered by the right sources at the right times” (Freimuth et al. 2001: 486).

Problems inherent in summative evaluations of mass media campaigns include the tendency for people to give expected, socially more acceptable rather than honest responses to surveys. Alternatively, people may deny seeing a campaign strategy if they have not accordingly changed their attitude or behaviour. Also, messages absorbed during a campaign may be forgotten soon after the campaign has finished (Freimuth et al. 2001: 488). The greater effectiveness of ongoing campaigns rather than intermittent ones is clearly apparent.

What do we know about what messages work?

The Victorian Traffic Accident Corporation (TAC) advertisements are continually conveyed to the Victorian community as a means of cutting the road accident and fatalities toll. Their most recent television advertising campaign, begun in November 2001 and part of their “Wipe off 5” campaign to curb speed, uses a law enforcement approach which warns speeding drivers that they are more likely than ever before to get caught and face hefty penalties (Heasley 2001; Mickelborough 2001). The advertisements are backed by the introduction of new cameras strategically placed and without identifiable flashes. Research undertaken prior to the introduction of the new campaign revealed that, while more than 50 per cent of drivers admitted to speeding, only 38 per cent of drivers expected to be caught.

As reported by Masanauskas (2001:23), Dr Ian Johnston, director of Monash University’s Accident and Research Centre, contends that: “Scare campaigns won’t cut the road toll without increased enforcement . . . while mass scare campaigns have been very successful, the road toll in Australia and other similar countries had stabilised . . . We’ve milked almost all we can milk out of [the campaigns].”

Previous TAC advertisements have presented clear, confronting messages about drunk-driving, speeding, and driving without a seatbelt. Slogans such as *If you drink then drive you’re a bloody idiot*, and *Don’t fool yourself, speed kills*, resound in people’s heads. These advertisements are presented in graphic detail. Pictures of mutilated bodies and mangled vehicles, combined with the sounds and expressions of grieving relatives defy ignorance of the reality of road trauma. Tomison (1995) contends that a child sexual assault campaign could adopt a similar approach. He cites McGurk (1995: 11) who envisaged a trial media campaign that would shock audiences with graphic scenes of family violence: “Confronting perpetrators with the grossness, grotesqueness and total unacceptability of their behaviour. For victims, the campaign would be directed at encouraging them to come out of the cupboard.”

As a secondary or tertiary prevention strategy, confronting campaigns such as this may work. Shaming potential and actual perpetrators through media campaigns may prove to be effective in helping to curb the incidence of premeditated abusive actions. As previously noted, “social disapproval” (Donovan et al. 2000: 80) is a strategy that may work for some target groups. Most people seek to behave in a manner that they believe to be socially acceptable, in line with current values and norms of behaviour. The prospect of public embarrassment brought on by behaving in a particular manner may act at least as an inhibitor to such behaviour. Again using the example of physical punishment of children, as society

increasingly views hitting children as inappropriate parenting behaviour, children are less often hit in public. However, much family violence occurs “behind closed doors” (Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz 1980).

For “shaming” to be effective in the prevention of family violence, campaigns would need to reach people to the extent that they feel ashamed of themselves for their behaviour, whether or not it is exposed to public recrimination. Constant reminders of public disdain for abusive behaviours, through campaigns highlighting “social disapproval”, may assist in this process. Drawing on DeJong and Atkin’s 1995 research on drink-driving campaigns, Yanovitsky and Stryker propose a “norm reinforcement” approach that attaches “a social stigma to unhealthy lifestyle behaviours by presenting those who perform them as individuals with poor self-discipline who have callous disregard for others” (2001: 231).

However, many incidents of physical abuse of children result from stressed parents losing control and hitting out (Hawkins et al. 1994; Saunders and Goddard 1998, 1999a,b). The abuse is not always pre-meditated. Indeed, it may be part of an established pattern of behaviour stemming from one’s own harsh childhood upbringing.

According to Hawkins et al. (1994: 35), for parents and carers in this target group: “Prevention of child abuse must . . . make good parenting easier. Assistance must be on tap and its availability promoted as part of the message . . . help rather than condemnation must be a central theme. If people are caught in a seemingly hopeless spiral of poverty, stress, depression or irritation, particularly if they have a ‘difficult’ or handicapped child, condemnation is not a positive approach, but an optimistic message can give them hope.”

More comforting educative campaigns, portraying happy healthy families, and adults “doing the right thing” in relation to children and adolescents, may be the most effective mass media prevention campaign strategy. Indeed, comforting campaigns may also be the better strategy when the target is the broad population and the goal is primary prevention of child abuse. “Much child abuse may be invisible, but many of the children who have been abused know only too well that many of us, including a succession of governments, would rather not see” (Goddard and Tucci 2002: 11).

Some people may be turned off when confronted by scenes of explicit family violence or even “inappropriate or abusive conduct” (Tomison and Poole 2000: 57). Such behaviour may seem too far-removed from what the average person perceives to be “normal”. While families may increasingly be aware of the problem of child abuse and neglect (though not its incidence (Tucci et al. 2001)), they may distance themselves from stereotypical images of perpetrators of family violence “pathologising them as mentally ill, abnormal or evil” (Tomison and Poole 2000: 57). As Hall and Stannard (1997: 7) learned through the evaluation of the New Zealand *Breaking the Cycle* campaign: “People are much more likely to identify themselves as

having difficulties with parenting than as child abusers, and they are more likely to seek information or help with their parenting skills.”

Examples of less confronting campaigns presenting more subtle, educative messages are the *Use Words That Help Not Hurt* NAPCAN 1995 campaign and the *Every Child is Important* AACA 2001 campaign. Continuous portrayal, in mass media, of positive parenting approaches and positive adult relationships with children and young people, may be an effective campaign strategy in the primary prevention of child abuse and neglect.

Public awareness of the reality of child abuse and neglect, including its most abhorrent forms, is also important to prevention. Media coverage of horrific acts of child abuse and neglect is inevitable. Such coverage, even when sensationalist, acts as a grim reminder to adults of children’s vulnerability and need to be nurtured and protected. In his article *Emotive Health Advertising and Message Resistance*, Brown (2001: 193) observes that: “Although the use of negative emotion may increase the salience and accessibility of campaign messages, there is also a risk that it may induce resistance toward those messages.”

Brown (2001: 197) suggests that, given the likelihood of message resistance to campaigns that arouse negative emotions: “Emotive components could be used more sparingly, be presented separately from the message, and avoid excessive focus on themes of guilt and remorse.” According to Brown, extensive pre-testing of campaign messages in focus groups will assist in determining whether emotive stimuli have the desired affect on audience cognition, attitudes and behaviour, or whether resistance is encountered.

CONCLUSION

Issues Paper 14, *Child Abuse and the Media* (Goddard and Saunders 2001), focused on news stories, feature articles and investigative journalism. In this Issues Paper we have concentrated on mass media education and prevention campaigns, television series, documentaries, and live theatre productions. Both papers demonstrate the media’s potential power to positively influence child welfare policies, community responses to children and young people, and societal acknowledgement of, and reaction to, child abuse and neglect. Both papers challenge those who are involved in child welfare and child protection to make greater efforts to understand media influences and to use the media constructively.

Society sometimes fails to recognise that children are the most vulnerable group in our community, and are thus in need of the greatest protection. The social and economic costs to societies that have not prioritised children’s needs, especially the prevention of child abuse and neglect, are well documented (see, for example, Levine 2001; Shanahan 2001; Forjuoh 2000; Courtney 1999; Plotnick and Deppman 1999).

The media's role in preventing child abuse and neglect is multi-faceted. The early "discovery" of child abuse is the clearest example. Without intense media exposure, Kempe's (1962) "battered child syndrome" may have remained largely unseen and unheard of. Children are not only the most vulnerable but their voices are often silenced, especially when the subject is child abuse and neglect. Examples of the media's ability to confront people with images and messages that they may not want to see and hear have been documented above. Investigative journalism also plays a less direct but nonetheless influential role in community education. And opinion pieces, such as Goddard (2002), are yet another means of educating both the public in general and professionals in particular about best practice.

Sustained community education and prevention campaigns, using mass media communication, are integral to the prevention of child abuse and neglect. These campaigns continually confront communities with the reality of child abuse. They challenge people, institutions, and governments to listen to children and to respond to the needs of all children and families, and particularly the special needs of children who have been abused or neglected. Further, sustained mass media exposure of child abuse and neglect may publicly censure and shame perpetrators, many of whom are relatives and adults well known to the victimised child.

However, to be effective, mass media campaigns will need to be part of a broader prevention program that includes the provision of supports and services for all children and families. A broad prevention program would reflect a society that recognises the value of children, respects children's rights, and optimises children's life chances. As argued by Windahl et al. (1992: 117): "Information or communication cannot resolve problems that are essentially caused by scarce resources, rather than a lack of knowledge."

There are limitations to what the media can achieve. Dennis and Merrill 1996: 87) purport that the media are "most powerful in furnishing information and setting agendas for members of a public . . . next powerful in impinging on the thoughts, opinions and attitudes of members of a public . . . [and] least powerful in affecting actions of members of a public."

Mass communication campaigns also have "a crucial role to play in setting agendas for professional, administrative and political leaders and decision makers" (Marcus, Owen, Forsythe, Cavill and Fridinger 1998: 375).

The nature of media influence is constantly changing. The power and ever increasing potential of the media, however, remains constant. Positive mass media communication waits to be tapped by those who advocate for children and young people. Mass communication may be a vehicle that constantly reminds people to value children and to respect children's rights. Moreover, mass media may be "an advocacy tool to achieve policy change" (Freimuth et al. 2001: 475), improving the status of children and addressing the physical and social conditions in which children and young people live.

According to Goddard and Tucci (2002: 11): "The agenda for our community – and the government which represents us – should be clear. The prevention of child abuse should be a priority. We have education campaigns which respond to problem gambling, speeding drivers, illicit drug use and drink-driving. Yet there has been no equivalent effort, at state or federal level, to prevent child abuse."

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Clearinghouse services

The National Child Protection Clearinghouse, at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, provides clients and stakeholders with a variety of services.

Research collection and library

The Clearinghouse has compiled and catalogued a comprehensive collection of the latest international and Australian child abuse prevention research and practice literature and resources. Materials are acquired in all formats – books, manuals, periodicals, newsletters, audio-visual materials and electronic resources. Training manuals and unpublished materials are also acquired.

Material housed by the Clearinghouse may be browsed at the Institute, or borrowed or obtained in photocopy format (where applicable) *via your own library*. For copyright reasons, photocopies cannot be provided by the Clearinghouse direct.

Help desk

A help desk is staffed during office hours to answer queries related to child abuse prevention, family wellbeing and child protection. Print-outs of database searches can be provided upon request. Queries can be addressed by telephone, fax, mail, email, or in person. Requests for specialised information are referred to the Clearinghouse Research Advisor, Dr Adam Tomison.

Contact the help desk. Phone: (03) 9214 7871;
Fax: (03) 9214 7839; Email: fic@aifs.org.au

Website

The Clearinghouse website (www.aifs.org.au/nch/) provides:

- information on Commonwealth and State and Territory initiatives;
- database of child abuse prevention program and activities in Australia;
- links to Australian and overseas websites;
- electronic versions of Clearinghouse publications; and
- news of forthcoming conferences and events.

Email discussion list

childprotect is a moderated list for the discussion of child abuse prevention and child protection research, policy and practice issues. Its aim is to promote the exchange of information and ideas between Australasian and other professionals working in the field of child abuse prevention and child protection. Participants include: child protection workers and other health and welfare service providers; professionals working in the criminal justice system, education and training or in policy and service planning; and researchers and information providers.

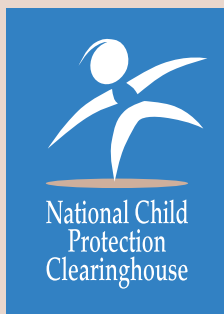
The *childprotect* list provides a forum for the notification or exchange of ideas on:

- research issues such as theory, projects and methodological issues;
- developments and strategies in child protection and child abuse prevention;
- best practice principles and broader family violence issues
- upcoming conferences and workshops; and
- new publications and online resources, links and websites.

To join the list, send a message to Majordomo@aifs.org.au with the following command in the body of your email message: `subscribe childprotect` (please leave the subject field blank).

Programs and activities database

The results of the National Audit of Child Abuse Prevention Programs (2000), undertaken by the Clearinghouse, have been captured in a searchable Child Abuse Prevention Programs database. The database contains 1244 entries with detailed information on the 1814 programs included in the Audit. The database is accessible via the Clearinghouse website (www.aifs.org.au/na2.html).



Become part of the child abuse prevention network!

The National Child Protection Clearinghouse at the Australian Institute of Family Studies serves as an interchange point for information, research and initiatives in the child abuse prevention field. It collects and distributes information, and aims for a two-way involvement with the community concerned with child protection. To participate in the work of the Clearinghouse:

- send us your materials relevant to child abuse prevention;
- complete and return a questionnaire on program activities relevant to child protection with which you are involved;
- join the National Clearinghouse mailing list – you will receive two newsletters and two issues papers free of charge each year.

Please fill in details overleaf ►



Clearinghouse publications

The National Child Protection Clearinghouse produces three types of publication – Issues Papers, Discussion Papers and Newsletters. These publications are available free of charge from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and can be accessed via the Clearinghouse website at www.aifs.org.au/nch/

Child Abuse Prevention – Issues Papers

- No 1. *Child abuse and neglect: incidence and prevention*, by Marianne James, 1994.
- No 2. *Domestic violence as a form of child abuse: identification and prevention*, by Marianne James, 1994.
- No 3. *Child abuse prevention: a perspective on parent enhancement programs from the United States*, by Marianne James, 1994.
- No 4. *Spotlight on child neglect*, by Adam M. Tomison, Autumn 1995.
- No 5. *Update on child sexual abuse*, by Adam M. Tomison, Spring 1995.
- No 6. *The intergenerational transmission of child maltreatment*, by Adam M. Tomison, Autumn 1996.
- No 7. *Child maltreatment and disability*, by Adam M. Tomison, Spring 1996.
- No 8. *Emotional abuse: the hidden form of maltreatment*, by Adam M. Tomison and Joe Tucci, Spring 1997.
- No 9. *Long-term effects of child sexual abuse*, by Paul E. Mullen and Jillian Fleming, Autumn 1998.
- No 10. *Valuing parent education: a cornerstone of child abuse prevention*, by Adam M. Tomison, Spring 1998.
- No 11. *Community-based approaches in preventing child maltreatment*, by Adam M. Tomison and Sarah Wise, Autumn 1999.
- No 12. *Evaluating child abuse prevention programs*, by Adam M. Tomison, Autumn 2000.

- No 13. *Exploring family violence: links between child maltreatment and domestic violence*, by Adam M. Tomison, Winter 2000.
- No 14. *Child abuse and the media*, by Chris Goddard and Bernadette J. Saunders, Winter 2001.
- No 15. *Child abuse and the internet*, by Janet Stanley, Summer 2001.
- No 16. *The role of mass media in facilitating community education and child abuse prevention strategies*, by Bernadette J. Saunders and Chris Goddard, Winter 2002.

Child Abuse Prevention – Discussion Papers

- No 1. *Child maltreatment and family structure*, by Adam M. Tomison, 1996.
- No 2. *Child maltreatment and substance abuse*, by Adam M. Tomison, 1996.
- No 3. *Child maltreatment and mental disorder*, by Adam M. Tomison, 1996.

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The National Child Protection Clearinghouse Newsletter, *Child Abuse Prevention*, is produced twice yearly to keep members up-to-date with new information and provide a forum for ideas.

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