

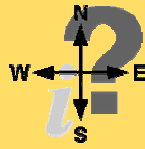


*Media and mental health issues:
building the capacity of the mental health
sector.*

Outside In Conference
Sydney 2009.

*Marc Bryant
The Mindframe National Media Initiative
Hunter Institute of Mental Health
Newcastle, Australia.*





***Positive Versus Negative
experiences with media
reporting about mental
illness?***





Why should the media consider the ways they cover mental illness?

- Research shows for many people Media is primary source of information about mental illness.
- Mental illness tends to be portrayed negatively in the mass media, according to national and international research.
- Such reporting may contribute to negative stereotypes, stigma and discrimination.
- It is important to minimise negative portrayals of mental illness as the presentation of positive images does not appear to balance negative media portrayals.



Why involve the mental health sector?

People involved in mental health and suicide prevention:

- Are a valuable source of **expert** information for the media
- Have specialised expertise and/or first hand experience of mental illness and suicide prevention
- Can 'model' principles of best practice reporting e.g. terminology, language
- Can **advocate** for the principles of responsible reporting



*What are the challenges
working with media for your
organisation?*



Working with the Media – Issues to consider.

- Consider whether to participate
- Provide expert comment
- Provide help seeking information
- Avoid negative stereotypes
- Use appropriate language
- Involvement of consumers carers (case study)
- Refer journalists to www.mindframe-media.info



These are the issues Mindframe encourages people involved in mh to consider when working with the media.

Read thru

We shall take a brief look at each of these. As I go through these, please remember that even if you aren't ever called upon to talk to the media per se on behalf of your organisation or group, you can still support others in your organisation to do so and work towards

Consider whether to participate.

- Does this story even need to have a wider audience?
- Do we have a media policy and who is our authorised media spokesperson(s)?
- Will this story benefit community understanding and/or promote help seeking? What might be the impact of saying 'no'?



•If the media contacts us to provide information is for story (often when we least expect it !), our first consideration is actually to do with WHETHER we participate or not . It will be a case of finding out as much as we can about the story, considering the pros and cons of getting involved and making a decision on that basis.

•We need to ask ourselves the following:

•Who is the most appropriate organisation/person to make comment – is that us or is it somebody else and can we refer it on?

•Do we have a media policy and who is our authorised media spokesperson(s) – for people here who work for a govt org, you would be likely to have a media policy in addition to a communications or public affairs unit. For ngos and smaller organisations this may or may not be the case.

•Will this story benefit community understanding or promote help seeking – will this story potentially include information on where to go for help, highlight risk factors or warning signs or include information which debunks the myths?

•What might be the impact of saying no? consider whether the story will be published with or without our input ? Is the journalist going to seek information from a less reliable source?

•Remember even negative stories can provide an opportunity for education - such as help line numbers or other information.

Provide expert comment.

- Who are the qualified people in our organisation or network and what is their area of expertise?
- Seek opportunities to debunk myths
- Are they familiar with *Mindframe* key issues?



Under MF, one of the things we tell journalists is to seek access to mh experts.

In terms of your responsibility and what you can do to prepare for being contacted by the media n

- Compile a list of qualified people in the organisation and their area of expertise
- Ensure spokespeople have access to MF resources – perhaps the resources could be showcased at a staff meeting or brought to their attention by managers. Most people (even experts with a lot of experience) do feel nervous about speaking to the media so these resources may help them to feel more supported in the role
- Seek opportunities to debunk myths about mi or suicide - as we know MI is still widely misunderstood in our community and myths are entrenched so we should seek any opportunity to debunk these myths. Use every minute with the journalist as an opportunity to debunk the myths! Even if they don't include all the info you provide, it may still influence the tone and angle of the story – hopefully to one which is more positive and compassionate .
- Refer journalists to appropriate local or national experts if necessary - The MF website lists names and numbers of national experts available for comment.

Provide help seeking information

- Media reports can create distress and induce vulnerable people to harm themselves but they may also prompt such individuals to seek help. In light of this, it is a good idea to
- Provide help line numbers - suggesting to the journalist that Helpline numbers be included at the end of a story is simple way to reinforce to the audience that help is available.
- The website and resource book lists lots of help line numbers for this purpose.

Provide the most up to date and accurate help seeking information

- Provide advice about who to talk to – GP, mental health service, friends and family, support services
- Provide help line numbers and websites (examples)
 - **Lifeline** – 131114
 - **Beyondblue** – www.beyondblue.com.au
 - **Bush Crisis line** – 1800 805 391
 - **Kids help Line** -1800551800
 - **Mensline Australia** -1800 600 636



Avoid negative stereotypes.

- Encourage inclusion of information that presents a balanced view of the topic or the event you may be promoting
- Use your promotional opportunities to dispel common myths about mental illness

“Mentally ill people are more violent and we should lock up folk with mental illness”

“People with mental illness can’t hold down a job”



•We need to consider the TYPE of information we provide to the media to ensure that it does not serve to reinforce damaging stereotypes such as those which suggest people with mental illness are unable to work, parent, recover or lead fulfilling lives. As people with expertise in mh we are in a position to challenge such stereotypes!

•How might we do this?

•Encourage inclusion of information that presents a balanced view of the person. I actually saw a good e.g. of this recently where a regional paper reported the tragic death of a young man with bipolar disorder, following his discharge from hospital, but article also mentioned that the young man had been a loving son and a successful businessman well respected by the community.

•Dispel myths about mental illness and violence. Sadly, there is still sometimes a tendency for the media to unnecessarily highlight a persons mental illness in a story about violent crime . We are in a position to question the relevance of including this information all together and/or direct the journalist to point the body of evidence around this issue. Does anyone know the number one risk factor for violence – male, followed by substance abuse. As we know vast majority of people with mi have no hx of violence.

Use and encourage media to use appropriate language – mental illness

- Avoid negative or outdated language (e.g. deranged, mental patient, mad).
- Use positively phrased descriptions – for example, say is “being treated for” or “currently experiencing” rather than “suffering from” or “afflicted with” a mental illness.
- Avoid labels e.g. ‘schizophrenic’, ‘anorexic’
- Use simple terms and avoid jargon



The research says that reporting that includes detailed description or images or method and/or location of a suicide has been linked in some cases to further suicides using the same method or location. E.g. the Gap in Sydney, in years gone by emerged as ‘popular’ places for people to take their own life.

As such its advisable to avoid discussing such details and discouraging use of visual images. When you speak to the journalist say to them you would prefer that information not be included (explain why) or at least mentioned in only very general terms.

Provide alternatives to specific descriptions, so that the act is described in only very general terms. Eg. Took their own life in a hospital room v used her bed sheet to hang herself from the ceiling fan. Or He fell to his death from a local building rather than he jumped from the top floor of the Skyline building on Smith Street.

Encourage respect of cultural protocols - keep in mind that amongst some Aboriginal and TSI communities, there are cultural protocols around naming or showing picture or video of deceased persons. Doing so, can create significant distress for family and community

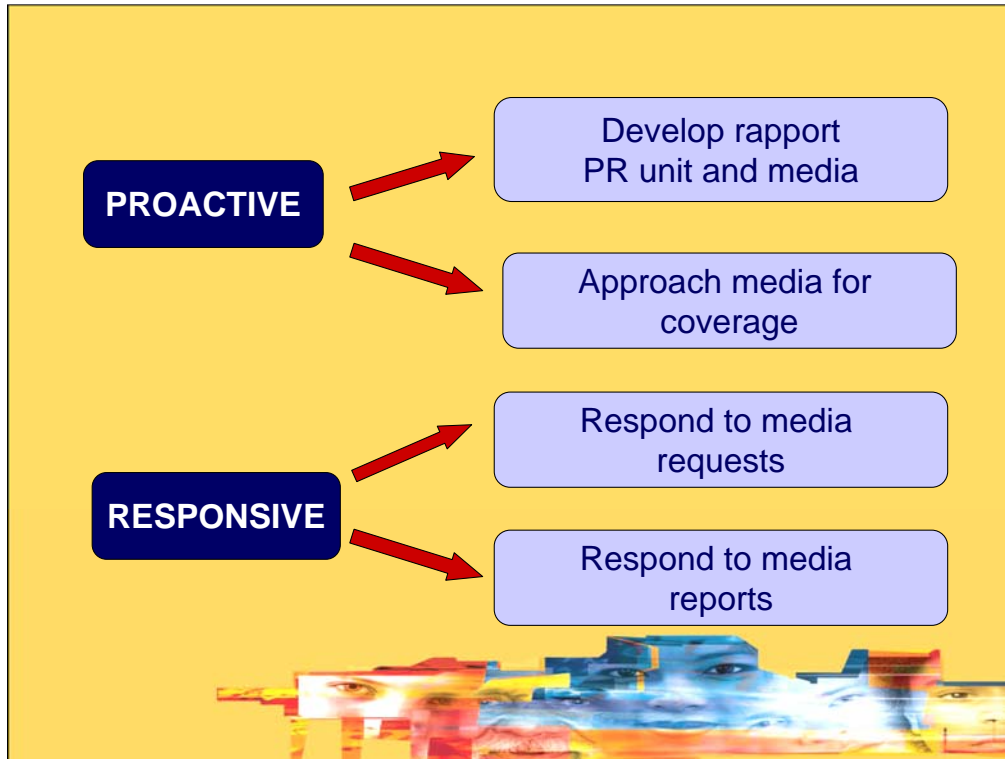
Involvement of consumers carers.

- If you are a consumer, seek support from an organisation that can provide media support
- If you are coordinating a consumer/carer spokesperson support them to make an informed decision about participation
- Ensure access to support during and after the interview



WORKING WITH THE MEDIA





Over the next few slides we'll explore a few ways we can consider working with the media. This is not media training per se – merely a few pointers from me as a novice in media work.

Broadly there are two ways in which we can work with the media.

1. Proactively – this is where we actively attempt to develop a relationship with local media – do they know you you are, do you know who they are , have you ever had a cup of coffee ?
2. Responsively –providing information for a story when the media come knocking on our door or taking action of some kind as a result of reporting (good and bad) that we see or hear. E.g. Stigmawatch.

Given this...

*Think about a mental illness proactive story
idea you want to promote?*





*Write down three
key messages
related to this
idea....*



Think about the type of media that is best suited to promote this message.



*•Community Forum-
Diversity of People- face to
face.*

- Radio- Community?*
- Television- Visual story*
- Print media- Local Story*
- Internal- Org. specific*
- Web page- Int. and Nat. interest*
- Newsletter- Community theme*



Resources for the mental health sector

- Resource book, Quick Reference Cards & website: www.mindframe-media.info
- Facts, stats & useful contacts
- General info and tips for working with the media
- “Issues to consider...”



- A suite of resources were launched in May last year to assist people involved in mental health to effectively work with the media and promote best practice reporting in keeping with the principles of MF.
- Has anyone seen the resources ?
- They include a website (the home page is illustrated here), a spiral bound resource book, and a quick reference card. The quick ref cards you will actually receive today – they are a summary of information contained on the website and resource book and one has also been developed specifically for AB TSI organisations.
- There are facts and stats about suicide and mental illness (useful for preparing media releases) in addition to general info about the media and tips for working with them (newcomers to media wk will find handy!)
- There are some key issues to consider when it comes to talking to the media around mi and suicide which we have talked about. These guidelines complement closely those provided to journalists under Mindframe and are based on the research evidence regarding the effects media reporting mental illness and suicide.