

Study: Māori and Asian family violence portrayed more negatively in media

September 23 2021, by Harini Dissanayake



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Media stories about Māori and Asian victims of family violence—where death resulted—used language that was significantly more negative, compared with stories on European victims, according to an analysis of

946 online articles published by NZ media outlets. The research also revealed that victims aged 65-plus were strongly under-represented in media coverage. In general, however, the proportion of victims in each ethnic group generally corresponded well to the proportion of front-page articles written about them.

Our study found that elderly victims (65 years of age and older) of [family violence](#), which resulted in death, are strongly under-represented in terms of the [media](#) coverage afforded to them. This finding supports an array of other research studies that have reached similar conclusions. For instance, Beard and Payne (2005) found that coverage of elder abuse in the newspapers was far less than the level of prevalence of this crime, whilst Payne et al. (2008) describes how sexual abuse crimes committed against [elderly people](#) are almost completely excluded from national news media.

The lack of media coverage afforded to elderly victims of family violence which resulted in death is all the more concerning given that as many as three in four cases of elder abuse in Aotearoa New Zealand go unreported. With this in mind, it is no wonder that elder abuse has been dubbed the 'silent problem that affects thousands of elderly Kiwis.' Further, our study found that there is a significant difference in the sentiment of the language used within articles written about Maori victims of family violence, which resulted in death in comparison to European victims.

Whilst in the context of the current paper, we cannot say that this is an indication of an unfavorable bias within the media toward either of the aforementioned ethnicities, previous studies on related topics have been far more unequivocal. For instance, in analyzing a cohort of articles concerning child abuse from three of Aotearoa New Zealand's largest newspapers, Maydell (2018) found that the dominant construction within these articles was of child abuse as a "Maori issue." This was achieved

through individual framing, focused on the personalities of the perpetrators and their inferred innate characteristics (such as being prone to violence and being dysfunctional by nature), which were further generalized to Maori society as a whole. Such criticisms are not unique to Aotearoa New Zealand media. For instance, Smith (2003) and McCallum (2007) both suggest that media coverage of family violence within [indigenous communities](#) is often used to depict the entire community as complicit.

In particular, McCallum (2007) investigated the media coverage of family violence in indigenous Australian communities and found that such coverage was employed to present aboriginal Australian people as innately backward, characteristically violent and a risk to national social stability. Whilst our study found that Pasifika victims of family [violence](#) which resulted in death were strongly underrepresented in terms of the degree of (front page) [media coverage](#) they were afforded, the same could not be said of Maori victims.

More information: Harini Dissanayake et al, Family violence in the news: an analysis of media reporting of family violence in Aotearoa New Zealand, *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/1177083X.2021.1976224](https://doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2021.1976224)

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