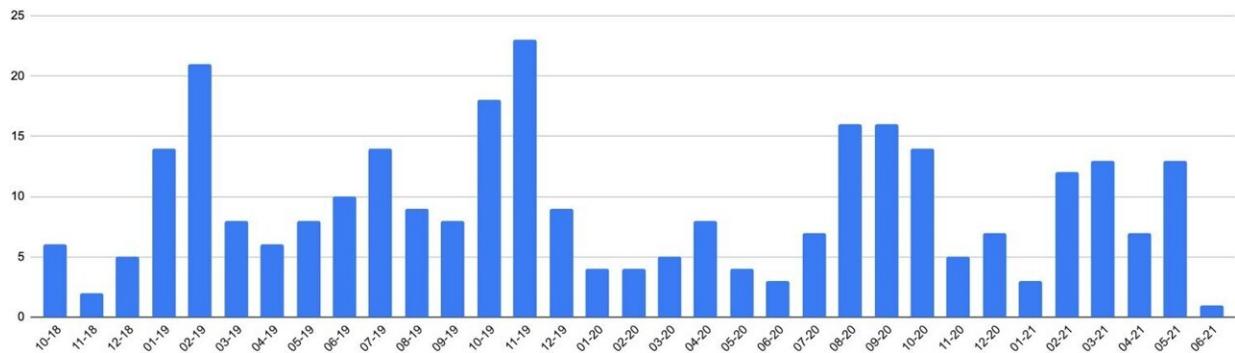


Older people need a stronger media voice, say Australian study

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National news distribution of aged care coverage. Note: Journalists at national news outlets wrote an average of 9.18 articles per month focused on aged care during the 33-month period from October 2018 through June 2021. The range was from 1 (in June 2021) through 23 (in November 2019). Credit: *Journalism Practice* (2023). DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2023.2215237

If news organizations in Australia created a 'round' for reporting on aging and aged care issues, the often-marginalized sector would be better represented, and entrenched ageism potentially less prevalent say QUT researchers.

Their research also suggests that the voice of politicians and other 'elites' are given much more attention as media sources than people in aged care, aged care staff or the families of older people.

Who or What Gets Referenced by Whom, How Often, and in Which Ways? Exploring Journalists' Sourcing Practices in the Context of Aged Care Coverage has been published in *Journalism Practice*. It's an analysis of which sources journalists at four national news outlets (The Saturday Paper, The Guardian Australia, The Australian, and the ABC) used in their news coverage of the aged care sector during the first half of the Aged Care Royal Commission (1 October 2018—31 December 2019).

Its authors are Dr. T.J. Thomson, a senior lecturer with QUT's School of Communication and chief investigator with the Digital Media Research Centre, undergraduate research assistant Alex Phan, acclaimed poet and aged-care advocate Professor Sarah Holland-Batt (School of Creative Practice), Associate Professor Jen Seevinck (School of Design), Professor Evonne Miller, Director, QUT Design Lab (School of Design), and MPhil student Sam Regi (School of Design).

"Without an exclusive focus on a [particular topic](#) or audience, journalists can only skim the surface and are forced to juggle stories related to aging in addition to their other duties and responsibilities," Dr. Thomson said.

"This in contrast to national news outlets like The Australian, The ABC, The Age, The Guardian Australia, and The Sydney Morning Herald, all of which have dedicated Indigenous affairs journalists and/or editors and in contrast to other Royal Commissions, such as the banking one, which benefited from coverage from more specialist reporters."

"While commercial media are especially impacted by deadline pressures and [limited resources](#) it does suggest news organizations view certain topics as more worthy of investment and attention than other topics and demographics."

"In Australia, news coverage of older people and the aged care sector are

overwhelmingly covered by generalist reporters or, for larger and better-resourced organizations, more specialized 'social affairs' journalists who, however, still have a relatively large remit that can include aging, disability, welfare, immigration, free speech, health, industrial relations, population policy and more."

Professor Sarah Holland-Batt said the way news media represents aging is critical in providing a window into a process that impacts on everyone and influences how the community regards older people and aged care.

"In looking at how journalists represent this demographic, sources are an essential component to journalistic reporting and are a critical determinant of its quality," Professor Holland-Batt said."

"Specifically, the study investigates six key questions on this: Who or what is used as a source? What is the proportion of elite to non-elite sources? What is the identifiability of sources? What is the number of sources per news story? What is the proportion of primary to secondary sources per story? And how are these aspects different for different news outlets?"

"Our results reveal journalists relied on elite sources, such as politicians, government and institutional sources, academics, and healthcare experts, in 79.7 percent of cases. Conversely, they relied on non-elite sources, including aged care residents, affected family members, and aged care workers, in only 20.3 percent of cases."

"That kind of ratio helps contribute to the dehumanizing of people in a very vulnerable position and does not reflect well on our society and what we value."

Dr. Thomson said past studies in Australia found journalists focus less on aged care compared to other topics and are more likely to show older

people in stereotypical or disempowering ways.

"Journalists here are also far more likely to focus on the economic or political implications of aged care compared to the social implications," Dr. Thomson said."

"There are many layers to this. As well as deadline pressures, the complexity of the topic, and the lack of specialized understanding, there are also difficulties with access to the [aged care](#) homes and facilities where older people live and with being able to interview older people who have dementia or other issues that can prevent them from sharing their stories."

Written as part of a Discovery Project—Amplifying Voices from the Royal Commission into Aged Care, Dr. Thomson said the paper originated from the Faculty of Creative Industries, Education, and Social Justice's Vacation Research Experience Scheme in late 2021 and early 2022, pairing undergraduate students with researchers to allow them to experience the research process.

"Undergraduate Alex Phan was the VRES Student Scholar on the project and instrumental in the coding process that made this study possible," he said.

More information: T. J. Thomson et al, Who or What Gets Referenced by Whom, How Often, and in Which Ways? Exploring Journalists' Sourcing Practices in the Context of Aged Care Coverage, *Journalism Practice* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2023.2215237](https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2023.2215237)

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