



## **What works in sharing research findings – for the public? Understanding VAWG in their communities**

### ***Who are EMPOWER?***

EMPOWER is a network of stakeholders delivering services in relation to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, and Northamptonshire. This network involves statutory bodies including police, crown prosecution service, local government, as well as third sector organisations that support survivors and perpetrators of these forms of violence. EMPOWER is a 9-month project identifying issues and co-producing projects to uncover and explore problems and potential solutions to VAWG. Future work will seek to ensure the sustainability of the network and undertake co-produced and co-designed research to develop effective solutions to the identified VAWG related issues.

### ***What key issues have been identified in this project so far?***

Five key issues were prioritised by stakeholders at the beginning of the project. These are:

1. Accessing and engaging in the criminal justice system
2. Multi-agency/Multi-systems
3. Education (intervention and training)
4. What works (using best-practice/evidence-based working)
5. Culture in the criminal justice system

Each of these issues was explored via a workshop including researchers and stakeholders, which led to the identification of mini-projects designed to explore the issue further.

This briefing summarises the *Communicating messages about VAWG to communities project* that emerged from Workshop 4 (What works).

### ***What were the key aims of this project?***

1. Understand how EMPOWER stakeholders are communicating difficult messages around the topic of sexual violence with the public.
2. What are examples of good practice, challenges and areas for development for public communication in the VAWG context?

### ***What did we do for this project?***

We interviewed two EMPOWER stakeholders to understand how they communicate with the public about key messages and campaigns. We asked them about their methods of communication, measurements of effectiveness and any challenges they faced in this area. We also reviewed literature for research on how to communicate messages in the VAWG context, good practice and recommendations for clear, impactful and engaging communications for sensitive topics.

### ***What did we find?***

#### ***Available methods for communication:***

- Social media: this has a wide reach for younger audiences (16-30yrs), can be shared daily and easily by users, and is cost effective.
- Organisation specific websites: direct access to the services available, can provide a platform for support services, but requires user going out of their way to reach the website and unlikely to have regular return traffic.
- Public advertising: examples include posters, trams, buses, fire engines. These can reach a wide range of audiences and do not require people to be online or searching for the information.



Figure 1. Tram and fire engine branded with Consent Coalition campaigns in Nottingham

- Research and communications often focus on the bystander effect <sup>6</sup> and engaging men as allies. <sup>6,7</sup>
  - A good example of this is the “You’re right, that’s wrong” campaign in Leicestershire, which both addresses the bystander effect and encourages men to act as allies in VAWG. See Figure 2 below.

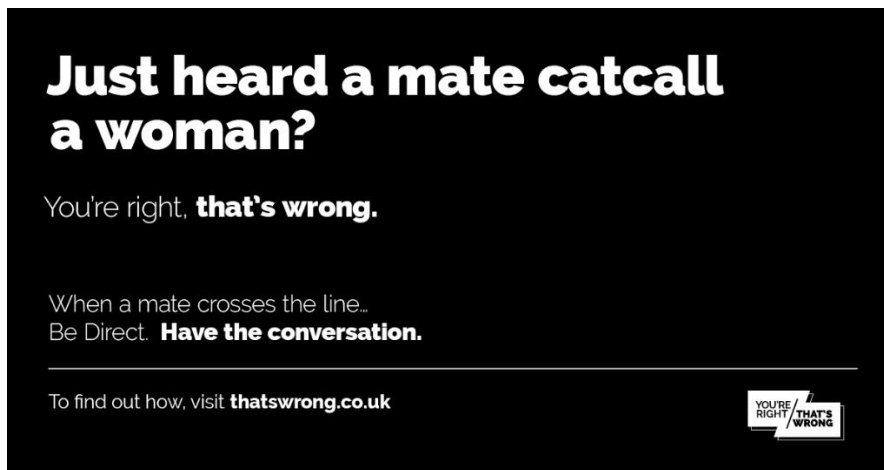


Figure 2. Poster from the You’re Right, That’s Wrong campaign in Leicestershire

***Assessing the effectiveness and impact of public communication:***

The literature noted the importance and value of social media for communicating and marketing to the public, namely the accessible analytics to show engagement and speed that communications can be shared and awareness raised, as shown during the #MeToo movement <sup>1,2</sup>

- The following analytics are available for:
  - Websites: frequency of site visits, number of pages viewed, bounce rate (i.e., going from website to support services), the effect of dates or events on website visits e.g., during the World Cup.
  - Social media: engagement with the platform, likes, interactions, comments.
- Results from these analytics can be used to guide future work, for example:
  - Rethink the delivery of campaigns that were not able to evidence effectiveness.
  - Produce extra campaigns for topics that had high engagement to emphasise key messages.

### ***Difficulties in public communication***

1. Difficulties of co-development: focus groups can be difficult to facilitate due to balancing different design preferences and the sensitive nature of topics.
2. Achieving 'buy-in' from important stakeholders: difficulties in getting colleagues and commissioners on board for the importance of openly talking about VAWG related issues and methods of communications, such as a heavy focus on social media to reach the intended audience.
3. Time and resource restrictions: getting the details, content and approvals for public communications are resource and time heavy, leading to delays and reduced frequency of communications.

### ***Improving the effectiveness of communications***

From the literature, there were 4 key factors that can be used to tailor and improve communications with the target audience:

1. The placement, time and formatting of a campaign is important. <sup>3</sup>
2. Gender of participant can significantly affect how a poster is received. <sup>4</sup>
3. The types of graphics influence reaction e.g., graphic portrayal, moderate images or cartoon. <sup>4</sup>
4. Analysis must be done throughout the campaign development, not just at the end. <sup>5</sup>

### ***What does this mean?***

The interviews showed pros and cons to different methods of public communication, including social media, organisation-specific websites and public advertising. A combination of these methods is likely to be most effective as it will widen the reach to different audiences. Analytics provided by online methods enable organisations to tailor and adjust future campaigns based on engagement rates of previous campaigns. Therefore, it is important to have a means and method to analyse effectiveness to understand how to strengthen approaches in the future.



A key factor that influences an organisation's ability to communicate with the public is the funding and time allocated to this role. In the interviews, one organisation had a designated team within the organisation tasked with creating, developing and analysing their public campaigns. In contrast, the other organisation hired an external company to complete the communications. There were noted differences in the time available for creating campaign content and publicly sharing this.

Understandably, the organisation that had an in-house funded team was able to produce more targeted and established campaigns, in comparison to the organisation who partnered with an external agency. However, this likely represents the situation for many organisations, especially third sector partners, where they are unlikely to have the budget for a permanent communication team. This highlights that, regardless of budget, both organisations ensured they were engaged with the public and their campaigns were reached by a number of people, albeit on a different scale.

Based on the findings of the interviews and literature review, below are the key take away points for effectively communicating with the public:

1. Use varied platforms and methods of communication to increase reach with a varied audience.
2. Analyse and review the project/message throughout the campaign, not just at the end.
3. Get support from other organisations and team for communication help where needed.

Thanks to all of our EMPOWER partners who contributed to this work.

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You can find out more about the EMPOWER project here:

<https://le.ac.uk/criminology/research/empower>.

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## References

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<sup>2</sup> Oleszczuk, A. (2020) Hashtag: How Selected Texts of Popular Culture Engaged With Sexual Assault In the Context of the Me Too Movement in 2019, *New horizons in English studies*, Vol.5(1), p.208-217.

<sup>3</sup> Igreja, V. (2018). Silence and visual representations of anti-violence campaigns in cosmopolitan Brisbane. *Anthropology in Action*, 25(1), 15-28.

<sup>4</sup> 2019 Shortland, N. D., Palasinski, M. (2019) "Mirror Mirror on the Wall, Which Is the Most Convincing of Them All? Exploring Anti-Domestic Violence Posters", *Journal of interpersonal violence*, Vol.34 (9), p.1755-1771.



<sup>5</sup> Potter, S. J., & Stapleton, J. G. (2011). *"Bringing in the target audience in bystander social marketing materials for communities: Suggestions for practitioners"*, *Violence Against Women*, 17(6), 797-812.

<sup>6</sup> Burrell, S. R, (2023) *"'Cause We're All Just Part of the System Really': Complicity and Resistance in Young Sportsmen's Responses to Violence Against Women Prevention Campaigns in England"*, *Sociological research online*, Vol.28 (2), p.336-354.

<sup>7</sup> Flood, M. (2011) *"Involving Men in Efforts to End Violence Against Women, Men and masculinities"*, Vol.14 (3), p.358-377.