



# Women invisible in media: report

**W**omen reach their shelf lives at just 35 as far as the Australian media are concerned and men over 35 are ten times more likely to be interviewed than women over 35. Similarly, if you are a woman between 18 and 34 in an influential position, you are half as likely to be interviewed as a young man in a similar position.

Despite the fact that women journalists and presenters are highly represented in the news media in Australia, women remain largely absent from news stories as interview subjects.

The fact that men and women are treated differently by the news media would come as no surprise but now we have the concrete evidence. It has been revealed in the Australian chapter of a Global Media Monitoring Survey, coordinated by Canada's MediaWatch organisation and launched at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing earlier this month.

The monitoring project - the largest of its kind ever conducted - set out to analyse major daily newspapers and television and radio news broadcasts in 71 countries on January 18, 1995. Each news program and newspaper was scrutinised for the inclusion of women - as authors of stories and as interview subjects - their ages and the issue discussed.

Among the Global report's major findings were the following:

- women make up 43 per cent of journalists and presenters but only 17 per cent of interviewees;
- around three quarters of news stories are from the 'core' areas of crime, economics, politics and sport yet women only make up 15 per cent of interviewees in these issues;

- 39 per cent of 'core' news journalists are women;
- women interviewees are almost twice as likely to appear in 'other' stories such as violence against women, child care, environment, arts and entertainment. 53 per cent of journalists in 'other' news are women;
- women journalists reporting politics and government make up 44 per cent, but women are only 7 per cent of those interviewed.

While Australia was found to have a substantially higher proportion of women journalists than Canada and the USA, it has a disproportionately low percentage of women interviewees (Australia 20 per cent; North America 27 per cent).

According to one of the coordinators of the project in Australia, Helen Leonard from the National Women's Media Centre, a major factor contributing to the low level of women interviewees in Australia was the male culture of the newsroom.

'There's an assumption by male decision-makers in newsrooms that it's not news unless it's a boy speaking,' Ms Leonard said.

'Women in journalism still believe that if you're not one of the boys and serve it up like the boys, then you

don't get your story up, and that has real career implications. There are centres of excellence like the ABC where women are doing much better but that's set against the vast commercial networks where there are some very unenlightened attitudes leading to superficial coverage from a male perspective.'

To break the routine, used as much by women journalists as men, some form of affirmative action needed to be taken, she said.

'If you can get more women into central positions within the decision-making structure, you are likely to get a more sophisticated debate.'

Ms Leonard said the growth of new media in Australia and the consequent development of new rules and guidelines relating to them, made it crucial for women to have central roles in policy formulation.

The National Women's Media Centre is recommending the establishment of a peak body within the Communications and Arts portfolio to provide advice and expertise to Government and other decision-makers and to facilitate women's contribution to the building of Creative Nation. □

*Copies of the report available from the National Women's Media Centre, PO Box 192, Camperdown NSW 2050. Phone: (02) 550 6734, fax: (02) 516 3158.*

