



PRESS RELEASE

**Asian Australian Lawyers Association calls on the legal profession to
“Choose To Challenge”**

12 March 2021

The Asian Australian Lawyers Association celebrates International Women’s Day 2021.

Whilst celebrating the achievements of our female members and all other female legal practitioners, AALA calls on the legal profession to “Choose To Challenge”, in line with the 2021 IWD global theme.

The Law Society of NSW’s 2019 National Profile of the Profession report found that in 2018, “for the first time in history”, female solicitors outnumbered male solicitors across Australia.¹

However, there is a stark underrepresentation of women at the law firm partnership level. The *Australian Financial Review’s* 2020 Law Partnership Survey found that female solicitors comprised just 30 per cent of the partnership at Australia’s large law firms.²

The underrepresentation of women at senior levels is more pronounced at the Bar. In 2018-2019, the Law Council of Australia found that women comprised 32 per cent of junior barristers and only 18 per cent of senior barristers.³

Moreover, at the Bench, the Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration found that in 2020, women comprised 38.8% of judicial officers across the Commonwealth, State and Territory Courts, although that percentage had increased from the previous year.⁴

Sexual harassment continues to be a significant problem in the legal profession, as in others sectors. A 2019 report from the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner (VLSB) found that from the participants surveyed, 36% of legal professionals have personally experienced sexual harassment whilst working in the Victorian legal sector, and that 61% of women and 12% of men have experienced sexual harassment whilst working in a legal workplace in Victoria.⁵

Molina Asthana, AALA National Vice President, said: “The continued lack of gender equality at senior levels of the legal profession, coupled with the severe underrepresentation of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, is a barrier to access to justice and a legal system that is truly representative of the community.”

¹ <https://lsj.com.au/articles/women-lawyers-outnumber-men-indigenous-numbers-lagging/>.

² <https://www.afr.com/companies/professional-services/women-partners-break-through-30pc-barrier-20201130-p56j7u>

³ https://www.lawcouncil.asn.au/publicassets/c0190b44-87f8-ea11-9434-005056be13b5/EBP%202018_19%20infographic%20Final.pdf?c1190b44-87f8-ea11-9434-005056be13b5

⁴ <https://aija.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/2020-JUDICIAL-GENDER-STATISTICS-v3.pdf>

⁵ Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner, ‘Sexual harassment in Victoria’s legal sector - Infographic’ (2020) <https://lsbc.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/VLSBC_infographic_final.pdf>



ASIAN AUSTRALIAN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

PROMOTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE LAW

“AALA calls on the legal profession to ‘Choose to Challenge’ the longstanding structural challenges that face women in the profession and beyond.”

“In particular, AALA calls on the legal profession to address the substantial issues of sexual harassment, bullying and discrimination that too often are significant obstacles to women’s fulsome participation in the law and in our society.”

“In this regard, AALA congratulates Grace Tame, 2021 Australian of the Year, for her courageous advocacy for legal and policy reform for survivors of sexual assault.”⁶

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⁶ <https://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/recipients/grace-tame/2297/>