

December
2010

Children's Views not in the News

Portrayal of Children in South
African Print Media
June, July and August 2010



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OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION FOR SOUTH AFRICA



Save the Children®

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Key Monitoring Findings.....	4
Methodology and Media Rating	6
Rating the Media.....	6
Limitations	7
Findings.....	8
Children in the media.....	8
Representation by publication.....	9
Children telling their own stories.....	10
Accessing and including children in their own stories	11
Type of stories in which children appear	12
Topics in children’s stories	13
Origins of children’s stories.....	14
Children’s Rights in the Media	15
Respecting children in headlines, images and text	16
Children’s rights respected	17
Observing ethical principles	19
Including information points.....	20
Representation of children in the media	20
Girls and boys in the media	22
Conclusions.....	26
Recommendations.....	27
Appendix I: User Guide	28

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Introduction

“A child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child.”
Article 28(2), Bill of Rights, South African Constitution

As the most vulnerable members of our society children are afforded special protection in the South African Constitution. Yet there is little mention of children in our Press Code. Save for a ban on the publication of child pornography, the South African Press Code fails to address the journalistic challenge presented by reporting on children. This is something that Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) wants to see addressed as part of the current Press Council review.

In the absence of regulation on how media reports on children it is up to editors and journalists to ensure that news is reported in line with children's best interests. Since 2003 MMA has been monitoring media performance in its reporting on children. While there have been improvements, the media report card still reads: “could do better.”

A child's rights to safety, privacy, education, health and dignity are of paramount importance. Children also have a right to participate and to voice their opinions, when it is in their best interests to do so. However achieving a balance between all of these presents a unique challenge for journalists.

Children are the most vulnerable members of our society, and so they are afforded special legal and constitutional protection. As a result it is sometimes easier for the media to “overlook” or forget that children have a voice.

Irresponsible journalism can have a serious and lasting negative impact on a child. It is perhaps understandable then that some journalists may choose to play it safe and consistently opt for adult voices, instead of taking the time to assess whether it would be in the best interests of a child to offer their opinion. However this approach ignores the views and voices of a sizable section of South African society - 39% of the population.

Coverage of children in the media is gradually improving. Children now feature in 12.7% of the stories monitored. But we are hearing their voices less, and this is a serious concern.

Key Monitoring Findings

1. The representation of children in the media remains at a low at 12.7%. It has been improving gradually; however, with children making up 39% of the population (South African Child Gauge 2009/2010), reporting is clearly not adequately representing this section of South African society.

2. We may be hearing a little more about children in the media, but we are hearing very little from them. Currently, of the 12.7% of stories in which children are mentioned, only 13% quote children either directly or indirectly. This has fallen since on our last report (14%) and it means that we are only hearing children's voices in 2% of all stories. This must be urgently addressed.

3. For every child related story, on average 1.3 children were involved or consulted. Since 2009 there has been no noticeable improvement in the number of children being accessed by journalists for stories in which they are involved. Considering that children should be the focus of many of these stories, this figure is disappointing.

4. Journalists rarely approach children directly for their views (6%). In most cases they are just referred to, often by age only (58%). In 17% of cases children are just photographed, in 13% they are only named and in 6% they are photographed and named.

5. Very few articles on children are in-depth analyses or features (4% down from 8% in 2009). The majority of stories on children fall within the category of hard news (60%). This trend needs to be challenged so that children's issues and concerns can be better addressed in longer and more in-depth articles.

6. 7% of stories monitored clearly violated the rights of children either by directly or indirectly identifying a child when it was not in their best interests. Examples of when this could occur include naming a child abuse victim, a child witness to a crime or a child offender. The marked increase in this figure since our last report may be partly explained by MMA's revision of its assessment criteria to ensure and improve their accuracy.

7. Children's rights are sometimes sacrificed as a result of media's desire for poignant photographs, captivating headlines and tantalizing copy. In 84% of cases both headlines and articles were found to have clearly respected children's rights. Unfortunately it falls to 49% when it comes to images, and when taken together, an article, headline and image were in children's best interests in just over one third of cases.

8. Personalities/Profiles, Education and Justice System are the three most reported on topics when it comes to reporting on children. Collectively, this makes up 47% of all stories in which children are mentioned. The upsurge in personality and profile pieces featuring children (25%) may be explained by the large number of stories on soccer stars or other celebrities meeting or working with children during the World Cup

9. The coverage of race is now largely representative of the racial demographics of South Africa. Girls and boys are represented almost equally in the media. However representation of race and gender still lends itself to stereotyping.

10. Saturday Star scored highest in terms of quantity of stories published on children (25%), and came out number 1 in a qualitative assessment of its overall representation of children (as evaluated with the DRIVE criteria-see methodology below)



Methodology and Media Rating

This quarterly report by the Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) has monitored 13 of South Africa's major news publications for content on children for a period of three months (from June-August 2010). Daily and weekly newspapers were standardized to produce the same monitoring result.

Of a total of 28,154 monitored stories, 3,571 (12.7% of all news stories) dealt with children.

Each story that was identified as having mentioned or referenced children (either by means of an article, picture, headline or caption) was assessed by media monitors using a customised monitoring tool (MMA's User guide has more detail – see Appendix 1). The research results provided an interesting insight into how the South African media represent children.

Our last report, published in August 2010, covered a period of nine months. However to facilitate a more accurate comparison, this report will refer to the results from the last three months of that period (from March-May 2010).

Rating the Media

MMA has applied its Media Rating System (MRS) method - used to highlight the best performing media during elections as well as reporting gender based violence - and developed one specifically for reporting on children and the media to enable individual media performance to be evaluated. The DRIVE criteria, outlined below was used to rate the monitored newspapers on their representation of children and their issues.

Diversity of Children:

Are children represented in a range of different roles – and not just as victims of crime and abuse? Children from a diversity of ages, races, regions and different genders should be represented in a clear and fair manner.

Rights Respected:

Are the child's rights respected? Identification and representation should always be done with the child's best interest in mind. Including context and giving additional useful information contributes to the protection of children's rights.

Issues Covered:

Is a diversity of issues covered? The media should include news that is relevant to society and reflects the complexity of children's lives (such as health and education).

Voices Heard:

Have the children been approached directly or otherwise included? Whenever it is in their best interests, children should be accessed by the media as this adds to the credibility, relevance and representivity of the story.

Ethics:

Reporting on children requires paying careful attention to respecting their rights, including their right to confidentiality and anonymity. This requires strict adherence to journalistic codes of ethics as well as the relevant laws.

Each item was monitored and then performance was rated under each of the DRIVE criteria. By applying a specially developed weighting system, the following ratings were revealed, with Saturday Star performing the best overall, coming in 1st place:

Medium	Rights Respected & Ethical	Voices Heard	Issues in Depth	Diversity	Overall Rating
Saturday Star	1	1	6	1	1
The Star	2	4	4	2	2
Daily Sun	4	2	1	4	3
Sunday Times	5	3	5	9	4
The Citizen	7	8	7	3	5
The Times	8	7	11	5	6
Sunday Independent	9	5	13	7	7
Sowetan	13	6	3	6	8
Mail & Guardian	6	11	9	11	9
City Press	10	10	2	10	10
Sunday World	3	12	12	13	11
Business Day	12	13	8	8	12
Sunday Sun	11	9	10	12	13

Table 1: Media Rankings

Limitations

During the three month monitoring period, articles on the World Cup featured prominently in the news.

Only major publications, predominantly from Gauteng were considered for this study. This meant that all 13 monitored newspapers were in English. Letters and advertorials were excluded from the monitored items.

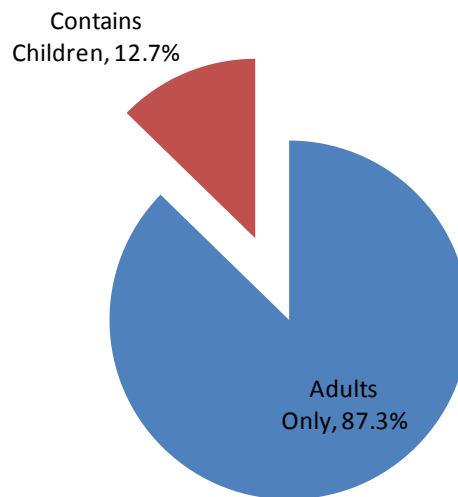
All monitors received the same training and applied the same user guide. Still, the possibility of minor human errors cannot be entirely discounted.

Findings

Children in the media

Of the 28,154 articles that were monitored, 3571, or 12.7% dealt with children. This represents a small increase since the last monitoring period, a difference of less than a percent.

Figure 1: Sources in stories



Sources in stories	03/10-05/10	06/10-08/10
Adults Only	88.1%	87.3%
Contains Children	11.9%	12.7%

Table 2: Stories in the media

However when viewed in the context of MMA's research results from the last year (August 2009-8.4%, May 2010-11.9%, August 2010-12.7%) there appears to be a positive trend in which media is gradually increasing its coverage of children. However, as children account for more than one third (39%) of the population in South Africa, this number is still too low.

Representation by publication

The extent to which children were represented in the various monitored newspapers varied considerably, from featuring in a quarter of all content to just 6%.

Saturday Star came out on top, with 25% of its content involving children. It is interesting to note that both in terms of our qualitative rating system, and in this quantitative research, Saturday Star leads the board for this period.

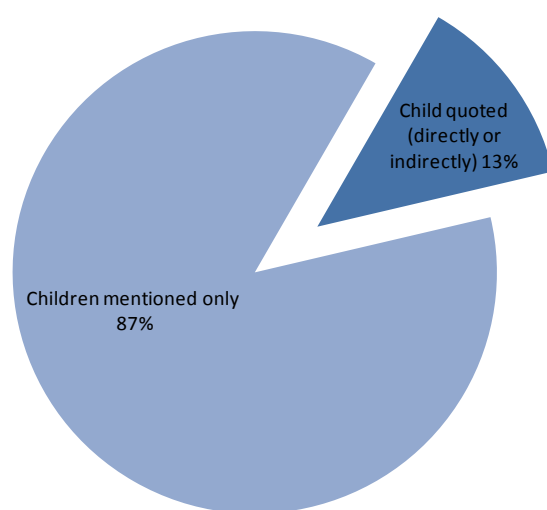
Medium	June to August 2010
Saturday Star	25%
The Times	19%
The Star	16%
Daily Sun	15%
City Press	14%
Mail & Guardian	13%
Sunday Times	12%
The Sunday Independent	11%
Sowetan	10%
Sunday World	9%
The Citizen	9%
Sunday Sun	7%
Business Day	6%

Table 3: Children's Stories covered by medium

Children telling their own stories

We are gradually beginning to see more stories about children being published, but that doesn't mean we are hearing more children's voices in the media. Unfortunately in stories about children, we hear from them only 13% of the time. That is staggeringly little. It means that even when stories are about children, adults frequently speak on their behalf.

Figure 2: Children Quoted



More worrying still is that media behaviour is getting worse instead of better. The percentage of children accessed by journalists has dropped from 21% in August 2009 to 14% in May 2009, and further to 13% in August 2010.

Similarly in 2003, an average of 2.4 children were accessed per children's story. Since then that figure has almost halved. In MMA's research from 2009 and May 2010 and now from August 2010, just over one child was accessed per story (1.3 children per story)

So why are we hearing so little from children themselves? It needs to be acknowledged that accessing children is often challenging, and even when it is in their best interests, speaking to children requires journalists to spend more time and to employ specific skills.

While these factors may contribute to less children being accessed, it means that all too frequently their voices are suppressed by those of adults. This can happen when an adult (for example a parent or teacher) speaks on a child's behalf, or where a journalist may simply assume they know how a child feels about a certain issue. This fails to acknowledge that children have a right to express their own opinions, and to participate in issues that concern them, when it is in their best interests to do so.

Accessing and including children in their own stories

MMA acknowledges that approaching children can be a difficult task for a journalist. A concerned parent or guardian may be reluctant to allow media access to a child, and sometimes with good reason. It may not always be in the best interest of a child to be accessed or identified in the media.

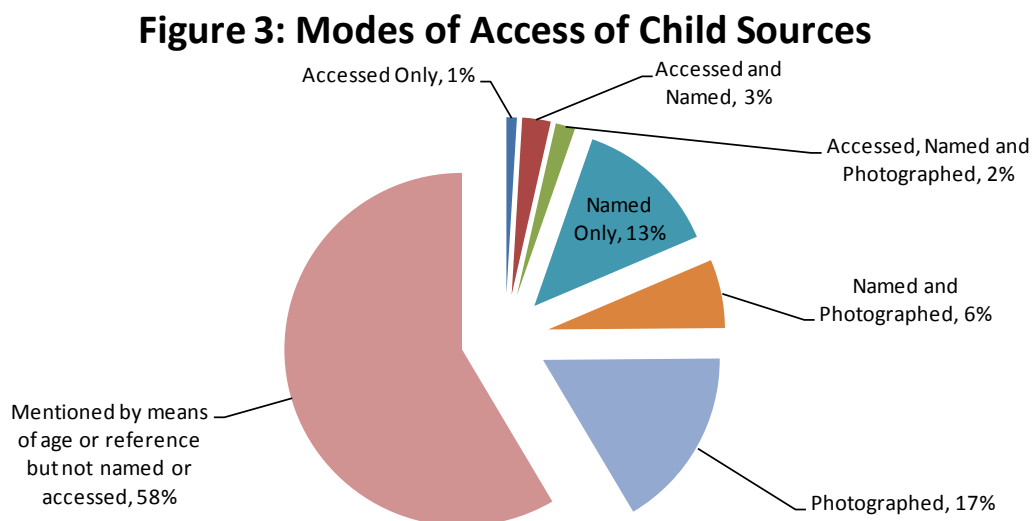
This is best avoided in cases where:

- The child is a witness (this includes all victims) or accused (perpetrator) of a crime.
- There are disputes around maintenance or care proceedings for the child.
- The child can be identified as living with HIV or AIDS. However, the child may be identified if the child and guardian have given informed consent and it is demonstrably in the best interest of the child.
- The child might be exposed to harm, stigma, victimization or suffer similar injustices.

However, that there are instances in which a child should not be accessed does not mean children should never be interviewed or identified by journalists. It is at times a challenging and delicate balancing act. But when it is in the best interest of a child, their participation can enhance media content, frequently offering fresh insights and new perspectives.

Too often though, journalists shy away from this challenge, silencing children's voices even when there is no justifiable reason to do so. A common trend is for journalists to merely refer to children by citing their gender or age rather than consulting them. This creates the impression that the child is immaterial to the story.

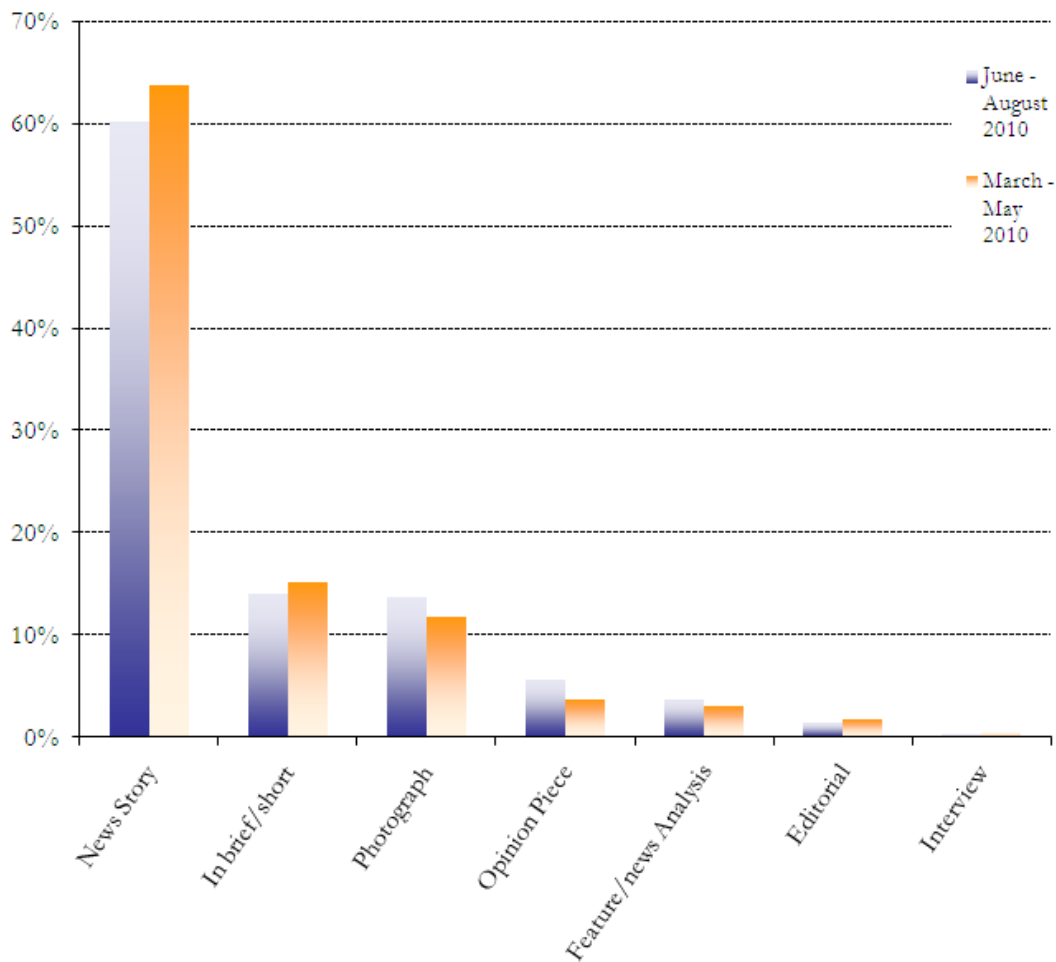
In 17% of cases, children were only photographed, a difference of 3% since our last report. Children were simply named in 13% of stories, and they were accessed directly by journalists in just 6% of cases.



Type of stories in which children appear

The majority of children featured in the media are predominantly seen in hard news stories (60%), abbreviated news stories or briefs (14%) and in photographs (14%). The percentage of children referred to in hard news stories and briefs has gone down since our last report, while the figure has gone up for children appearing in photographs. Despite some improvements, the continued over-representation of children in hard news stories suggests that they are frequently portrayed as helpless victims.

Figure 4 : Types of Stories on Children



In a positive development, there has been an increase in the percentage of opinion pieces that deal with children, although it is starting from low baseline. It has gone from 2% in 2009, to 4% on our last report, and it now stands at 6%.

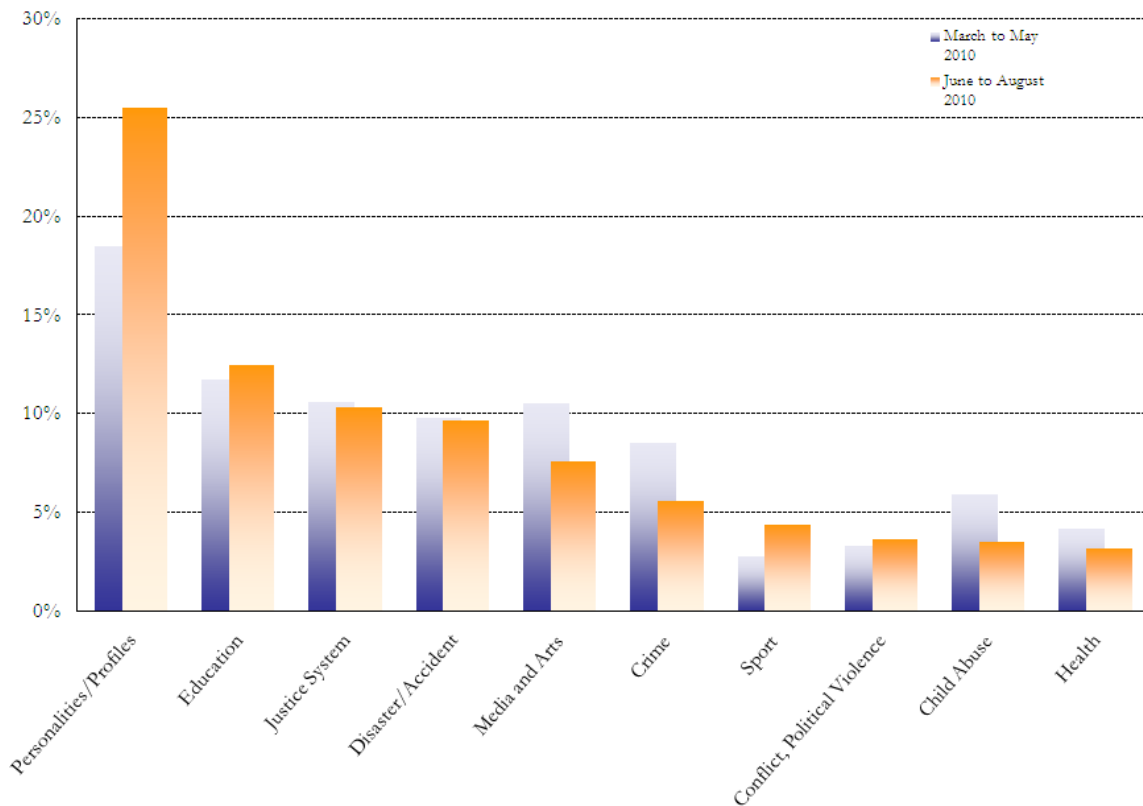
Despite this growth in opinion, that children rarely appear in features or in depth analysis articles continues to be a concern. The percentage of feature/analysis pieces that include children has halved since 2009, falling from 8% to 4%, though it has improved a little since our last report where it stood at 3%.

If children’s issues are to be addressed in a meaningful way, and if they are to be placed firmly on the agenda, they need to be the focus of more opinion pieces, more features and more in-depth analysis articles.

Topics in children’s stories

It seems clear that large scale events have an impact on the types of stories that are published involving children. For example, the World Cup took place in South Africa during this monitoring period, and it seems the most likely explanation for the dramatic upsurge in profiles or personality pieces featuring children. This style of article now represents a quarter of all stories published involving children, up from 18% in the last monitoring period. During the World Cup sports stars and celebrities participated in a number of initiatives involving children and this may go some way towards explaining the increase.

Figure 5: Topics



Education was the most popular topic in stories dealing with children in our last report. Though it has now dropped into second place, the percentage of children’s stories about education has remained strong - at 12%. This is not surprising however, as there was a teachers strike during the monitoring period which received a lot of coverage.

Stories featuring children that deal with the justice system and disasters or accidents have remained at similar levels since our last report. This highlights that children are frequently and consistently portrayed as “victims” in the press.

On a positive note, the percentage of stories about children and crime has fallen quite dramatically. In 2003 it was the most common topic in children’s stories, at 18%. That figure fell to 10% in 2009, to 8% in May and it now stands at 6%.

Regrettably however, a positive trend identified in our last report, the noticeable increase in the number of stories on children and media or the arts, has failed to continue into this monitoring period. The percentage had doubled in our May results – reaching 11%, however that figure has now fallen to 8%

Origins of children’s stories

Whilst the publications that were monitored are based in Gauteng, a considerable number of stories originated from a variety of locations. The breakdown of where news comes from is very similar to our last report.

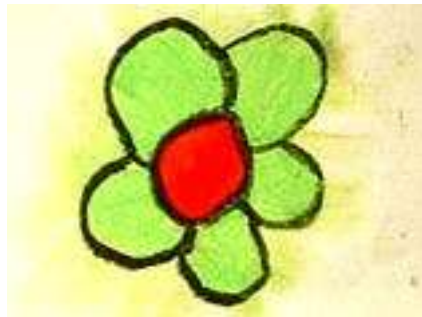
Origin	March to May 2010	June to August 2010
Gauteng	32%	34%
International	26%	27%
National	21%	18%
KwaZulu-Natal	3%	3%
Western Cape	4%	3%
Africa	3%	3%
Mpumalanga	3%	3%
Limpopo	2%	2%
North West	1%	3%
Eastern Cape	3%	2%
Free State	2%	2%
Regional	1%	1%
Northern Cape	0%	0%
Provincial	0%	0%

Table 4: Origin of stories

Topics dominating Gauteng based stories on children included disaster / accidents, the justice system and personalities and profile. The latter appears to be linked to the World Cup. Personality and profile pieces also dominated international stories about children, and featured prominently among National reports as well.

It is positive that children featured so prominently in these pieces, both at home and abroad. However children's involvement in these stories is often relatively superficial, with the reports arguably more about the adult icons present rather than the child participants.

That children also featured in many stories about disasters or accidents or the justice system in Gauteng suggests that there is a strong trend towards depicting children in the province as "victims."



Children's Rights in the Media

As vulnerable members of society, children are afforded special rights and protections, under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the South African Constitution and in legislation. For its part the media has a responsibility to ensure that reporting on children is consistently professional and ethical.

As this section shows, the media generally fulfils this obligation at the most basic level, by taking care not to be unethical in its reporting or to violate children's rights. However, when it comes to actively affirming children's rights, there is a lot of room for improvement.

In this study, the extent to which the media has respected children's rights has been assessed on three different levels. The first considers the structural elements of a story to establish whether the child's rights were respected, this includes an analysis of the headline, image and actual article. Secondly, the article's ethical principles are evaluated. Finally, the extent to which the story included critical information points that not only contextualize the story but also empower children, was determined.

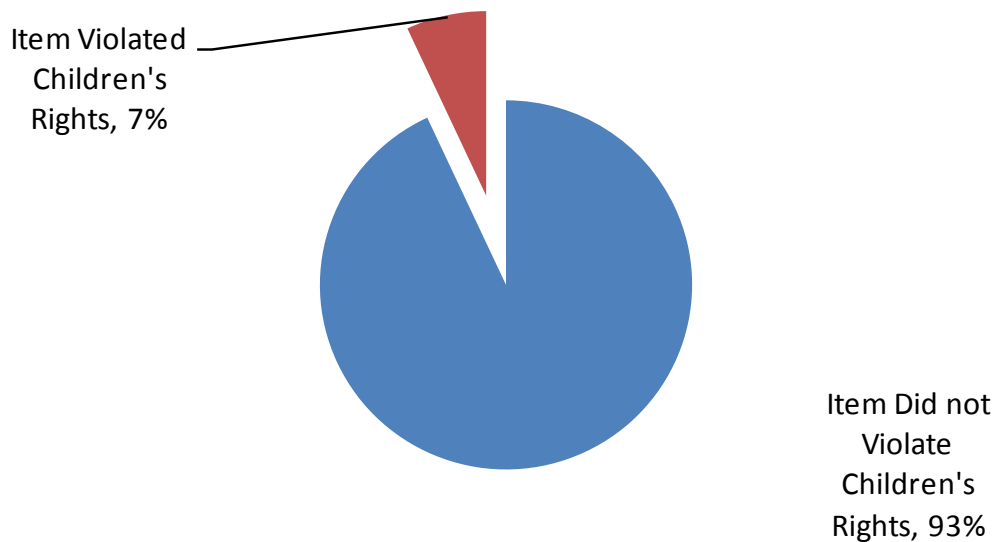
Respecting children in headlines, images and text

Clear violations of children's rights

Given the extra protections afforded to children it is essential that journalists take special care when reporting on them. Headlines, photographs and articles should never be threatening or suggestive, or victimise a child.

MMA has revised and further refined its assessment criteria for establishing whether media has violated children's rights in order to ensure and improve their accuracy. According to these revised criteria media violated children's rights in 7% of cases. This includes where children were identified in the media when they were HIV+, victims of abuse, accused of committing a crime or in other circumstances where it was clearly not in their best interests.

Figure 6: Children's Rights



According to our May report 2% of stories on children violated their rights, down from 10% in 2003. However this was assessed using criteria that MMA identified to be biased in favour of media and which overlooked certain children's rights' abuses.

When the new criteria were applied to the same period from March to May 2010, children's rights' violations in the media stood at 10%. What this suggests is that instances in which the media effectively abused children's rights are going down, but simply started at a higher level.

Nevertheless that 7% of stories on children violate their rights is very worrying. It also supports MMA's contention that improved reporting on children should be encouraged through better and more comprehensive guidance in the Press Code. It is also important that journalists, editors and publishing houses take responsibility for these violations and act to ensure that children are adequately protected in the press.

**“My girl's possessed!”
Daily Sun, 10 June 2010, pg 2**

This was a story in which a child, who had been sold into marriage and was the victim of rape, was identified and then further stigmatised. The primary focus of the article was not on the abuse she had suffered, but on her “strange” behaviour afterwards.

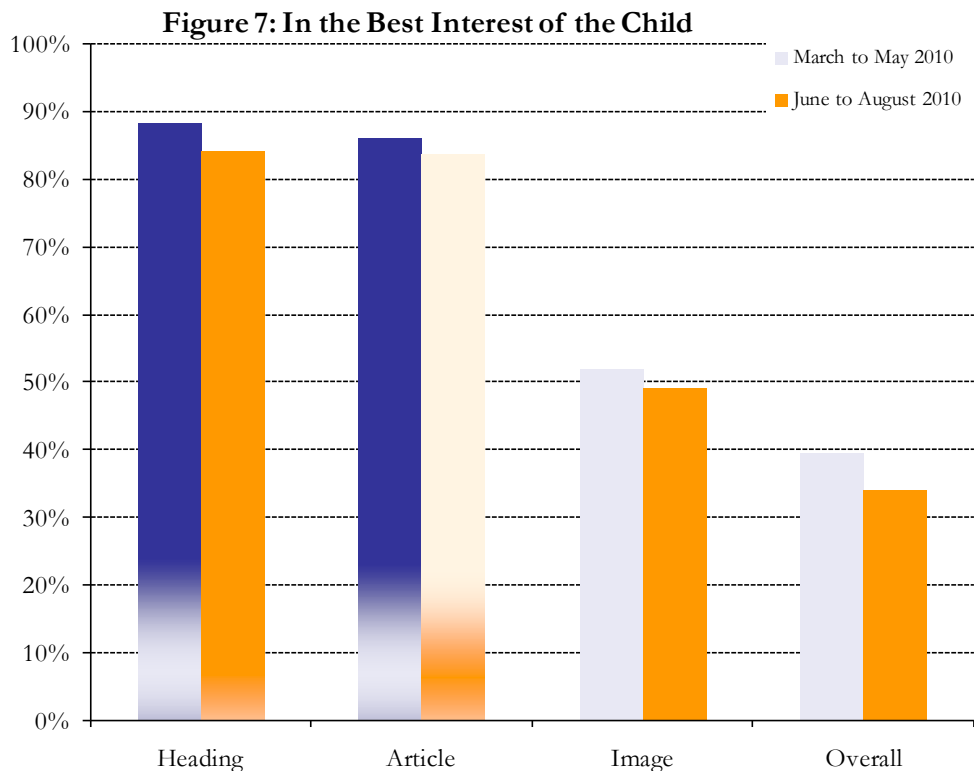
Children's rights respected

The remaining 93% of stories may not have clearly violated children's rights; however that's not to say that all of those stories clearly respected children's rights either.

The extent to which stories **clearly respected** children's rights is measured using a tool originally designed to facilitate online media monitoring. The Make Abuse Disappear-Online Accountability Tool (MAD OAT) considers the headline, actual article and image of the monitored stories and also allows for judgment to be made on whether the article, as a whole, truly respects children's rights.

**“Dump kids thrilled to receive new soccer kit”
The Star, 12 August, page 3**

The headline is an example of how the media can negatively label children. As the children live near the Randfontein dump, the newspaper insensitively labelled them as dump kids. This could negatively impact on the children emotional development.



The abbreviated nature of headlines means that catchy and often derogatory labels like “dump kids” are used, despite the negative impact that this may have.

It is positive then that 84% of headlines clearly respected children’s rights, however this is down on our last monitoring period (88%).

**“Schoolkids take charge”
Daily Sun, 20 August 2010, page 1**

The headline shows children in a positive light, taking action after teachers have gone on strike. Such headlines could motivate and encourage other pupils to act in a similar manner.

The percentage of articles that clearly respected children’s rights has also fallen and now stands at 82%. This is a disappointing development.

Photographs can be very powerful, capturing moments in history, as well as personal displays of strength, weakness or vulnerability. Given their potential impact, it is crucial that images of children published in newspapers are in their best interests.

Regrettably however, far fewer photographs than articles or headlines performed positively when it came to representing children. Since May the percentage of images that clearly respect children’s rights went from 52% to 49%.

Overall, an article, headline and image considered together, clearly respected children’s rights in just 34% of cases down from 39% in May. There is plenty of room for improvement here.

Observing ethical principles

Stories were assessed to determine the extent to which they observed ethical guidelines, as set out by MMA. These guidelines incorporate journalistic codes of conduct as well as human rights and best practice principles.

Only stories that adhere to these specific criteria are deemed to have clearly supported ethical principles and only those that unequivocally failed to abide by these same criteria are deemed unethical. Those articles that do no harm, but that also miss the opportunity to do some good, are not included.

As the two graphs below indicate, whilst only a small fraction of stories constituted blatant violations of these principles, they still received comparatively little clear positive support.

While the instances in which children’s interests are clearly taken into account has doubled, it still stands at just 2%. Instances where media were judged to have afforded children special protection fell by two thirds from 9% to 3%. These were the two ethical principles most clearly supported by media during the monitoring period. However a small number of reports – 1% - were also considered to have violated both of these principles.

	March to May 2010	June to August 2010
Children are afforded special protection	9%	3%
Children's interests are taken into account	1%	2%

Table 5: Principles Supported

	March to May 2010	June to August 2010
Children's interests are not taken into account	1%	1%
Children are not afforded special protection	1%	1%

Table 6: Principles Violated

Including information points

Information points assist the reader in acquiring context for a story. This can be done, for example, by providing background information, relevant legislation, and self-help contacts or tips where appropriate. Feedback from child media monitors suggests that they prefer reading stories where journalists have provided information that helps them to better understand how the story relates to them and to society more broadly. This empowers children and demystifies news for them.

The media is continuing to get the basics right, with 99% of monitored stories providing a good degree of context. However when it comes to the additional information that can facilitate a broader understanding of a story, journalists' performance has been slipping. Stories judged to have provided sufficient information on causes has fallen from 52% to 38%. There are also fewer found to have outlined potential consequences or possible solutions. Relevant legislation was referred to in just 2% of stories, while too few included self-help information to even register 1%. MMA is concerned with these shocking results and urges the media to provide more information points in their articles.

Information Provided	March to May 2010	June to August 2010
Context Basic	99%	99%
Context In Depth	79%	84%
Causes	56%	38%
Consequences	13%	8%
Solutions	10%	3%
Legislation	2%	2%

Table 7: Information Provided



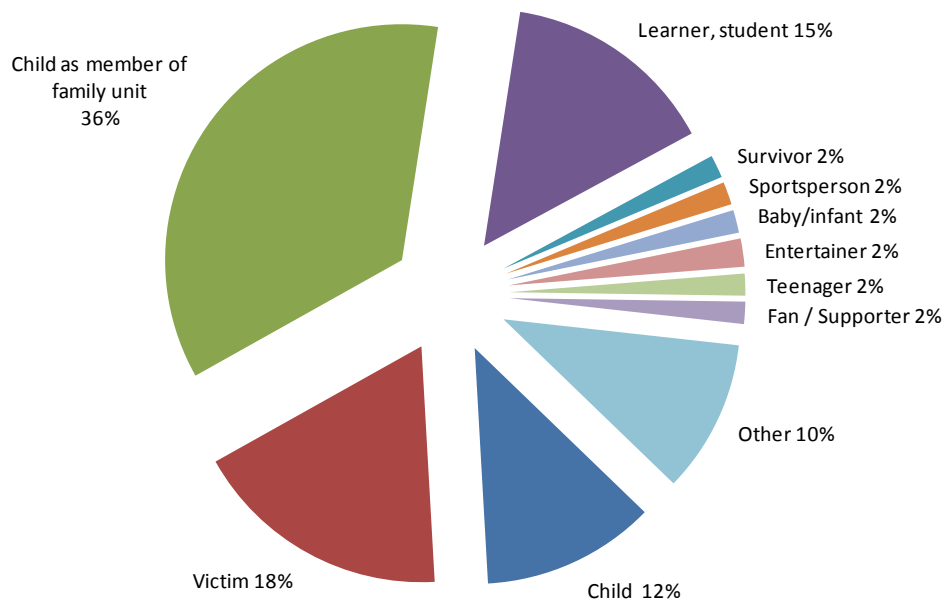
Representation of children in the media

The representation of children in the media remains limited and we are still seeing children merely mentioned in a way that perpetuates stereotypes about them. An example of this is where a child is simply referred to as “a member of a family unit”. This role does not hold much substance or weight in the representation of a child in a story. The child is often defined as a “son”, “daughter”, “sister” or “brother”, and so they are not really seen as a person in their own right, but merely as an extension of a family member, frequently an adult, that is considered much more important in the context of the story. It is therefore of concern that this is the most common representation of children in our media at 36%, up from 31% in the last period.

However it's not all bad news, with some evidence that small but increasing numbers of children are being portrayed in more specific and positive roles. While the roles of victim, learner and simply “child” come in second, third and fourth in terms of children's representations in the media, all three have fallen a little since our last report. It's especially good news that the role of victim has fallen from top spot in 2009 at 22%, to 21% in the last period, now standing at 18%.

Though small, the representations of children as entertainers, sportspeople and fans have doubled, although this was most likely due to the World Cup. And children are still presented as survivors in 2% of cases.

Figure 8 Children's Roles

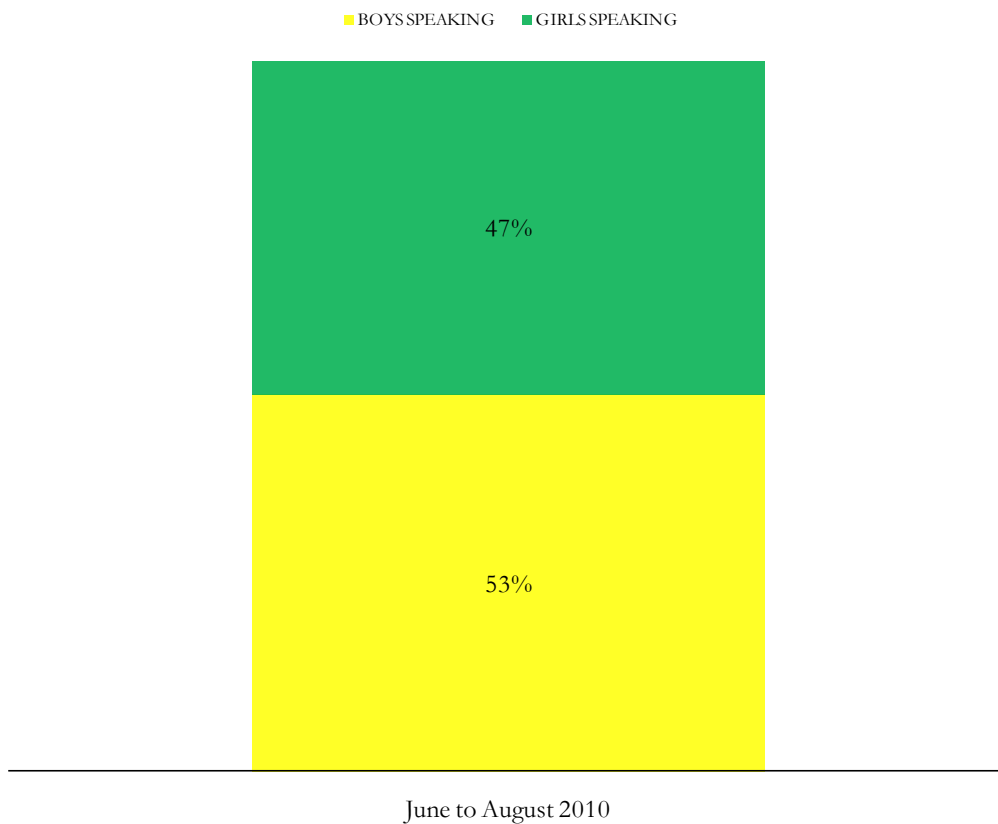


Girls and boys in the media

It's important for media to represent boys and girls in a fair and unbiased way. Journalists must also be careful not to reinforce stereotypes, and to challenge them where possible.

Overall newspapers have managed to achieve a relatively good gender balance when it comes to reporting on children, with representation at almost at half and half.

Figure 9 Girls & Boys Accessed



However it is interesting to look at the roles assigned to boys and girls in the press. In the second most common role, that of victim, one fifth more girls are represented as victims than boys, reinforcing the stereotype that girls are weaker and more vulnerable.

Role	%
Child as member of family unit	31%
Victim	25%
Learner, student	12%
Child	11%
Entertainer	4%
Teenager	3%
Sportsperson	2%
Fan/supporter	2%
Survivor	1%
Missing child	1%

Table 8: Top 10 Roles for Girls

Role	%
Child as member of family unit	30%
Victim	20%
Child	15%
Learner, student	8%
Sportsperson	3%
Entertainer	3%
Survivor	3%
Suspect	3%
Fan/supporter	3%
Child Offender	2%

Table 9: Top 10 Roles for Boys

The topics in which children appear are also an indicator of whether children are being typecast by the media.

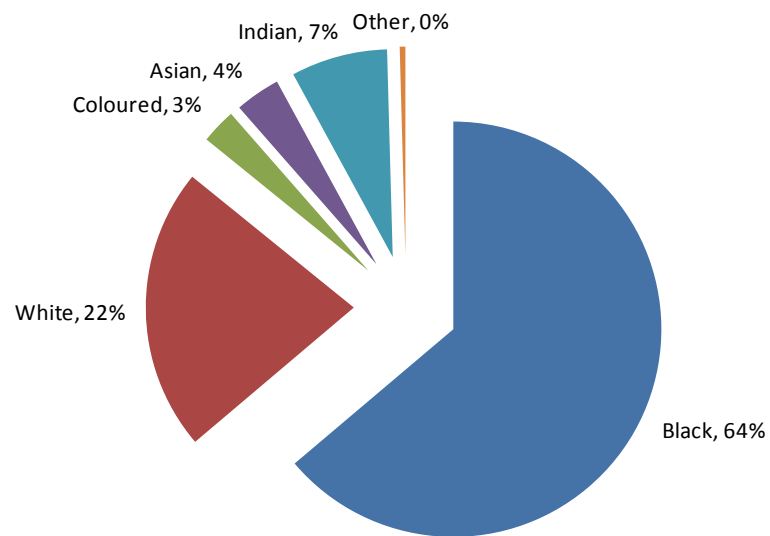
In similar finding to previous reports boys continue to appear in more crime stories than girls, while justice stories more frequently feature girls.

Girls outweigh boys significantly in child rape reports and only a third as many boys as girls were mentioned in stories about abductions and trafficking. This is a definite reflection of stereotyping in the media. It is also worth noting that much emphasis was placed on rape and abduction/trafficking stories during the world cup in order to raise awareness.

Race of Children in the News

South Africa's history of racial segregation and marginalisation makes issues of race and representivity extremely important considerations for the media. In 2003 just 39% of children featured in the news were black. In 2009 that figure was 71% and it is now at 64%. The World Cup which featured fans, including children, from different countries and of different races may have had an impact on racial representation during this monitoring period.

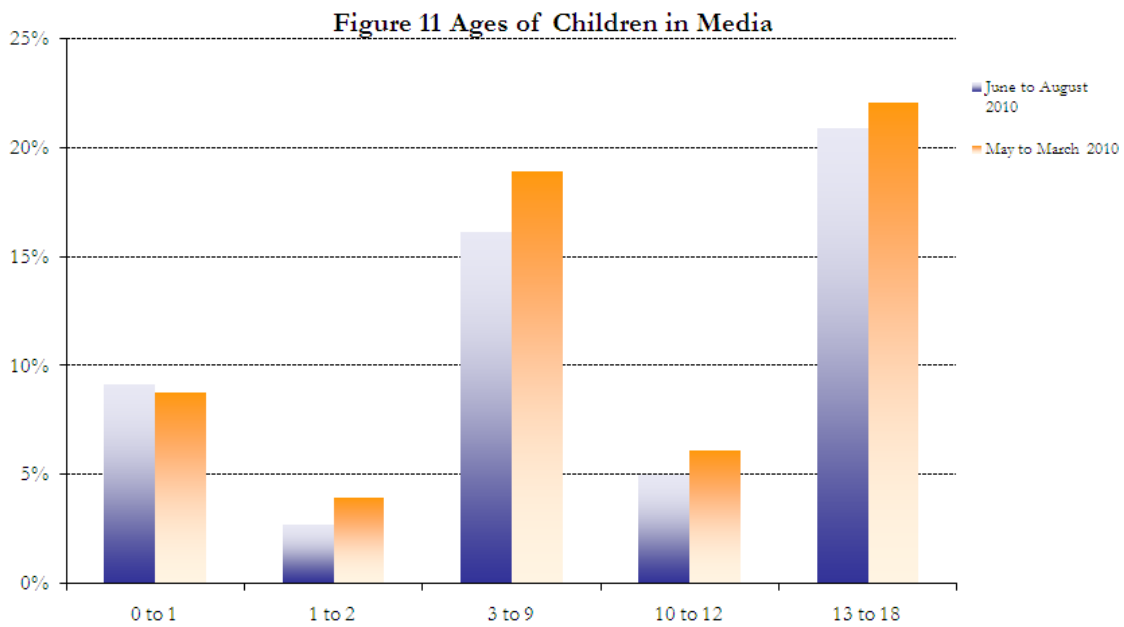
Figure 10 Race of Children in Media



Age of children in the News

Children's ages are not always specified in the news, but where this information is available it gives context to a story. It also provides an interesting picture of how the media deals with children of different ages and the apparent "news value" associated with them.

Given South Africa's high child mortality rates – an issue which was covered during the period monitored, it could have been expected that more attention would have been given to children in these age groups.



Conclusions

Though reporting on children is improving, it is happening slowly. Crucially media is still failing to adequately give children a voice.

While the percentage of stories about or mentioning children increases with every report and now stands at 12.7%, we only hear children's voices in 13% of these, leaving adults to do most of the talking. It is also of concern that 7% of stories about children violate their rights.

Journalists must get the balance right between protecting children who may be made more vulnerable by media coverage, and accessing them when it's in their best interests. It's a difficult balancing act, and there is clearly room for improvement in both of these aspects of reporting on children.



Recommendations

While newspapers published by Avusa and Independent Newspapers have adopted guidelines on reporting on children, these fall outside the more formal press regulation procedures.

Save for a ban on publishing “child pornography”, there is nothing regulating what is published about children and how media reports on them in the Press Code. This means that those with concerns about reporting on children have no formal avenue to complain or seek redress.

In its submission as part of the Press Council Review Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) says “the inclusion of a dedicated clause on children is essential”.

It appears that children themselves agree! On 30 November 2010, a number of child media monitors, who had participated in an MMA project, presented a list of their suggestions for inclusion in Press Code on the Redi Thlabi show on Talk Radio 702 and Cape Take 567.

Michelle Fithole and Branden Moloitsi from Park Senior Primary in Johannesburg told a panel of journalists and editors that “the Press Code should provide better guidelines to journalists on how to report about children.”

Their suggestions were as follows:

- Even if a parent says it is ok for you to identify [or interview] the child you should at least try and speak to the child and see what they think about the decision made by their parents.
- If putting a child’s picture in the newspaper will endanger or embarrass the child in any way at all, they should not put it in, even in blur, no matter what the situation is.
- If a child is uncomfortable you should not push the issue. Try to be very patient with him or her. It is the child’s choice. Don’t write lies just because he/she refuses to talk to you.
- If these laws [or codes] are broken, severe punishment will be given.
- The child’s rights shall be respected and protected at all times no matter what the circumstances. The rights are rights to freedom of speech, participation, dignity and privacy.
- You will not pass judgement no matter what the child tells you. You must listen and not judge him or her.

MMA believes that these suggestions need to be taken seriously by the Press Council and that they should also be taken into consideration by all journalists when they are reporting on children. Perhaps then we will see greater improvements in this challenging yet crucially important area of journalism in South Africa.

Appendix I: User Guide

The **monitoring criteria** used in this study include the following:

Date	When the item was published.
Medium	The name of the medium (newspaper) monitored.
Number of Children's stories per medium	The number of children's stories which appeared in a newspaper
No.	page number where the story appeared. This is important in order for us to assess the importance and relevance given to the article.
Summary	A brief summary of the article
Type of article	This captures the different types of articles published. Eg: News Story, opinion piece or editorial.
Topic code	Here the overall topic, or central subject of each item is captured. This is determined from a set list of codes.
Origin	Here the geographical location to which the stories apply is captured.
J/A, Journalist Sex, J/A name	The journalist sex or agency who is responsible for writing this article would be captured along with their full names and gender.
Adult Source	The role of the adult in the story is captured. Eg: Mother, teacher etc. This role is determined from a set list of codes.
Children's Role	The role of the child in the story. Eg: Victim, learner etc. This role is determined from a set list of codes.
Sex	The child's gender
Age	The age of the child is captured. Ages are broken down into certain categories where the monitor captures it. Eg: 1: 0-1 year, 4: 10-12 years, 5: 13-18 years old etc.
Race	The race of the child
Child Access Code	How is the child accessed? Eg: named and accessed, named only or mentioned by means of age or reference but not named or accessed.

The **MAD OAT** (Make Abuse Disappear - Online Accountability Tool) is implemented to assess ethical issues in reporting on children. It takes the following into consideration:

Headline	Is the headline in the best interest of the child, does it support stereotypes and is the headline representative of the content of the story.
Image	Is the image in the best interest of the child, does it support stereotypes and is the headline representative of the content of the story.
Article	Is the article in the best interest of the child, does it support stereotypes and is the headline representative of the content of the story.
Source	Does the article have a fair amount of sources? Have the relevant sources, such as parent/guardian/welfare groups have been used in the article?
Identity	The privacy/identity and HIV status of the child has been sufficiently protected where in the child's interest.
Abuse	Has the article reported that the child has been abused?
Child Central Focus	A 'YES' or 'NO' box is ticked to determine if the story is centered around the child or children in question.
Rights Respected	A 'YES' or 'NO' box is ticked if the story respects or disrespects the rights of a child.

The following criteria is employed to measure the extent to which stories supported or violated key **ethical principles**:

No.	Principle	Description
1	The Story does/does not seek and express the truth	Is the story accurate? Or are there any glaring inaccuracies? Does the story have more than one source? Are sources (other than people who have been abused) named? Are the principles of the Constitution clearly promoted or violated?
2	The Story is/is not independent and objective	Does the story provide context? Does the story respect the rights of those in the story? Does the story present competing perspectives, i.e., is it balanced and fair?
3	The Story does/does not minimise harm	Does the story directly or indirectly protect or promote the best interests of the child? Has an effort been made in the story to minimize harm Is the story clearly in the best interests of the child? If not, e.g. the child is named and shouldn't be, then choose principle 4. Have identities/names of children been revealed. Has an effort been made to prevent harm to the child?
4	Children are afforded special protection	In abuse stories, has the identity of a child been revealed directly or indirectly? Has an effort been made to prevent harm to the child? Has an effort been made in the story to minimize harm? Are the children's rights to privacy and/or dignity protected? Have identities/names of children abused/violated been given? Is there clear informed consent?
5	Avoid stereotypes	Does the story clearly promote or challenge stereotypes about children? Eg: children are seen as helpless victims Child victims may be blamed for the crimes perpetrated against them, short skirts, suggestive behaviour, and claiming to be older than they really are used as a justification to statutory rape and child abuse.
6	Children's interests are/are not taken into account	Is the story disregarding of children's feelings? Does it make them feel sad about themselves?
7	Child Abuse is a Human Rights Violation	Does the story clearly represent child abuse as human rights violation or does it clearly trivialise child abuse?
8	Stories do/do not respect and engage with cultural and sexual practices as well as drug awareness	As culture is not fixed, but constantly negotiated, often at the expense of women, there should be debate about cultural practices. Traditions, which may have negative consequences for women include inheritance laws, bride inheritance, bride kidnapping, virginity testing and female circumcision. Does the story attempt to give voice to the voiceless?
9	Be aware of the HIV/AIDS dimensions to child abuse stories	Does the story raise HIV as a clear issue linked to child abuse? Does the story consider the HIV implications of child abuse?
10	Be gender proactive and consider the gender angles to all stories	In stories, boys are represented as being active and jovial whereas girls are represented as being passive and quite, be alert to this kind of stereotyping. Often the gendered aspects to a story, including how events, policies, decisions or programmes affect girls are neglected, is this evident in your story Does a story include girls as a broader community?

An article's inclusion of key **information points** is assessed using the following codes:

Code	Description
CB	Context basic: Does it mention any basic statistics or facts about where it happened, does it show a map, etc.
CI	Context in –depth: Is the story given greater context? Does it talk about the broader social consequences? Does it talk about tragic accidents as recurring patterns?
Y	Causes: Does the story explain the causes of the event?
O	Consequences: Does the story describe the consequences of the accident or disaster or how it impacts on broader society?
S	Solutions: Does the story offer any possible solutions or means of addressing the problems?
L	Relevant legislation: Does the story mention any relevant legislation or policy?
SH	Self Help: Does the story provide information to help the reader eg: in a drug abuse story, does it give information on where to go to get help for drug addiction, in terms of a sexual abuse or child abuse story, where can anyone go or phone to receive help. Does the article provide tool bars (such as columns, graphs or tables) to detect signs of child abuse/sexual abuse/drug abuse etc. Does the story provide information necessary to make an informed self help story?
CBI	Child's Best Interest: Is the story in the child's best interest? Is the story beneficial to the child or not? Is the child portrayed in a positive light?

As a final step in monitoring the news, an **analysis box** is provided where information could be recorded that has not been captured elsewhere.