

Double Humiliation

On 29 October, MMP issued an update addressing the issue of inappropriate identification of a child. In an incident last week members of the media again identified a child who has been abused and traumatised, and has also identified children who may be facing criminal charges.

SABC 3 (07/11/03, 19h00), *Sowetan* (27/11/03, p. 3), *City Press* (09/11/03, p. 4), and *Rapport* (09/11/03) covered the story of a 16-year-old girl who was the victim of an alleged racist attack at her high school in Cape Town. According to SABC 3 (07/11/03, 19h00) "the mother of a white school mate, her daughter, and a boyfriend viciously assaulted her (the 16-year-old black victim), shouted racial insults and left her covered in faeces in full view of other students." SABC 3 (07/11/03, 19h00) named the girl and then while describing the incident the reporter crossed over to a visual of the crying girl who then tells her story amidst tears. While the accused white schoolmate and her mother are not accessed, they are also both clearly identified in visuals.

The *Sowetan* (27/11/03, p. 3) reported that the police are investigating "one count each of assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm and crimen injuria against (the mother) and her 16-year-old daughter." *Sowetan* further stated that the white mother and her daughter have laid counter-charges of assault and crimen injuria.

In terms of the Criminal Procedure Act 154(3), "No person shall publish in any manner whatever information which reveals or may reveal the identity of the accused under the age of 18 years or of a witness at criminal proceedings who is under the age of 18 years."

As criminal investigations have begun it would not seem to be in the children's best interest and seems to be in contravention of the Act. In this case both the minor girls are facing charges and yet their identities are revealed. The black girl child is named in the *Sowetan* (27/11/03, p. 3), *City Press* (09/11/03, p. 4), and *Rapport* (09/11/03) and she is named and her face shown on SABC 3 (07/11/03, 19h00). The white girl child is indirectly revealed by her mother being named in the *Sowetan* (27/11/03, p. 3), *City Press* (09/11/03, p. 4), and SABC 3 (07/11/03, 19h00), and her face is shown thus clearly identifying her on SABC 3 (07/11/03, 19h00).

Section 28 (2) of the Bill of Rights states that "A child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child." There is nothing to suggest that revealing these children's identities is in any way in their best interests. The victim in particular has been highly traumatised and it is not ethical to have accessed her during this time.

Critically this story deals with the issue of racism. It is imperative for the media to engage with and report on such stories particularly as they deal with a human rights violation. Given that racism robs people of their right to dignity and equality it is a great pity then that in reporting on such a story the same rights to dignity and equality are again violated. The facts of the story speak for themselves and convey the horror and humiliation.

The Media Monitoring Project calls on the media to respect the rights of all people. The scourge of racism can and must be stamped out but it cannot be at the expense of the rights of the child.

MMP, 11 November 2003