

Make Abuse Disappear Online  
Accountability Tool (MADOAT)  
Quarterly Report: (January – March  
2011)



OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION FOR SOUTH AFRICA

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Promoting Human Rights and Democracy in the media since 1993

## Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. About MAD OAT MADs and GLADs.....  | 2  |
| 2. Introduction: .....  | 3  |
| 3. MAD OAT Report for the first quarter of 2011 .....   | 3  |
| 4. Media Monitoring Africa's (MMA) Best Promoter and Worst Violator of Children's Rights in South African Print Media (Jan – March 2011): ..... | 4  |
| 5. Promotion and Violation Trends:.....   | 6  |
| 6. What stories about children made the news in the first quarter?.....   | 11 |
| 7. Conclusion:.....   | 12 |



Promoting Human Rights and Democracy in the media since 1993

## 1. About MAD OAT MADs and GLADs

Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) is an NGO that undertakes a watchdog role in the media to promote the development of a free, fair, ethical and critical media culture in South Africa. MMA's Make Abuse Disappear Online Accountability Tool (MAD OAT), is part of a larger strategy, the Empowering Children and the Media (ECM), which aims to improve the representation and participation of children and further reduce the incidences of children's rights violations in the media. Our work is informed by a human rights based approach.

We highlight cases of good and best practice, where the media has promoted the rights and welfare of children, otherwise referred to as "GLADs", as well as feedback on cases where the rights and welfare of children have been compromised through poor and irresponsible media coverage, referred to as "MADs".

On this basis, MMA staff monitor 14 mainstream newspapers and hold weekly meetings to nominate articles to be written as "GLAD" and "MAD" of the week.

The newspapers are:

- *Business Day;*
- *City Press;*
- *Daily Sun;*
- *Mail & Guardian;*
- *Saturday Star;*
- *Sowetan;*
- *Sunday Independent;*
- *Sunday Sun;*
- *Sunday Times;*
- *Sunday World;*
- *The Citizen;*
- *The New Age;*
- *The Star and*
- *The Times;*

After much deliberation – due to the complex nature of ethics around reporting on children in the media – a general consensus is reached on which articles to select as MAD and GLAD of the week. The commentary is then written by two staff members and posted on MMA's website, ([www.mediamonitoringafrica.org](http://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org))

## 2. Introduction:

As part of our communication strategy, MMA sends e-mails to editors and journalists alerting them to commentaries – in the form of MADs and GLADs – written on articles published in their newspapers.

As a result of this strategy, MMA received requests from a number of editors to produce an overview report of MADs and GLADs.

In response to this request, MMA has produced a MAD OAT quarterly report for the first three months of 2011. This report is a qualitative assessment of articles published by mainstream print mediums which, in our view, clearly violated or promoted children's rights.

## 3. MAD OAT Report for the first quarter of 2011

The first quarter of 2011 was a disheartening one when it came to the portrayal of children in the media, with the month of January a particularly unfortunate start to the year.

During this period (January to March), a number of children's rights were violated in mainstream print media through the identification of child witnesses, child victims and vulnerable children to name just a few examples.

MMA in its MAD OAT analysis termed January, "The Month of Multiple Children's Rights Violation by SA Print Media."<sup>1</sup> *Daily Sun; Mail & Guardian; The Citizen; The New Age; Sowetan* and *The Star* were collectively identified as newspapers that had contributed to this term.

The analysis outlined how articles published in these newspapers clearly violated children's rights protected under the South African Constitution and legislation such as the Criminal Procedure Act.

Prominent stories that were reported during this period and where children's rights were violated included reports about a famous actor who allegedly sexually assaulted his child. Another example comes from reports about pupils who were drinking alcohol whilst making their way to school.

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<sup>1</sup> Analysis available at: <http://bit.ly/jMSDbm>

The pupils were photographed and consequently directly identified. Negative stories or those that entrenched or supported stereotypes around teen pregnancy in schools also found their way into the newspapers.

On a more positive note, the media also tackled current issues facing children in South Africa, including reports that held government accountable on schools that were devastated by storms in 2009 in the Eastern Cape where children are being taught under unfavourable conditions.

It was also positive to see the number of newspapers which accessed children's voices. In the GLAD<sup>2</sup> it wrote on the issue, MMA congratulated *The Star*, *Daily Sun*, *The New Age* and *Sowetan* for focusing some of their pieces on children and their opinions whilst portraying them in a positive light. These were children from different walks of life who were accessed about their lives and matters affecting them.

#### 4. Media Monitoring Africa's (MMA) Best Promoter and Worst Violator of Children's Rights in South African Print Media (Jan – March 2011):

The *Worst Violator* and *Best Promoter* titles are awarded to two newspapers which led the pack by publishing the most number of articles written as MADs or GLADs.

*Daily Sun* is awarded the title for *Worst Violator* the first quarter of 2011. The newspaper published an astounding 18 articles which clearly violated a variety of children's rights and failed to act in their best interests. In January alone, the paper published an average of two articles per day, in one week.

*Daily Sun* is the only paper standing in the double digits and was also featured in MMA's MAD OAT (Make Abuse Disappear Online Accountability Tool) analysis dubbed, "January 2011: The Month of Multiple Children's Rights Violations by SA Print Media" with four articles included in the analysis which were identified as clearly violating children's rights.



Two newspapers made it as the runners-up to *Daily Sun*. They are *Sowetan* and *The New Age*, each with a total of eight articles selected for MADs during this period.

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<sup>2</sup> Read the commentary "Children's voices heard across a number of newspapers": <http://bit.ly/IP7EsM>

The two newspapers were also featured in the analysis, “January 2011: The Month of Multiple Children’s Rights Violations by SA Print Media” with *The New Age* contributing a total of four articles and *Sowetan*, three, which violated children’s rights.

*The Star* clinched the title of *Best Promoter of Children’s Rights* in the first quarter of 2011, securing an impressive nine GLADs. However it is also worth noting that despite its positive performance in representing and reporting on children, it also earned a few MADs during the same period - four in total.

## **The Star**

Articles published by *The Star* which merited GLADs<sup>3</sup> included those which formed part of a series of articles the paper ran for over a week, which accessed experts who weighed the pros and cons of introducing HIV testing in schools. This was an impressive initiative by the newspaper as it carried the debate on a pertinent issue that might significantly impact on the lives of pupils in South Africa, presenting the reader with expert advice that left no stones unturned.

*City Press* was a runner-up to *The Star*. The paper also published a fair number of stories that highlighted children’s issues and promoted their rights. An example includes “They think HIV is just a story”<sup>4</sup> (20/02/2011, p.8) which accessed the views of pupils from a school in Gauteng on matters relating to HIV awareness and the proposed initiative of introducing HIV counselling and testing in schools.

### 4.1 Ranking Table – Number of articles selected for MADs

| <b>Newspaper</b> | <b>Number of MADs to end March</b> |
|------------------|------------------------------------|
| Daily Sun        | 18                                 |
| Sowetan          | 8                                  |
| The New Age      | 8                                  |
| The Star         | 4                                  |
| The Citizen      | 2                                  |
| Mail & Guardian  | 1                                  |
| Saturday Star    | 1                                  |
| Sunday World     | 1                                  |
| City Press       | 0                                  |

<sup>3</sup> Read the commentary “The Star explores the pros and cons of introducing HIV testing for schools”: <http://bit.ly/i9WgkC>

<sup>4</sup> Read the commentary “City Press accesses children’s views on HIV”: <http://bit.ly/kjE1cl>

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Business Day       | 0 |
| Sunday Independent | 0 |
| Sunday Sun         | 0 |
| Sunday Times       | 0 |
| The Times          | 0 |

## 4.2 Number of articles selected for GLADs

| Newspaper          | Number of GLADs to end March |
|--------------------|------------------------------|
| The Star           | 9                            |
| City Press         | 5                            |
| The Times          | 3                            |
| Sowetan            | 2                            |
| Daily Sun          | 1                            |
| Mail & Guardian    | 1                            |
| Saturday Star      | 1                            |
| Sunday Times       | 1                            |
| The New Age        | 1                            |
| Business Day       | 0                            |
| Sunday Independent | 0                            |
| Sunday Sun         | 0                            |
| Sunday World       | 0                            |
| The Citizen        | 0                            |

## 5. Promotion and Violation Trends:

MMA's media monitoring over the last eight years indicates a gradual but steady improvement in media's coverage of children and children's issues. However, during January to end March 2011, there were unfortunately significantly more articles that earned MADs than GLADs. Below are some of the most concerning children's rights violations selected for MADs:

Of the 43 articles selected for MADs 60% (or 26) clearly violated various separate children's rights and pieces of legislation. Examples include the identification of children involved in maintenance disputes or reporting that subjected children to possible stigmatisation or humiliation.

Of the remainder, the following trends emerged where such identification was clearly not in the children's best interests:

- 19% (8) identified child witnesses;
- 12% (5) identified child victims;
- 9% (4) identified abandoned children.

## 5.1 Leading violations:

1. Identification of child witnesses: These are instances where children who witnessed crimes were directly or indirectly identified when it was not in their best interests. Although a contravention of Section 154(3) of the Criminal Procedure Act, this was a leading violation by most articles.

Examples include:

- “Gunned down in his yard”<sup>5</sup> (*Sowetan*, 14/03/2011, p2) – A 17-year-old child who witnessed a policeman fatally shoot his friend was named in the article. A murder case was reportedly opened against the policeman.
- “Love made him kill”<sup>6</sup> (*Daily Sun*, 15/02/2011, p.12) – The article named a 14-year-old child who was reportedly kidnapped by an accused murderer and who also witnessed the murderer stab a number of people and kill one.
- “Evil thugs killed our family”<sup>7</sup> (*Daily Sun*, 11/01/2011, p.5) – The article reported on the killing of a mother while her children were under a blanket. The children were indirectly identified.

2. Identification of child victims: These are instances where children, who had gone through traumatic experiences including abuse, were identified. This violation not only disregards a child’s right to privacy and dignity but often the Children’s Act and Section 28(2) of South Africa’s constitution which states that: “The best interests of the child are paramount in all matters concerning the child.”

Examples include:

- “Day-care assault charge laid” (*The Citizen*, 18/01/2011, p4) and “Day mother blamed over alleged child abuse” (*The Citizen*, 19/01/2011, p.6) – The two articles<sup>8</sup> reported on the same story involving an eight-month-old baby who was allegedly abused while in a day-care centre was named and pictured.

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<sup>5</sup> Read the commentary “Sowetan – child witnesses should not be named”: <http://bit.ly/lmuvQ2>

<sup>6</sup> Read the commentary “Daily Sun article: A lesson on how NOT to report on children”: <http://bit.ly/lb8yFP>

<sup>7</sup> Read the commentary “Horrorific start to the year for Daily Sun”: <http://bit.ly/eBQaw8>

<sup>8</sup> Read the analysis: “January 2011: The Month of Multiple Children’s Rights Violations by SA Print Media: <http://bit.ly/eBQaw8>

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- “Hot Klap”<sup>9</sup> (Daily Sun, 19/01/2011, p.5) – The article named and photographed a seven-year-old boy who suffered from temporary blindness after being hit by another child at school.
  - “Pupil beatings continue in defiance of law”<sup>10</sup> (The New Age, 31/03/2011, p.6) – Pupils who alleged that they were being beaten by their teachers were named and photographed in the article.
3. Identification of abandoned or vulnerable children. Abandoned children are victims of abuse as abandonment constitutes child neglect, recognised as child abuse by South African law. Therefore, unless exceptional circumstances prevail, abandoned children should not be identified in the media as they are victims and witnesses to a crime.

Examples include:

- “Evil mum dumps two kids on the doorstep”<sup>11</sup> (Daily Sun, 10/01/2011, p.10) – The article named and photographed children who had been abandoned by their mother.
- “Mlungu woman finds home with the orphans”<sup>12</sup> (Daily Sun, 12/01/2011, p.24) – Orphaned children described as coming “from very poor backgrounds” were photographed in this piece.
- “Big hearts for little people who need love”<sup>13</sup> (The New Age, 01/03/2011, p.6) – Abandoned children were identified in the photograph accompanying this article.



**ARMY DAD GOES MAD!**  
Boy sees father shoot his gogo, her sister, then himself

<sup>9</sup> Read the analysis: “January 2011: The Month of Multiple Children’s Rights Violations by SA Print Media: <http://bit.ly/eBQaw8>

<sup>10</sup> Read the commentary: “The best interests of the child disregarded by two articles in The New Age”: <http://bit.ly/jE65fZ>

<sup>11</sup> Read the commentary “Horrible start to the year for Daily Sun”: <http://bit.ly/eBQaw8>

<sup>12</sup> Read the commentary “Horrible start to the year for Daily Sun”: <http://bit.ly/eBQaw8>

<sup>13</sup> Read the commentary: “The best interests of the child disregarded by two articles in The New Age”: <http://bit.ly/jE65fZ>

While there were concerning aspects, there were also positive areas of reporting, where journalists performed well in promoting and respecting children's rights during the first quarter of this year. These are the top three issues where the media protected and promoted the four main rights of children in the media, namely the right to participation, freedom of speech, dignity and privacy.

## 5.2 Leading Promotions:

1. **Accessing children's Views:** These are instances where the media interviewed and profiled children whilst portraying them in a positive light. This is a commendable practice as it is empowering reporting that affords children due agency.

Examples include:

- "Pupils tackle alcohol abuse"<sup>14</sup> (Sowetan, 22/03/2011, p.12) – The article profiled children who started an initiative to curb alcohol abuse in their community.
- "My first day at school" (The Star, Verve Section, 28/01/2011, p.20), "Early birds catch a seat!" (Daily Sun, 02/02/2011, p.8) and "Drug abuse creeping into primary schools – study" (The New Age, 31/01/2011, p.7) – All three of these articles<sup>15</sup> accessed children on issues such as drug abuse in schools, the first day of school and the lack of school equipment.

2. **Highlighting children's issues:** Cyberbullying, sex, education and HIV are subjects that were covered by a number of articles selected for GLADs. Reporting on such issues often reminds the public of issues facing children in South Africa and the rest of the world. These articles were congratulated for highlighting these issues and going the extra mile by accessing children's views on them.

Examples include:

- "Mean girls get meaner online"<sup>16</sup> (Mail & Guardian, 21/01/2011, p.23) – The article explored cyberbullying and accessed a 14-year-old who spoke of her experiences on the issue. The child's identity was concealed.

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<sup>14</sup> Read the commentary "Sowetan gets a GLAD for reporting on children who are fighting for change in their community": <http://bit.ly/kMzKcE>

<sup>15</sup> Read the commentary "Children's voices heard across a number of newspapers": <http://bit.ly/IP7EsM>

<sup>16</sup> Read the commentary "Mail & Guardian reminds us of the issues facing teenagers": <http://bit.ly/iHyOYZ>

- “Sugar daddies bribing parents of young girls”<sup>17</sup> (The Times, 30/03/2011, p.6) – The widespread phenomenon of sugar daddies and the entrapping relationships young girls maintain with these men in exchange for gifts and money; and due to pressures from their families were outlined in this article.
  - “Sucked into vortex of revolution”<sup>18</sup> (The Star, 16/02/2011, p.15) - The article focused on Egyptian street children and the challenges they faced during the country’s social upheaval.
3. Concealment of identities: These are instances where articles were selected for GLADs for protecting the identities of children when it was not in their best interests to be identified. This is an important practice that protects children who might be subjected to humiliation or harm which may result from their identities being revealed in the media.

Examples include:

- “Mother wins R16m from health MEC”<sup>19</sup> (Sunday Times, 27/02/2011, p.7) – The article protected the identity of both the mother and her child - a victim of medical negligence.
- “Government steps in as married mother, now 15, goes back to school”<sup>20</sup> (Saturday Star, 12/02/2011, p.17) – The article accessed but hid the identity of a Muslim girl who became pregnant at the age of 13 and then got married when she was 14.
- “Teacher used K-word on us” (The Times, 11/03/2011, p.6) and “Colour in the classroom” (The Times, 17/03/2011, p.17) – The two articles<sup>21</sup> reported on the same story where pupils alleged that a teacher called them by a racially derogatory term. The identities of the pupils were protected.

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<sup>17</sup> Read the commentary: “The Times demystifies who sugar daddies really make happy”:

<http://bit.ly/IMxqU7>

<sup>18</sup> Read the commentary: “The Star tells the untold story of Egyptian children during the protests”:

<http://bit.ly/ijZ6uR>

<sup>19</sup> Read the commentary: “The Sunday Times aides informed citizenry”: <http://bit.ly/jrg6vq>

<sup>20</sup> Read the commentary: “Saturday Star sensitively deals with a case of a married Muslim minor”:

<http://bit.ly/l1zKS8>

<sup>21</sup> Read the commentary: “Thumbs up to The Times for respecting children’s rights in race story”:

<http://bit.ly/iMwXEs>

## 6. What stories about children made the news in the first quarter?

In January *Sowetan* reported<sup>22</sup> on an actor accused of sexually assaulting his daughter. Unfortunately, the newspaper published details that indirectly identified the star, including the name of the soapie in which he acted and the name of its broadcaster. This resulted in his daughter, the alleged victim's identity being indirectly revealed. MMA wrote that it was clear that *Sowetan* had not done enough to protect the identity of the actor as readers on the newspaper's website were able to say who he was, stating his name and the name of the character he played in the popular soapie.

*Sowetan's* reporting also caused a lot of controversy in mid-January when the paper reported<sup>23</sup> on three boys who were drinking alcohol on their way to school. The children were directly identified in a picture *Sowetan* published on its front page and the paper further revealed the name of their school. Confusingly, *Sowetan* showed different treatment between the print and online versions of the story by at least attempting to protect the identities of the pupils on its website, placing black strips over their eyes. MMA stated that "placing black strips over the eyes may not be sufficient to fully hide the boys' identities and that their whole faces should have been blocked out." Both online and print versions of the story were selected for a MAD, with MMA further stating that while underage drinking is newsworthy, it is a crime and child offenders are protected under the Criminal Procedure Act, therefore "the identities of these children should have been protected for both legal and ethical reasons."

More positively, one prominent story that addressed an issue facing children came from *City Press* in January when children around the country opened schools for the new year. *City Press* shared a GLAD<sup>24</sup> with television programme *Fokus* for highlighting the poor conditions under which pupils from the Eastern Cape are studying. "Rain stops classes at ruined schools," (*City Press*, 30/01/2011) reported on a school in the province that was destroyed by a tornado in 2009 but was still not rebuilt despite promises by the Education Department to do so.

By covering this story so extensively, *City Press* highlighted the dire situation of schools in the Eastern Cape and held the Education Department accountable for the promises it had not fulfilled.

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<sup>22</sup> Read the commentary: "Sowetan makes obvious the identity of an actor accused of raping his child": <http://bit.ly/i20QLr>

<sup>23</sup> Read the commentary "Dismal reporting on Back to School": <http://bit.ly/jn3qq2>

<sup>24</sup> Read the commentary "City Press and Fokus highlight the dire situation facing schools in the Eastern Cape": <http://bit.ly/iiCDmF>

## 7. Conclusion:

A report titled “Children’s Views Not in the News”<sup>25</sup> published by MMA in December 2010, presented findings on how South Africa’s media portrays children. According to the report, “7% of stories monitored [from June to August 2010] clearly violated the rights of children either by directly or indirectly identifying a child when it is not in their best interests.” This is a significantly high percentage and judging from MAD OAT analyses that have been written between January and March 2011, there continues to be plenty of room for improvement.

The trends outlined in this report on the promotion and violation of children’ rights present areas where the media can learn and improve.

The report also shows where the media can go wrong when reporting on prominent stories which involve children – a reminder for all media professionals to always bear in mind the best interests of the child.

In a time when media freedom is under threat in South Africa, MMA urges the media to continue to strive for best ethical practice and protect children’s rights and avoid fuelling proposals such as those for a statutory Media Appeals Tribunal by those who argue that flaws in the media are not dealt with adequately under the current self-regulatory framework.

MMA is in the process of developing a revised set of Editorial Guidelines and Principles for Reporting on Children in the Media with the input of children and journalists. We encourage media houses to participate in this process and to further endorse these guidelines in order to protect children’s rights in the media.

MMA will also publish a follow-up report to “Children’s Views Not In the News,” in the middle of this year. This will be a comprehensive report on the media’s performance on reporting on children and is inter-related with the quarterly MAD OAT reports of MADs and GLADs.

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<sup>25</sup> Read the report: <http://bit.ly/f4E0rk>