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# Children's Views not in the News

Portrayal of Children in South  
African Print Media 2009 -2010

**MEDIA**MONITORING  
AFRICA

Written by Ronell Singh



OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION FOR SOUTH AFRICA



**Save the Children**

Sweden

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## Introduction

Reporting on children is one of the most challenging aspects of journalism. It is also one of the most important.

We know that human challenges, like hunger, poverty, disaster, and discrimination all have a profound impact on children. In fact the media frequently chooses to represent children as the face of these challenges (despite it rarely being in a child's best interest to do so).

Images of children are also often used to represent hope and optimism, which shows that the media is at least aware of children's importance as future decision makers in society. However unfortunately this is not always evident in its treatment of children.

Children are arguably afforded greater protection under the law than any other grouping. Media similarly have greater responsibilities when it comes to reporting on children.

Excellent reporting on children requires commitment and professionalism, and while it may pose significant ethical dilemmas, it is not only rewarding, but it is necessary if reporting is to become truly representative of society.

Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) seeks to encourage professional and ethical reporting. This is the third report published by MMA since 2003 as part of its Empowering Children and the Media (ECM) strategy.

For this report MMA has monitored 13 of South Africa's major news publications for content on children over a period of nine months (from September 2009 to May 2010).

Since 2003 the coverage afforded to children, children's rights and their issues by the South African media has been steadily growing, and now stands at 11.4%. But there is still significant room for improvement, both in terms of the quantity and quality of reporting on children.

## Key Monitoring Findings

1. Children are significantly under-represented in the media. Only 11.4% of stories deal with children and their issues, despite the fact that they make up over 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the population - 39% (South African Child Gauge 2009/2010). However the number of children's stories has increased since we published our last report, when just 8.4% of stories mentioned children and it is a significant improvement on 2003's results, where children appeared in just 6% of the stories monitored.

2. Even when children are the subject of news stories, their voices are rarely heard. In fact our research shows a decline in the number of children being accessed by the media. Currently, of the 11.4% of stories in which children are mentioned, only 34% actually refer to children as sources, and of these only 14% of children are quoted, either directly or indirectly. Last year, 42% of stories that mentioned children had child sources, and 21% directly or indirectly quoted children. This decrease is a worrying trend.

3. There has been no noticeable improvement in the average number of children accessed per child related story. For every story written about children, an average of 1.3 children were involved or consulted. Considering that children should be at the heart of these reports, this number is extremely low.

4. Journalists access children either directly or indirectly in just 14% of cases. In most stories involving children (59%), they are not even named, but are just mentioned, often by only referring to their age. This figure has increased by 17% since our last report. In 14% of cases children are just photographed, while in 12% they are simply named.

5. The number of in-depth analysis or feature articles has fallen to 3%, down from 8% in our 2009 report. The vast majority of stories on children fall within the category of hard news. That figure now stands at 66%, up by 4% on last year's results. This is a worrying development. The emphasis on hard news leaves little room for addressing children's concerns

6. 2% of stories monitored clearly violated children's rights, by either directly or indirectly identifying them when it was not in a child's best interests. This tends to occur most frequently in stories of abuse where the child's identity is revealed. This year has seen a small improvement on last year, a decrease from 3%, while the figure was 10% in our research in 2003.

7. Children's rights can fall victim to media's hunger for catchy headlines and enticing copy. However, in a positive development, headlines now appear to respect children's rights 80% of the time. This is an improvement on 2009, a difference of 16%. There was also a significant improvement witnessed in the percentage of actual stories that clearly made efforts to respect or reinforce children's rights. This now stands at 79%, up from 64% in 2009.

The percentage of images in which children's rights were clearly respected has only slightly increased from 41% in 2009 to 42% in 2010. Collectively headlines, copy and photos clearly considered children's rights in 32% of all cases. This was also an improvement on last year, showing a difference of 4% since 2009.

8. Education, disaster or accident, and personality or profile pieces are the 3 most reported on topics when it comes to stories involving children. Collectively they make up 35% of all children's news stories. The percentage of stories about education has been gradually increasing since 2003, overtaking crime as the most popular topic for children's stories. That 11% of stories involving children deal with a disaster or accident is due in part to the extensive coverage of the Haiti disaster. While personality and profile pieces making it into the top 3 may in part be attributed to the large amount of World Cup stories and photographs that featured soccer stars and children.

9. Similar to last year's research findings, the representation of children by race and gender appears to reflect the status quo quite closely. However, representation of gender and race still lends itself to stereotyping. Under certain topics, such as disaster or accident and crime, boys are referred to more often. However, in other topics such as health and the justice system, girls are represented more. This is most likely due to the stereotyping of boys seen in more masculine roles whereas girls are often represented as passive victims. Black children make up the majority of children mentioned.

10. Whilst The Times scored highest in terms of the quantity of stories published on children, (18.4%), the Sowetan was rated highest in a qualitative assessment of its representation of children (as evaluated with the DRIVE criteria – see methodology below).

## Methodology and Media Ratings

Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) has monitored 13 of South Africa's major news publications for content on children for a period of nine months (from September 2009 to May 2010). Daily and weekly newspapers were standardised to produce the same monitoring result.

Of a total of 63,658 monitored stories, 7274 (11.4% of all news stories) dealt with children. Each children's story that was identified (either by means of an article, picture, headline or caption) was assessed by media monitors using a customised monitoring tool (see USER GUIDE). The research results provided an interesting insight into how the South African media represents children.

### 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 were 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 interest, children should be accessed by the media as this adds to the credibility, relevance and representativity 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 Sowetan performing the best overall, coming in 1<sup>st</sup> place:

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

### **Limitations**

During the nine month monitoring period, the Haiti disaster featured prominently in the news. The large number of photographs and articles depicting victims and survivors may have influenced the findings. The build up to the World Cup may also have resulted in more personality and profile pieces featuring children being published than would ordinarily be the case.

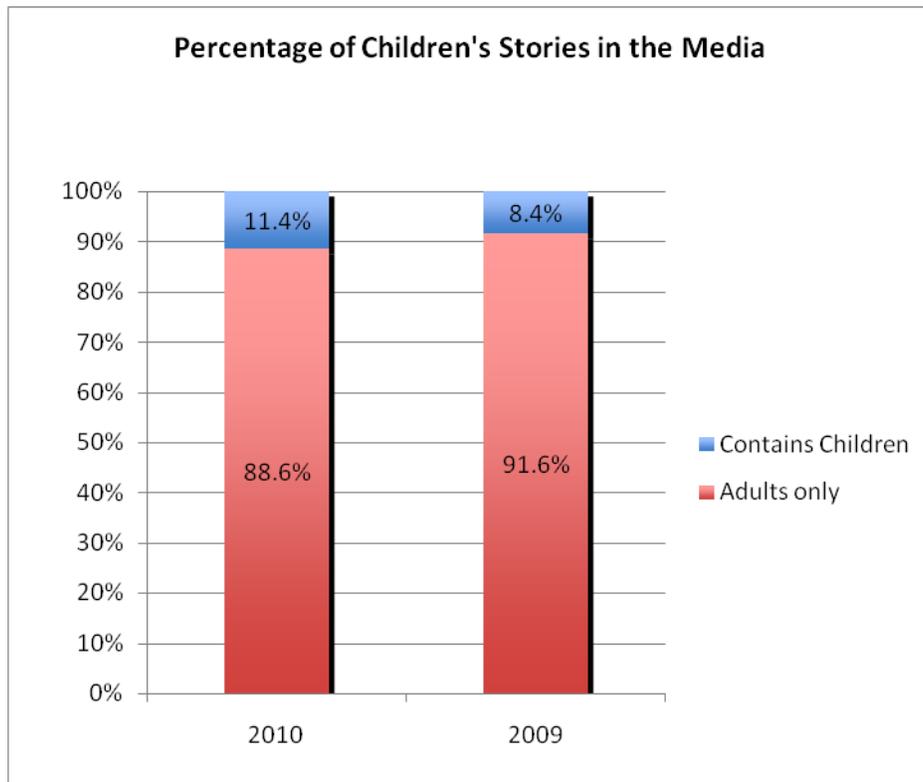
Only major publications, predominantly from Gauteng, were considered for this study. All 13 monitored newspapers were in English. Letters and advertorials were excluded from the monitored items.

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

In the nine months of the monitoring period 63,658 stories appeared in the monitored mediums, of which 7,274 dealt with children. This means that stories in which children were involved accounted for just 11.4% of news during the monitoring period. Whilst low, this figure represents an increase from 8.4% from the 2009 study and from 6% since the 2003 research report.



Though gradual, this a positive trend and one that needs to continue if reporting is to become truly representative of the population. However, with children accounting for 39% of the total population (South African Child Gauge 2009/2010), media still have a long way to go.

## Representation by publication

How frequently children’s stories appear in each of the monitored publications varies considerably. Barring City Press, every newspaper has improved in terms of the amount of children’s stories published.

The Times retains first place with children’s stories making up over 18% of its content. Saturday Star demonstrated the biggest improvement in this area. The percentage of stories featuring children published by the paper has doubled since last year, jumping from 7.9% of its content to 16.6%, making it the second best performing newspaper. While Business Day failed to include enough stories to even register last year, child related stories now make up 3.7% of its content. Though small this is still a positive step in the right direction.

	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2009</b>
1	The Times	18.4 %	15.3%
2	Saturday Star	16.6%	7.9%
3	The Star	14.5%	9.8%
4	Daily Sun	14.1%	9.0%
5	Sowetan	11.0%	9.9%
6	Sunday Times	9.0%	8.2%
7	The Citizen	8.2%	5.3%
8	Sunday World	8.1%	3.1%
9	City Press	7.9%	8.4%
10	Sunday Sun	6.4%	5.7%
11	Mail & Guardian	4.8%	3.7%
12	Business Day	3.7%	0%*
13	The Sunday Independent	3.2%	2.9%

**\* sample size was statistically insignificant**

It’s interesting to note that those who performed the best in terms of the quantity of children’s stories published also tended to do well when it came to our DRIVE rating system (see above) which determines the quality of the reporting. The top five here also appeared in the DRIVE top five, though in a different order.

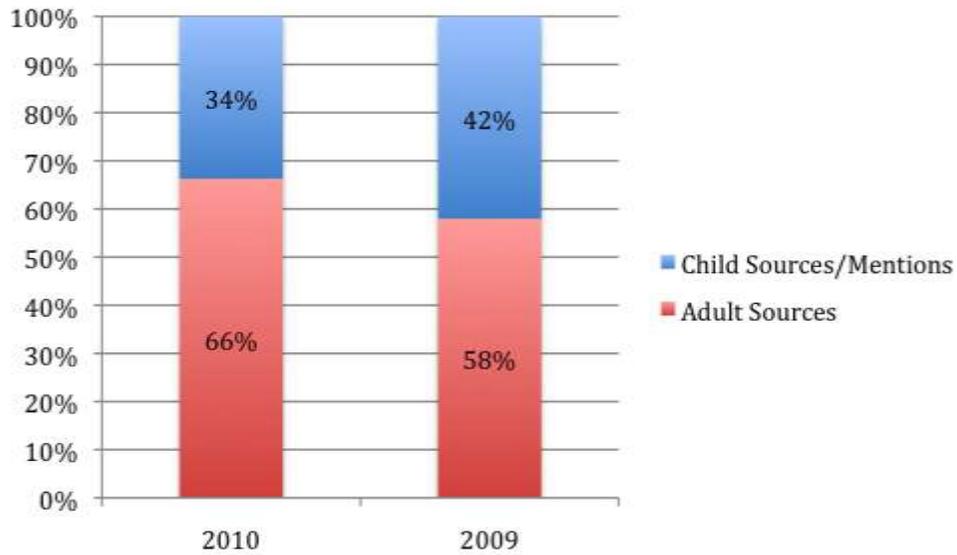
**Children telling their own stories**

Despite the gradual progress which is being made in increasing the quantity of children’s stories that are published, 11.4% is still too little.

Worse still is that when newspapers publish stories about children, we rarely hear from the children themselves, and this year we are hearing even fewer children’s voices.

The proportion of children accessed fell by a disappointing 20%, from 42% of the total to 34%. Adults now constitute 2/3s of the sources accessed in monitored stories about children.

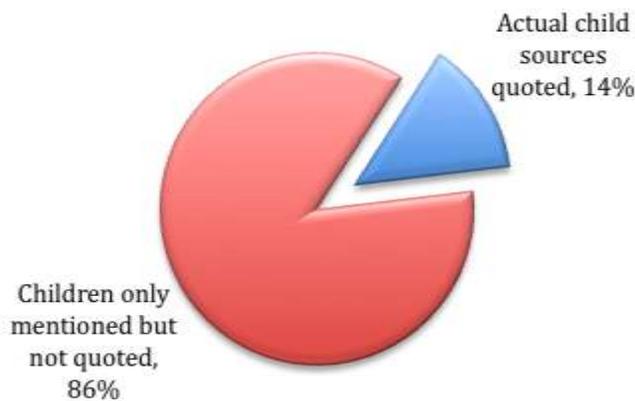
**Child sources vs. adult sources**



In 2003 an average of 2.4 children were accessed per children’s story. However, in recent years that figure has almost halved. In both 2009 and 2010, on average, just over one child was accessed per story (1.3 in 2009 and 1.3 in 2010). Children should be at the heart of stories that involve them. Clearly this is not currently the case. That there has been no significant improvement since last year is very disappointing.

Even when children are included as sources, the media and other adults frequently speak on their behalf. Children were only quoted (directly or indirectly) in 14% of the stories in which they were mentioned as sources. Again this is down on last year’s figure of 21%. Instead of talking to children, journalists may approach an adult to speak on their behalf, a parent or teacher for example, or may simply assume they know how a child feels about a certain issue. These are disturbing results. Rather than recognising the value of children’s contributions, the media is stifling their voices. Where possible and appropriate the media must work harder to ensure that children’s voices are heard.

**Children Quoted**



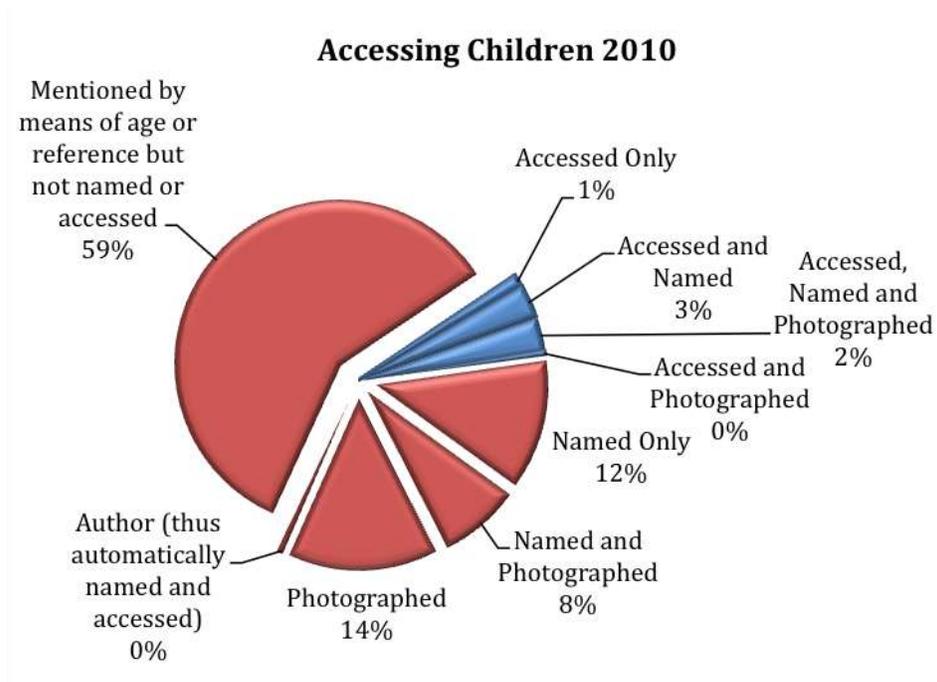
**Accessing and including children in their own stories**

MMA understands that for many reasons, it is often difficult for journalists to approach children in order to access them directly or indirectly in stories. Many parents or guardians may not want to allow journalists to speak directly to their children. Instead they often choose to speak on behalf of their children. However, this is not always in the child’s best interest as the adult might not be aware of how the child feels.

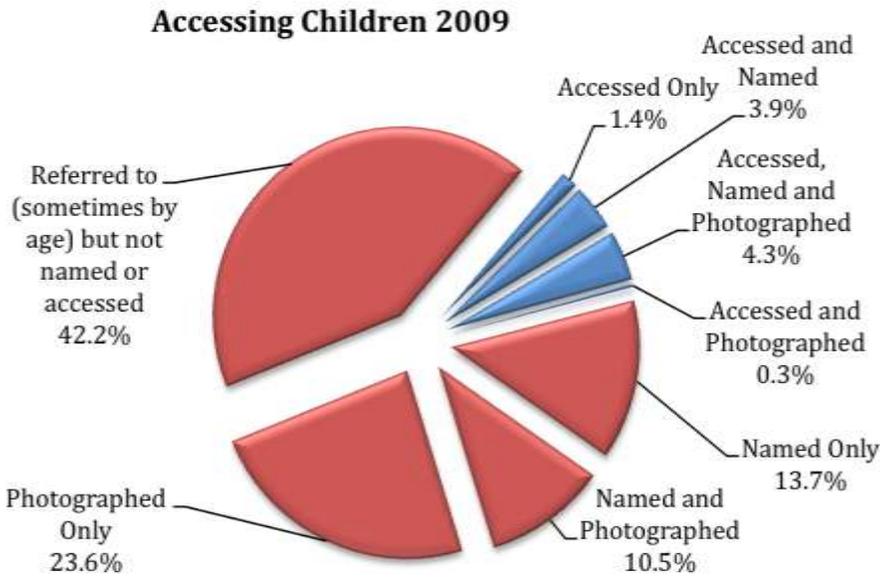
There are occasions, however, where it might not be in the child’s best to be identified. This is best avoided in cases where:

- 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 interests of the child.
- The child might be exposed to harm, stigma, victimisation or suffer similar injustices.

Nevertheless by not consulting children and then simply referring to them by citing their gender or age, it creates the impression that the child is immaterial to the story. As the graph below shows, even when children are the centre of a story, most articles make only brief reference to them, often only citing a child’s age or including a photograph of them or naming them.



What is most disturbing about these results is that media is making even less of an effort now to adequately access children than it did last year. The proportion of children that are simply mentioned without even being named has increased from 42% to 59%. These children are neither seen, nor heard, and as such are portrayed as being peripheral to the story.

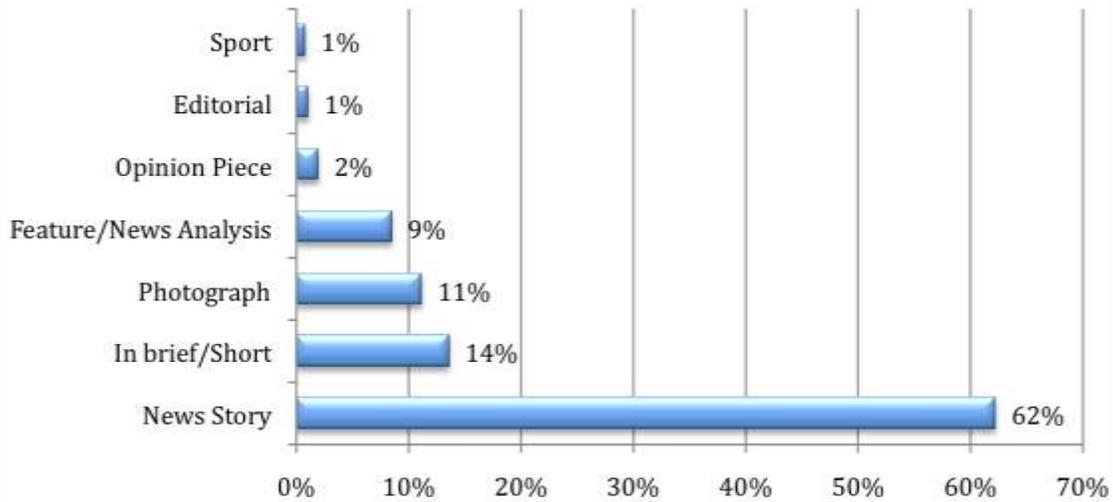


**Type of stories in which children appear**

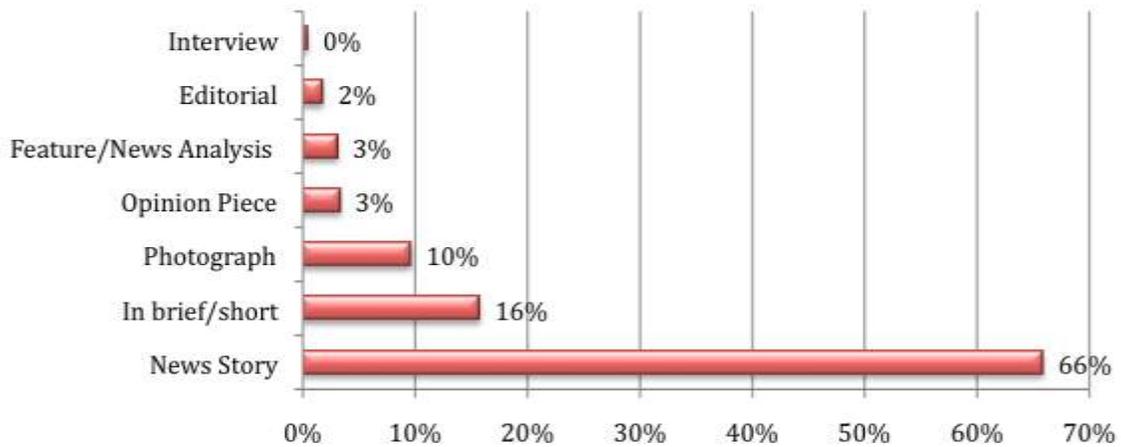
Children feature predominantly in hard news stories (66% - up from 63% in 2009), in abbreviated news stories or briefs (16% - up from 14% in 2009) and in photographs (10% - down from 11% in 2009).

MMA is very concerned that the number of feature / analysis pieces about children has fallen significantly from 8% to 3%. The continued over-representation of children in news stories, and their dwindling inclusion in feature / analysis pieces, leaves little room for their concerns and interests to be addressed in a meaningful way. This is a trend that must be reversed.

**Types of stories on Children 2009**



**Types of stories on children 2010**



**Topics in children’s stories**

Since 2003, it’s been possible to identify a number of interesting trends in the news topics in children’s stories.

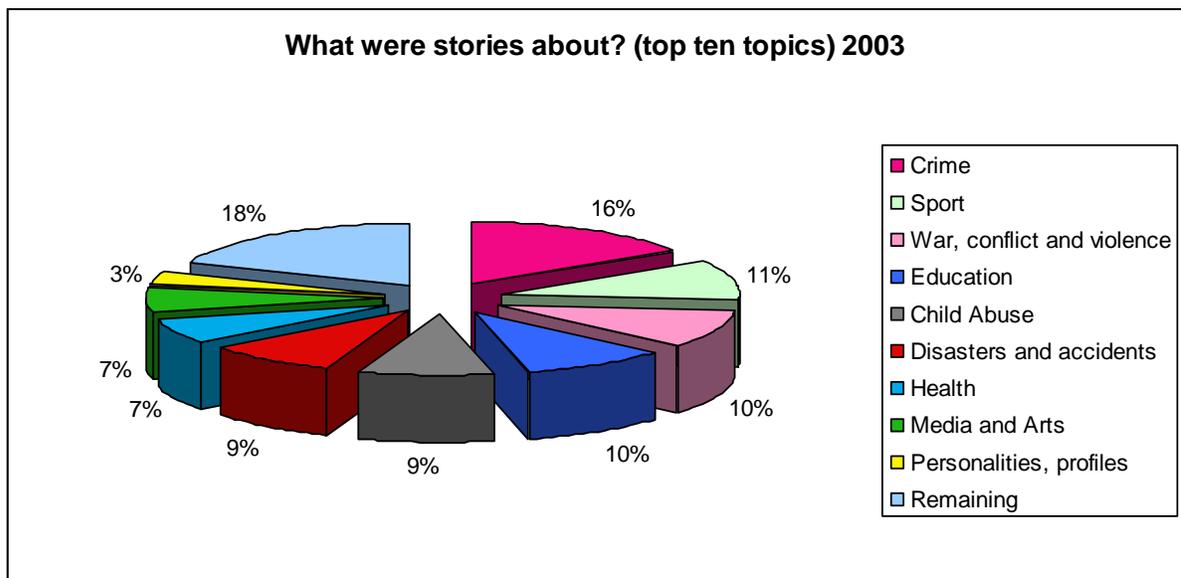
While the percentage of stories on education that mention or feature children has increased marginally since 2003, it is now the most popular topic in children’s stories at 13%. That education dominates children’s stories may be attributed in part to the extensive media coverage of struggles within the education system.

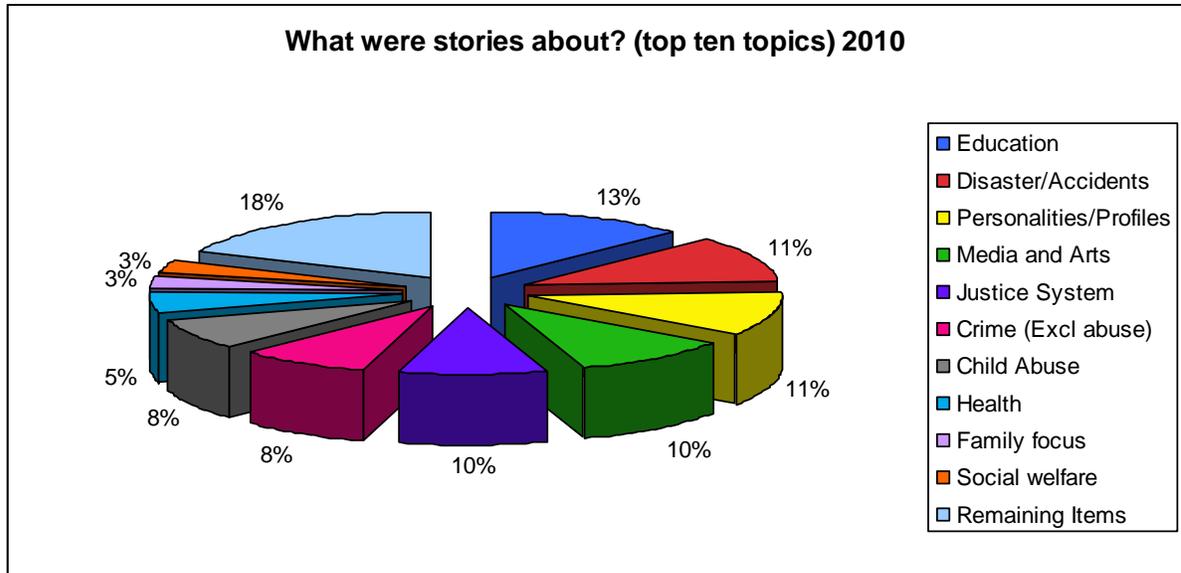
In 2003 children appeared most often in crime stories. Reporting on children in these stories frequently casts them in the role of victim or perpetrator. However, over the last number of years the representation of children in crime stories has fallen substantially, from 18% in 2003 to 11% last year, and now the figure stands at 8%. This is significant progress.

While stories dealing with war and violence, featuring children, were in the top three topics in 2003, this topic don't even feature in the top ten in 2010. This may be attributed to the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003.

The percentage of stories featuring children that deal with disasters or tragedies has remained at similar levels, at 9% in both 2003 and 2009 and increasing to 11% this year. This increase is most likely the result of media coverage of the earthquake in Haiti in January.

However, the fact that since 2003, approximately 1 in 10 stories featuring children are about a disaster or tragedy, demonstrates a consistency in the representation of children as victims, and frequently as the face of suffering.





Last year there was a noticeable increase in the percentage of children’s stories about health which was attributed in part to the outbreak of the H1N1 virus. Our latest results show that there are now even fewer health related children’s stories appearing than in 2003.

Children are appearing in more positive stories, for example the percentage dealing with the media, arts and lifestyle issues has increased dramatically since our last report. So too has the percentage of profiles about prominent people or upcoming talent in which children appear.

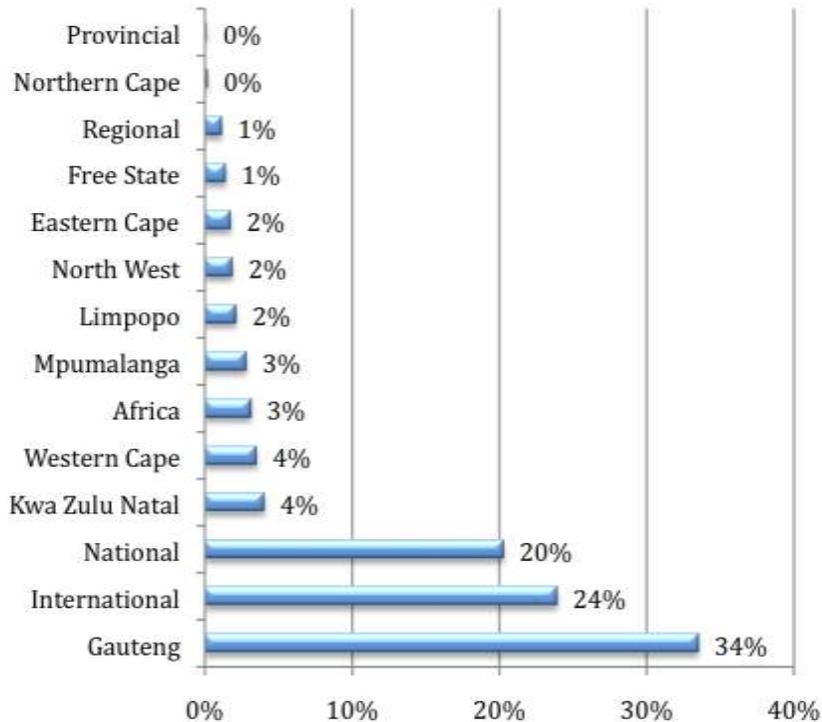
Note: While the percentage of “remaining” topics may appear quite high, this represents all other topics that constitute 2% or less of the children’s stories monitored, and consists of over 60 topics.

**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.

Topics such as media and arts, as well as personality and profile pieces perform strongly irrespective of whether a story is local, National or International. However the most popular stories to emerge from Gauteng are those dealing with disasters or accidents, crime and the justice system. This suggests a strong trend towards negative reporting on children at a local level.

**Origin of Stories on Children 2010**



**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, 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 their reporting or violate children’s rights. However, when it comes to actively affirming children’s rights, there is a lot of room for improvement.

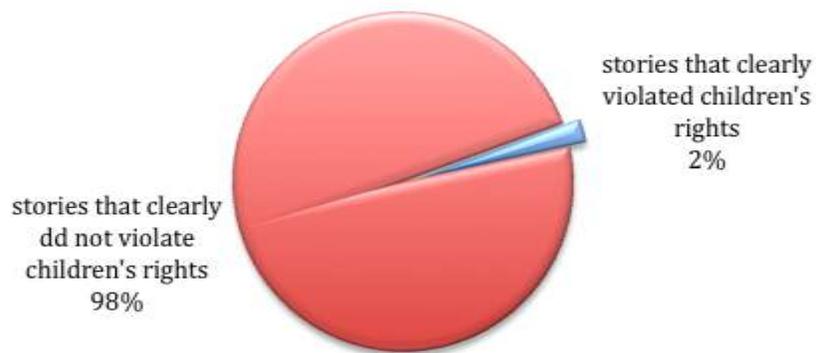
In this study, the extent to which the media has respected children’s rights has been assessed on three different levels. The first considers the structural elements of a story to establish whether the child’s rights were respected, this includes an analysis of the headline, image and actual article.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

**Respecting children in headlines, images and text**

**Clear violations of children’s rights**

When considered as a whole, only 2% of the monitored children’s stories clearly violated the rights of the children in those stories. This number has been decreasing since MMA’s first research study in 2003 where 10% of all stories monitored clearly violated the rights of the child. And in the last year the percentage of articles violating children’s rights stood at 3%.

**Children's rights respected in the media 2010**



These violations occurred most frequently in stories where a child was the victim of abuse and their identity was made public despite this not being in the child’s best interest.

While the continuing decrease in the number of these stories appearing in the media is a very encouraging trend, each case represents a clear violation. Just one report that violates a child’s rights is one too many.

**Children’s rights respected?**

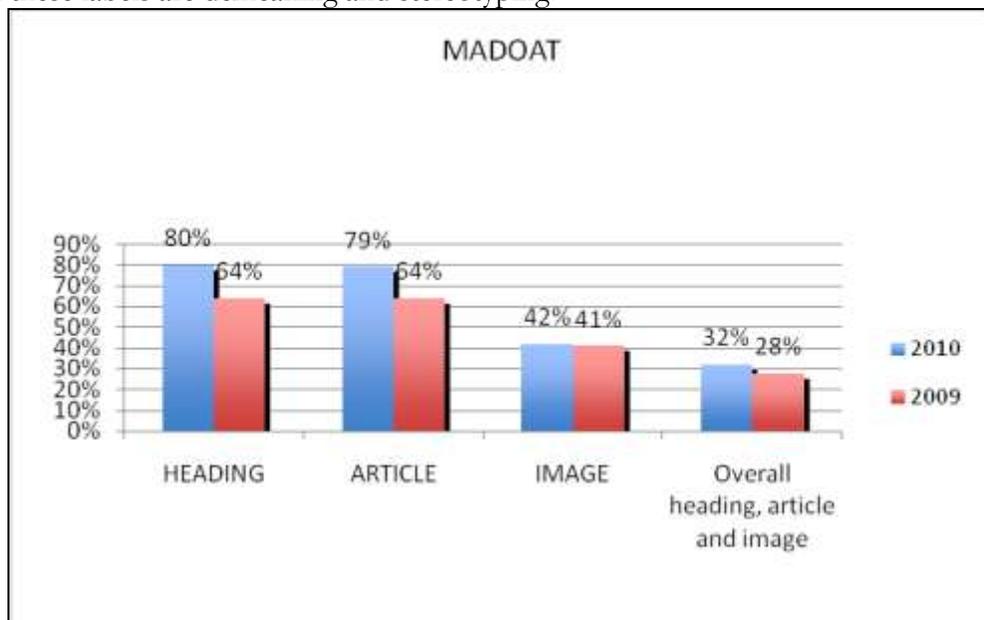
While 98% of stories may not have clearly violated children’s rights, that’s not to say they all of them clearly respected children’s rights either.

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 judgement to be made on whether the article as a whole truly respects children’s rights.

“Bus driver suspended after bus jump girl is hurt”  
 Citizen, 8 February 2010, p. 8

The headline is an example of how the media can negatively label a child. By calling the child “bus jump girl”, it suggests fault or blame. The bus driver in this story was suspended for not stopping the vehicle thereby endangering the girl’s life.

The abbreviated nature of headlines means that details and nuances are often glossed over and people frequently get labelled rather than actually named. This labelling tends to be aggravated further in situations where children’s names should not be used in the first place. Often these labels are demeaning and stereotyping.



However, there has been a significant improvement in the number of headlines in which it could be said that the rights of the child were clearly considered. The figure has increased from 64% in 2009 to 80% in 2010, which is a very positive development, and one that MMA would like to see continue.

Another significant increase is noticed in the percentage of articles that clearly considered the rights of the child. It has gone from 64% in 2009 to 79% in 2010, showing a difference of 15%.

The depiction of children in images is still a cause for concern as very little improvement has been seen in the media. The percentage of images that clearly considered children’s rights increased only slightly from 41% in 2009 to 42% in 2010.

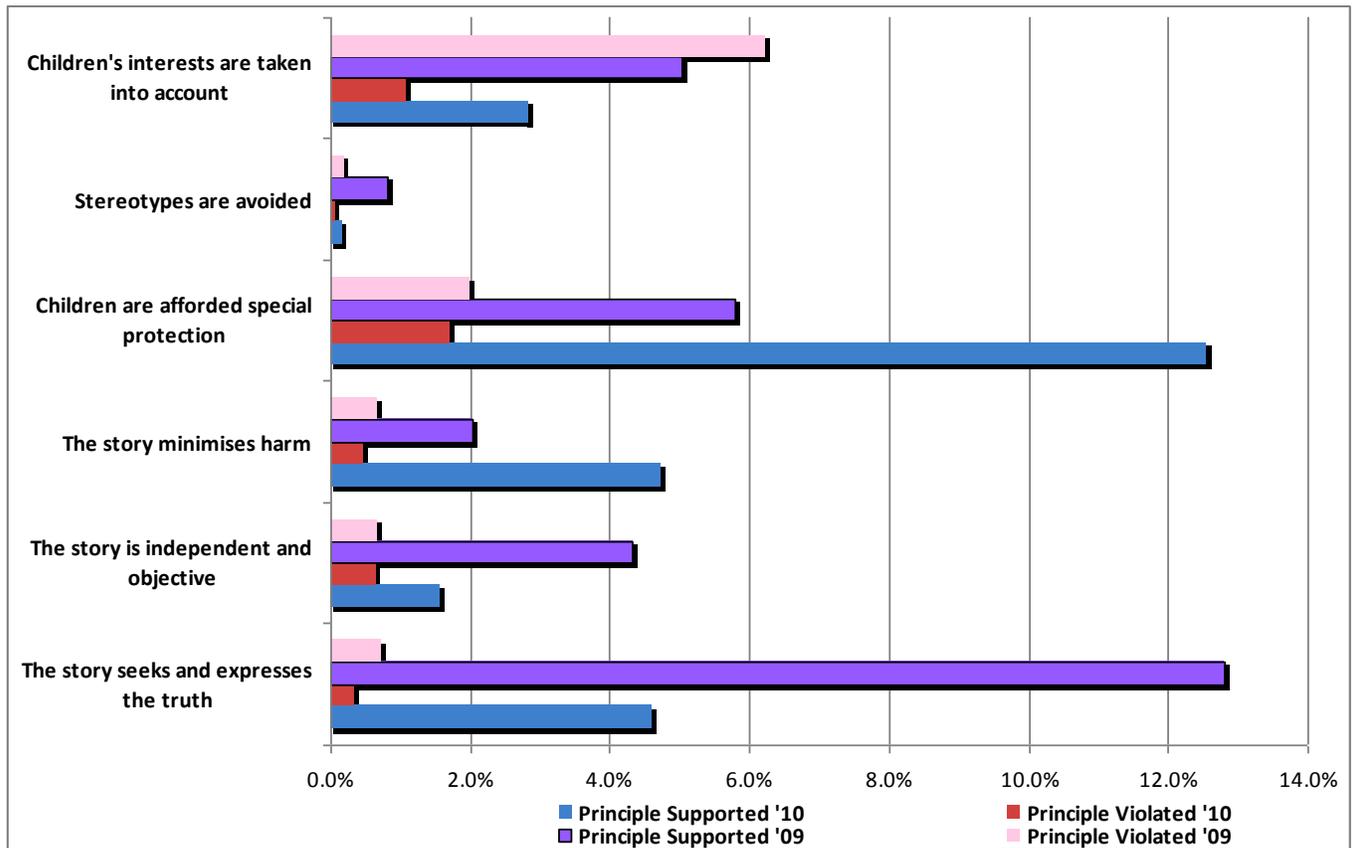
When considered as whole, the percentage of headlines, articles, and images that collectively respect children’s rights stands at 32%, which is also an improvement on 2009.

**Observing ethical principles**

Stories were also 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 an ethical principle 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 graph below indicates, whilst only a small fraction of stories constituted blatant violations of these principles, they still received comparatively little clear positive support.



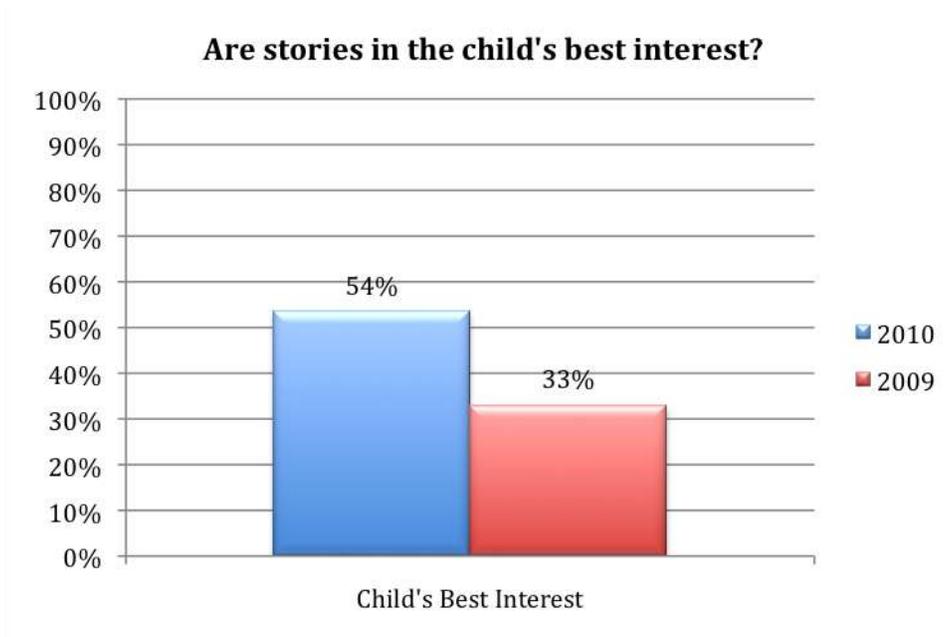
The most significant improvement in ethical reporting of children’s issues was witnessed in the number of stories judged to have afforded children special protection, for example by protecting their identity when it’s in their best interests. The number of articles in this category has more than doubled since our last report, jumping from 6% to 13%.

Unfortunately this year saw a significant drop in the number of stories which clearly endeavoured to seek and express the truth. Since our last report they've more than halved, falling from 13% in 2009 to 5% this year.

However on a positive note, fewer articles are clearly failing to take children's interests into account. The number of stories judged as having clearly violated this principle has dropped by 5%, from 6% to 1%.

**In the child's best interest?**

All articles that involve children should be in their best interests. It may sound obvious, but unfortunately not all articles follow this basic ethical principal. In our last report, just 1/3 of the articles monitored were judged to be in the child's best interest. Thankfully this is improving. Now more than half of the articles were found to be in the child's best interest. However there is still a lot of room for improvement here.

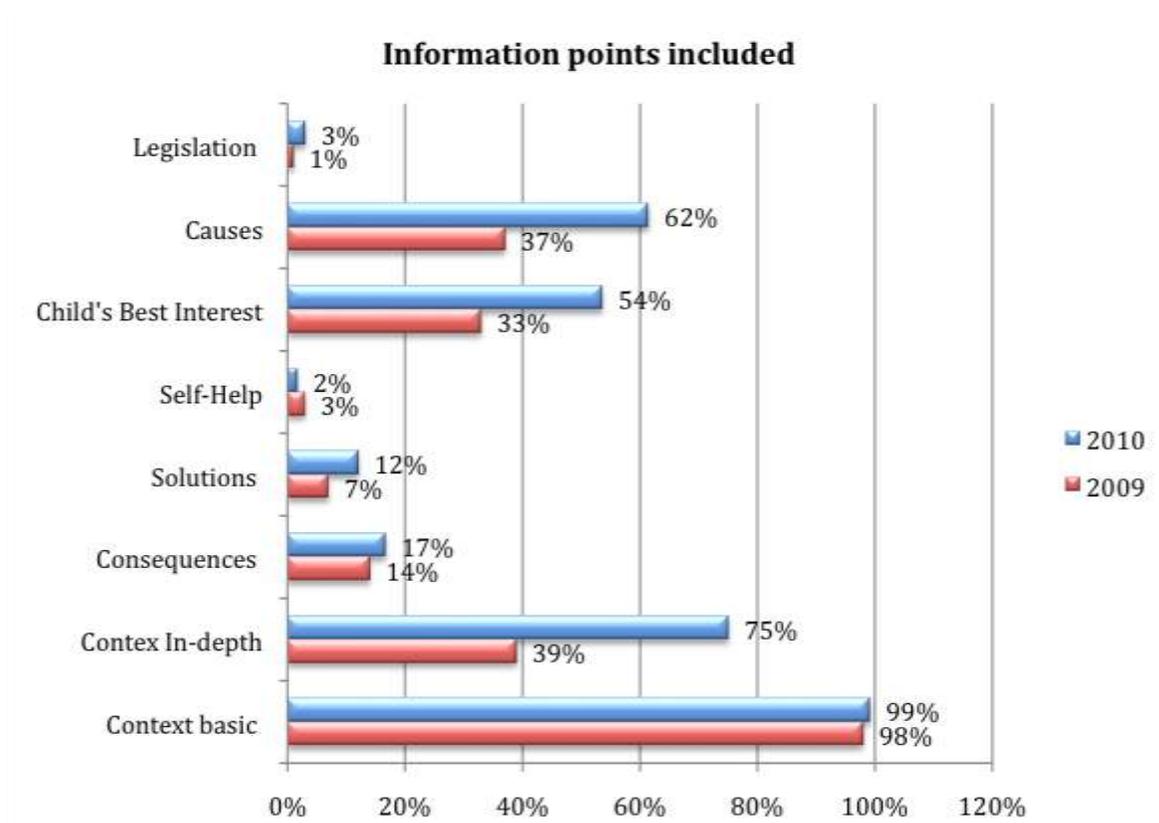


**Including information points**

Giving context to a story, so that it is not viewed in isolation but rather as part of a bigger picture, is key to informative and relevant journalism. To that end journalists should refer to appropriate legislation, offer statistics, discuss possible causes and solutions, as well as including self help information where appropriate. Stories that report on injustices to children, like abuse or rape for example, offer an opportunity to educate readers and other children on what to do should they have a similar experience.

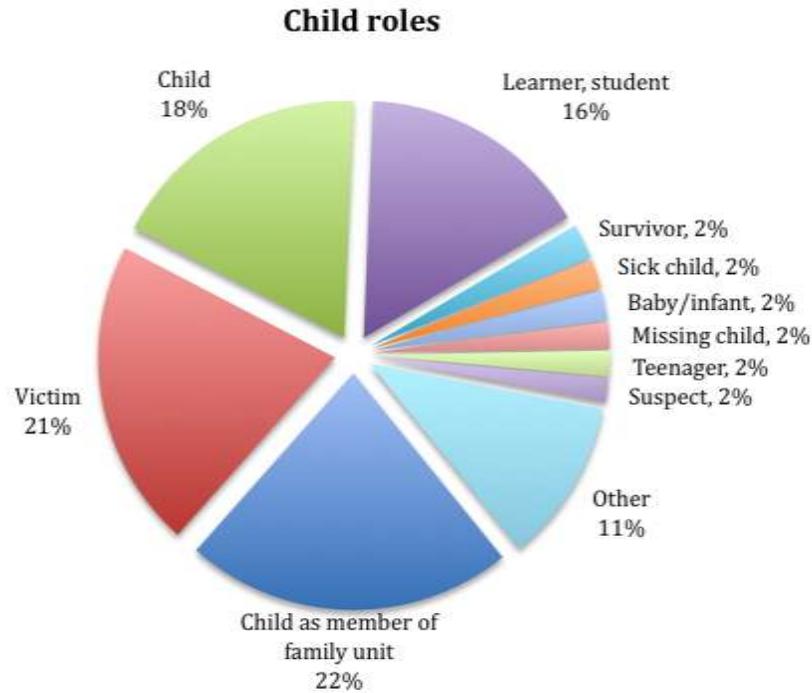
The media consistently does well in terms of providing context and background to stories. There have also been improvements in the how frequently articles deal with potential

consequences and offer solutions. However despite a small increase, the percentage of articles that refer to relevant legislation is still very small at 3%, and unfortunately even fewer offer self-help information, with the percentage falling from 3 % to 2%.



**Representation of children in the media**

As noted earlier, children are all too often seen and not heard in the media. In failing to access children in stories that involve and concern them, the media frequently overlook children’s individual characters, representing them instead in stereotyped roles such as the student or learner (16%), the family member (22%) or the victim (21%).



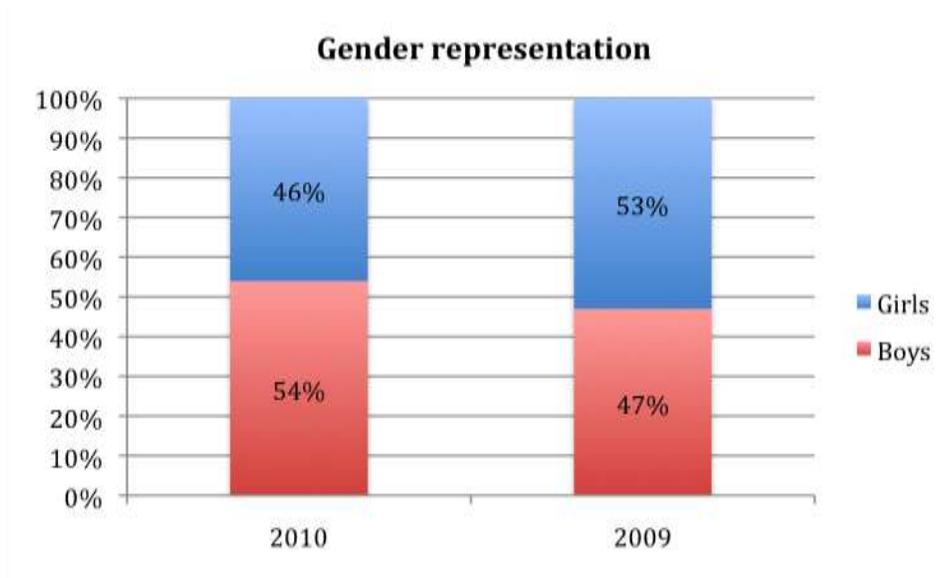
In over 1/5<sup>th</sup> of all stories, children are represented as victims. This year’s figure of 21% is down from 26% last year, and from 24% since 2003. Nevertheless it still constitutes a consistently high representation of children as victims, and suggests that this is one of the most commonly held perceptions of children. While it is true that children are the most vulnerable members of our society, assigning them this role of victim fails to acknowledge their resilience and capacity to survive. From working with children, we are aware that they are not only unhappy with stereotyping of this kind, but it discourages them from taking an interest in the media.

### **Girls and boys in the media**

It is important for the media to represent boys and girls in a fair, unbiased manner and without embedded stereotypes.

In the last report, boys were represented less than girls at 47% to 53%. In recent months, this trend has effectively been reversed with boys now appearing in 54% of stories, and girls in 46%.

Despite this shift, it’s fair to say that gender representation is quite balanced. However, the manner in which boys and girls are represented in stories can differ significantly and there remains a tendency to stereotype them in gender-defined roles, although in some cases this is beginning to change.



Traditionally boys appeared more frequently than girls in crime related stories, however this year, not only has the percentage of crime stories involving children fallen, the gap between those that mention boys and those reporting on girls has narrowed to just 1%. Nevertheless in these stories boys continue to be represented most often as perpetrators and girls, as passive victims.

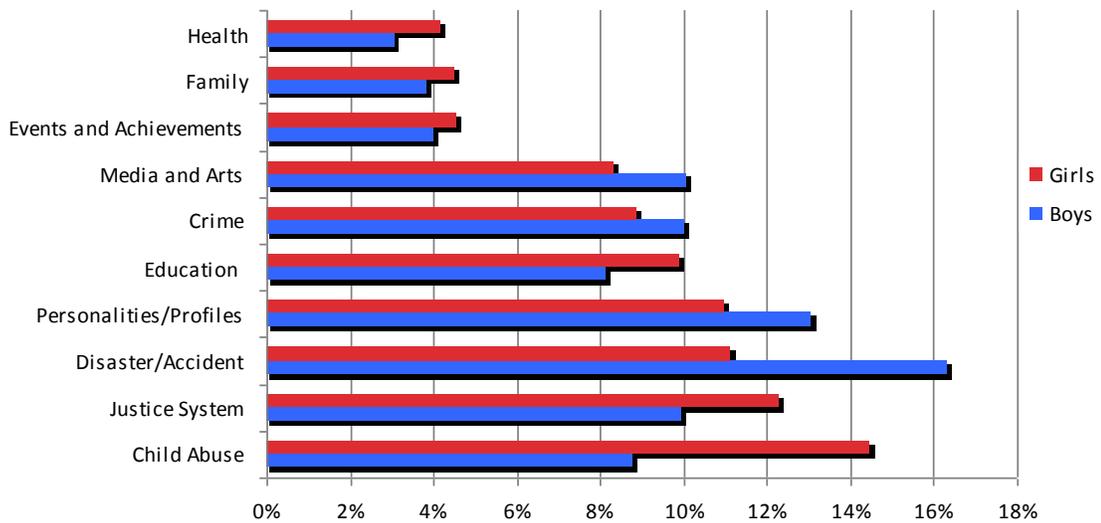
There has been a noticeable increase from 10% to 16% in the percentage of stories about boys involved in disasters or accidents. This is probably due, to a large extent, to the earthquake in Haiti in January in which children, and frequently boys, were depicted as victims.

The representation of girls and boys in stories about child rape is exactly the same as it was when we issued our last report. Of the stories monitored, 7% were about child rape involving a girl, and 1% involving a boy. Girls also continue to appear more often in stories about the justice system.

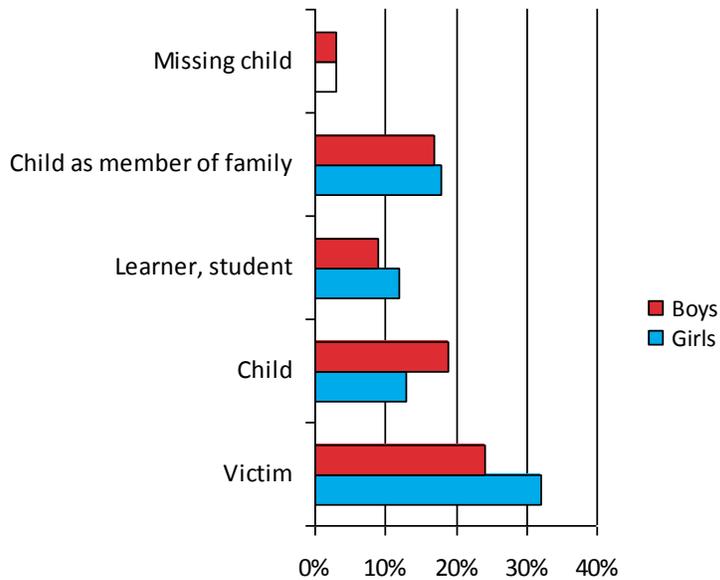
However in stories about the family, which had previously featured significantly more girls than boys, these latest results show that there is a minimal difference in representation of one over the other.

Boys are involved in more stories about media and the arts, and in more profile and personality pieces than girls. This suggests that there is a perception that boys are more outgoing and ambitious.

Topics in which boys and girls appear 2010



Gender Roles 2010

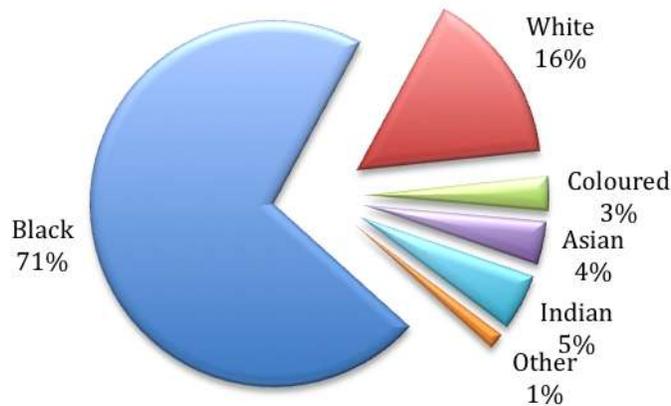


**Race**

Given our history of racial segregation and marginalization, race and representivity are extremely important considerations for the media in our developing democracy.

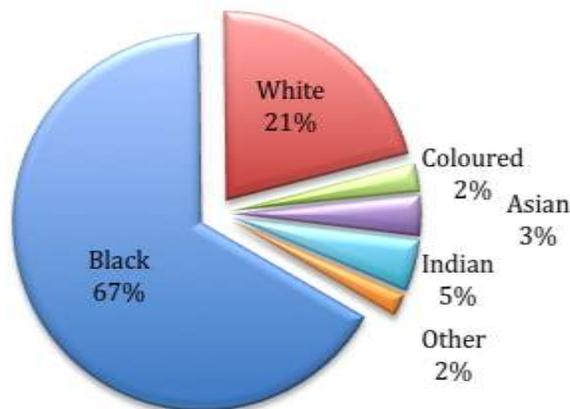
In 2003, our research showed that only 39% of children represented in the media were black. This figure almost doubled in our 2009 research results, with black children accounting for 71% of those accessed or mentioned in reports. These latest figures show that the number has dropped a little to 67%.

**Children in the media by race 2009**



Nevertheless the current representation of black children in the media offers a more accurate reflection of the race reality in South Africa than existed in 2003.

**Children in the media by race 2010**



However there is still room for improvement in terms of how children of different race are presented and the roles the media assigns to them. For example, according to these latest figures 16% of white children were shown as victims, 19% of black children were portrayed

in the same way; it was 18% in the case of coloured children and the figure climbed to 24% and 27% for Indian and Asian children respectively.

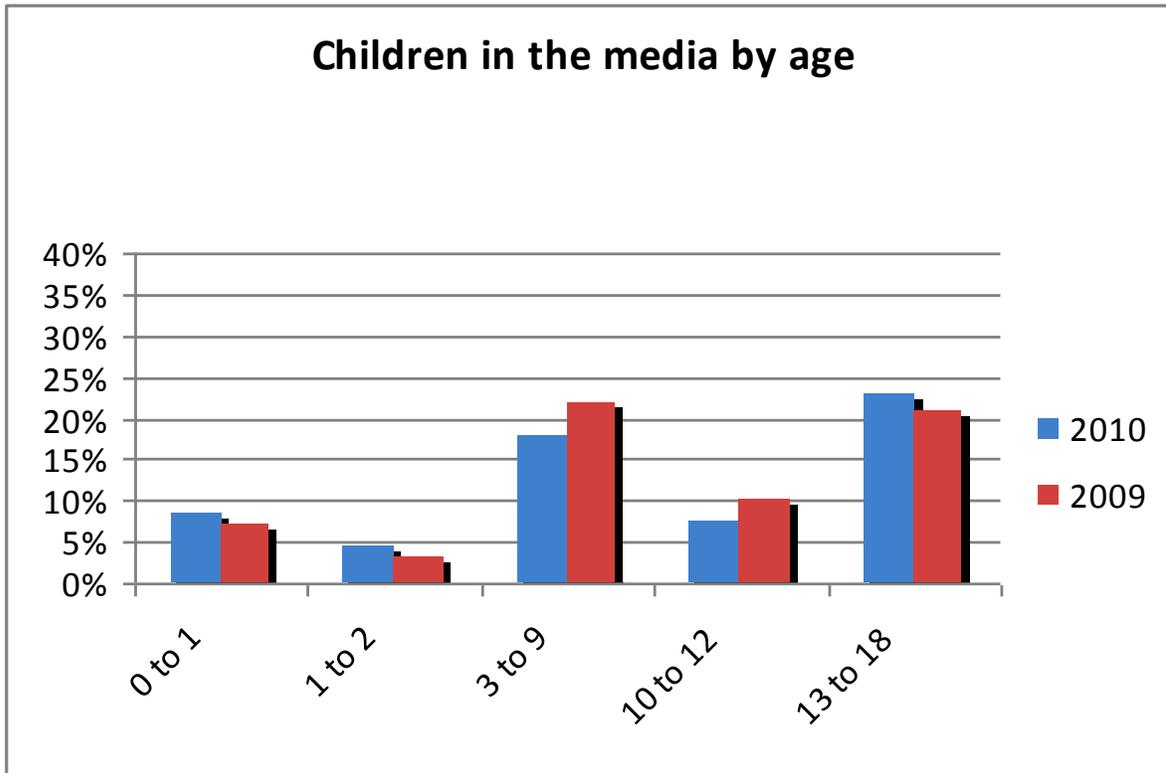
But when it came to showing children in a safer, more supportive environment, as a member of a family, 38% of white children mentioned in monitored stories were depicted in this way. This is a difference of more than 10% when compared with the percentage of black (27%), coloured (26%), Asian (23%) or Indian children (20%) identified in this way.

**Age**

Children’s ages are not always specified in the news, but where this information is available it gives context to a story.

When representation is spread across the age groups readers are given a greater understanding of the types of issues faced by children of different ages.

These figures also offer insight into how children in different age groups are covered and assessed in the media.



## Conclusion and Recommendations

Unfortunately, the old adage that children should be seen and not heard appears to be alive and well in South African reporting. While the number of stories about children is steadily growing, the amount of children’s voices being heard is dwindling. Since our last report the number of children quoted either directly or indirectly fell from 21% to just 14%.

Reporting on children is not easy. The special status afforded to them, as well as additional protections means that reporting on them requires greater adherence to ethical and legal codes. This appears to be a challenge that many journalists prefer to avoid.

Failing to engage with children means that journalists miss the opportunity to portray children as individuals with their own opinions and ideas. Instead children tend to be portrayed as stereotypes: the learner, the victim, the “typical” child – whatever that is!

Not only are children under represented in the media, but this failure to ask children what they think, means they are likely to be frequently misrepresented as well.

That the number of features and analysis pieces dealing with children has fallen since our last report is also troubling. With most children’s stories falling under hard news, it affords little opportunity to look in depth at issues that impact on the lives of children.

And while it is true that the number of clear violations of children’s rights is continuing to fall, that violations occur at all remains of serious concern. Similarly that 46% of articles are considered not to be in the best interests of a child is very worrying indeed.

### **The way forward**

The research suggests that coverage of children in the news continues to be guided predominantly by perceptions of the story’s value. Thus children are frequently reported on in crime and abuse stories or in the context of health and education. They also tend to be written about when something dramatic has happened to them – effectively, when they have “made the news”. This means that they are usually already in a vulnerable position and are then often subjected to exploitation by the media as their stories are made public knowledge.

Children in these circumstances often do not have the resources, capacity or knowledge required to defend themselves when their rights are violated and similarly, often do not have the means or sway to put their concerns on the agenda themselves. Consequently their empowerment in the media cannot be self-made – it must be facilitated. Whilst undertakings like the ECM are crucial in providing research and facilitating such change, journalists and the media as a whole have a critical role to play in improving the representation of children.

Some ways in which the media can further contribute are outlined below:

- Reporters should be encouraged to generate stories about children – rather than relying on traditional shocking or otherwise “newsworthy” events to happen before covering children’s issues.
- When writing about children, journalists should engage with them as much as possible – and at the same time exercise extreme caution in dealing with children whose rights have been violated.
- Help realise children’s right to participation as guaranteed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child by talking to children. Not only will talking and listening to children give them a sense of involvement in their own story, it will enrich the final story. Moreover, only quoting a child is not likely to expose their identity and there are many creative ways to take anonymous photographs. Ultimately, this will add depth and substance to the story and make it more interesting to read.
- Wherever possible, stories about children should be accompanied by additional information that might educate and empower readers and children in particular.
- Every story on children should be considered an opportunity to raise awareness about children’s rights.
- Encourage your newsroom to adopt MMA’s guidelines on reporting on children that have been developed with children and journalists.
- Children are involved in a diversity of exciting and interesting activities. Many of these will make for equally exciting and interesting stories.
- Not only is supporting children in the best interest of society, but most adults have children and are therefore interested in children’s issues.

# User Guide

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

<b>Date</b>	When the item was published.
<b>Medium</b>	The name of the medium (newspaper) monitored.
<b>Number of Children's stories per medium</b>	The number of children's stories which appeared in a newspaper
<b>No.</b>	page number where the story appeared. This is important in order for us to assess the importance and relevance given to the article.
<b>Summary</b>	A brief summary of the article
<b>Type of article</b>	This captures the different types of articles published. Eg: News Story, opinion piece or editorial.
<b>Topic code</b>	Here the overall topic, or central subject of each item is captured. This is determined from a set list of codes.
<b>Origin</b>	Here the geographical location to which the stories apply is captured.
<b>J/A, Journalist Sex, J/A name</b>	The journalist sex or agency who is responsible for writing this article would be captured along with their full names and gender.
<b>Adult Source</b>	The role of the adult in the story is captured. Eg: Mother, teacher etc. This role is determined from a set list of codes.
<b>Children's Role</b>	The role of the child in the story. Eg: Victim, learner etc. This role is determined from a set list of codes.
<b>Sex</b>	The child's gender
<b>Age</b>	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.
<b>Race</b>	The race of the child
<b>Child Access Code</b>	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 newly-developed **MAD OAT** (Make Abuse Disappear - Online Accountability Tool) was introduced into this user-guide and implemented to assess ethical issues in reporting on children. It took the following into consideration:

<b>Headline</b>	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.
<b>Image</b>	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.
<b>Article</b>	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.
<b>Source</b>	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?
<b>Identity</b>	The privacy/identity and HIV status of the child has been sufficiently protected where in the child's interest.
<b>Abuse</b>	Has the article reported that the child has been abused?
<b>Child Central Focus</b>	A 'YES' or 'NO' box is ticked to determine if the story is centered around the child or children in question.
<b>Rights Respected</b>	A 'YES' or 'NO' box is ticked if the story respects or disrespects the rights of a child.

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

No.	Principle	Description
1	<b>The Story does/does not seek and express the truth</b>	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	<b>The Story is/is not independent and objective</b>	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	<b>The Story does/does not minimise harm</b>	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	<b>Children are afforded special protection</b>	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	<b>Avoid stereotypes</b>	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	<b>Children's interests are/are not taken into account</b>	Is the story disregarding of children's feelings? Does it make them feel sad about themselves?  
7	<b>Child Abuse is a Human Rights Violation</b>	Does the story clearly represent child abuse as human rights violation or does it clearly trivialise child abuse? 
8	<b>Stories do/do not respect and engage with cultural and sexual practices as well as drug awareness</b>	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	<b>Be aware of the HIV/AIDS dimensions to child abuse stories</b>	Does the story raise HIV as a clear issue linked to child abuse? Does the story consider the HIV implications of child abuse?  
10	<b>Be gender proactive and consider the gender angles to all stories</b>	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** was assessed using the following codes:

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>CB</b>	Context basic: Does it mention any basic statistics or facts about where it happened, does it show a map, etc.
<b>CI</b>	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?
<b>Y</b>	Causes: Does the story explain the causes of the event?
<b>O</b>	Consequences: Does the story describe the consequences of the accident or disaster or how it impacts on broader society?
<b>S</b>	Solutions: Does the story offer any possible solutions or means of addressing the problems?
<b>L</b>	Relevant legislation: Does the story mention any relevant legislation or policy?
<b>SH</b>	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?
<b>CBI</b>	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** was provided where information could be recorded that has not been captured elsewhere.