Reporting on children in the media, how does it make you feel?

MAD?
Stories that violate children’s rights to dignity, equality and privacy make us MAD.
- This article identifies children who are being abused;
- A token gesture is made to protect children’s identities. The black strips hide only the girls’ eyes and nothing else;
- The images and details provided are used to titillate and further sexualise the children who are being assaulted;
- No evidence is provided that informed consent was received from the children to be interviewed;
- Not only does the story glamourise child abuse, but in reporting it in this way the Daily Voice perpetuates child abuse.

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GLAD?
Stories that protect children’s rights, give them a voice and meet the highest standards of media professionalism make us GLAD.
- In the example the child’s identity has been protected by showing her only from behind and by not showing her face;
- Instead of showing the child as a helpless victim the story and picture show the child as active, full of energy and as a survivor;
- The story focuses on the lack of police action, issues of justice and provides explanation rather than focusing on the details of the crime;
- The story highlights the issue of rape and draws on expert and child sources to ensure a better understanding of the issues involved;
- The child’s best interests are clearly paramount in the story.

Help publicise the MADOAT project. Contact us now on madoat@mediamonitoring.org.za

Comments from the children who participated in the CMMP:

“[T]hen I learnt from the others. Now I know I can only use a pic if it benefits the child,”

“So glad I spoke to the kids: they had so much to tell… They are not voiceless objects!”

“[I] must encourage more positive stories about kids. I’ll be more in touch with kids in the future.”

“[I was] inspired by what kids had to say especially during the time they gave us feedback and when I interviewed them.”

“They want to be [re]presented the way they want and be respected. Children know about their rights and basic needs. They don’t want us just to take photos and write about them.”

Comments from the journalists who participated in the CMMP:

“The purpose of the Media Monitoring Project is to get us children involved in the media to make us aware how the media represents us children, but basically for us to enjoy it.”

“I wanted to be involved so that I can have a say in how the media affects us children.”

“To be able to understand the media and the rights of the children.”

“We wanted to become monitors because we wanted more stories of children. We wanted to meet journalists and other schools.”

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The Make Abuse Disappear website aims to raise awareness and improve the representation of child abuse in the South African media. It does this through the use of technology, a reference group of children and a network of child abuse experts. For more details about the MAD project go to: www.getmad.co.za

About the Media Monitoring Project (MMP)

The MMP is a human rights driven, non-governmental organisation specialising in media monitoring with the goal of advancing a media culture in SA and the rest of the continent, that is critical and fair, free, diverse and ethical, and is trusted by top local and international human rights organisations, and leaders in children’s media monitoring. For more about the MMP go to www.mediamonitoring.org.za

“A child’s best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child.” Section 28(2) The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

The CMMP is an ongoing project started in 2003 by the Media Monitoring Project (MMP), with the support of Save the Children Sweden (SCS), and in partnership with the Institute for Advanced Journalism (IAJ). The broad aims of the project are to raise awareness on children’s issues and improve reporting on children in the South African media. It is a unique project in that a group of journalists, who remain in the newsroom throughout the process, are selected as media mentors, with the view to help them become ‘child friendly’. Through a number of training sessions and interactions with a group of schoolchildren, they are provided with specialist knowledge, skills and experience on children’s issues and children’s participation in the news media.

In 2006 the CMMP selected and worked with a group of nine journalists. In addition, we trained sixty schoolchildren from different schools around Johannesburg as child monitors, in order to build their critical thinking and reading skills and have them contribute to a discussion around children’s representation and participation in the media.

Be sure to get involved in all the policy, regulation and monitoring sessions taking place during the summit. Child-centred policy, guidelines, regulations and monitoring can make a great difference in ensuring children’s voices will be heard.