

# Children neglected in the media



## 2015 Children's media coverage: Lesotho

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## 1. Introduction

Despite their vulnerability, children are the most important part of our communities hence their rights should be respected and promoted. Therefore, with the support from Save the Children International (SCI), Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) and the Lesotho Chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) partnered to conduct an analysis of the Lesotho media coverage of children and children's issues.

The objective of the analysis was to provide an understanding on the ways media in Lesotho report on children and their issues. The following media, namely *Harvest FM*, *informative*, *Lesotho Times*, *MoAfrika*, *Moeletsi Oa Basotho*, *People's Choice Fm*, *Public Eye*, *Sunday Express* and *The post* were analysed for a period of 2 months, from 22 June 2015 to 22 August 2015. During this period, the 8 media had a total of 3077 stories of which only 61 were stories about children.

The stories about children were then analysed to determine how children were covered. This included looking at where the stories came from, what they were about, whether children were accessed, how children were portrayed, whether their rights were respected and whether the information provided in the stories is informative for the readers and audience was nuanced and empowering. The overall finding is that the Lesotho children coverage is very disappointing. The number of stories covered is very low. Most of stories covered were about abuse. Children voices were reasonable considering that "abuse" was the most covered issue and some time the media violated children's rights. Media in Lesotho need to increase the children's coverage. The findings of the analysis and recommendations are detailed below.

## 2. Findings

This section presents the findings and where possible comparisons are made with results from other countries in the southern Africa region where such analysis have been conducted. The section begins with the number of the stories and continues to origin of the stories, topics covered, children accessed, rights respected and ends with quality of information.

### 3. How many children's stories are covered in the media?

More than 40 percent of the population in Lesotho is constituted of children under the age of 18, hence we expect the children to receive a reasonable coverage in the media<sup>1</sup>. However such expectation is not reflected in the media. Figure reveals that children constituted only 2% of all stories in the media monitored. Furthermore, Lesotho is not the only country with such less devastatingly coverage of children in the media, country like South Africa has coverage of 7 % average<sup>2</sup>.

Media in Lesotho need to start reporting more on children story to ensure that their issues are not forgotten.



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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF State of the World's Children country statistics - Lesotho

<sup>2</sup> South African children's report 2014

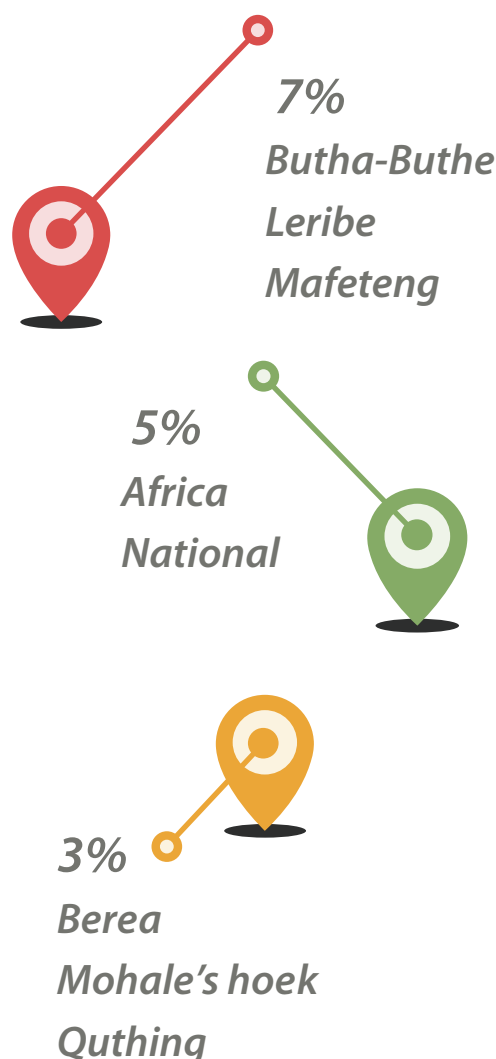
## 4. Where do the stories come from?

Exploring the origin of stories on children is of fundamental importance in understanding the diversity of coverage and issues that are of children's interest. While determining the origin of stories, the stories across the country, continent and the world were included in the criterion. However, the most important results for the stories that originate from the country as it has more direct impact on children. When it comes to coverage of children, the results from other countries like South Africa and Zambia have shown that media tends to concentrate on the large metropolitan<sup>3</sup>. This is the same with Lesotho, Maseru which received most of the coverage.

While it is disappointing that Lesotho coverage of children follows the trend in the Southern African region, which is to focus on the metropolitan stories. It is understandable that it is probably easier to report on children in Maseru because of logistical considerations the disparity when compared to the other regions is high. However, the low coverage of children in other regions is an injustice to those children living in these regions as their issues are being neglected and consequently the issues on the ground and their development is neglected. Media are therefore encouraged to report different areas or to seek stories from underreported areas perhaps through citizen journalism as technology is now available to do so without expending a lot of resources

Figure 1 - Origin of stories

**Maseru 61%**



## 5. What are the stories about?

Analysing which topics are most reported on in the media help us determine the issues media regarded as newsworthy. This can be compared with the challenges faced by the Lesotho children on the ground therefore allowing us to measure how these issues are reflected on the media landscape. Below figure shows the Top 5 topics covered.

The top 5 results shown in Figure 2, is representative of a 3rd world country like Lesotho with its economic challenges. However, this does not mean that all of the top 5 topics were all reporting of bad news. It is still shocking that child abuse constituted 44% of the entire coverage. This suggests that children's rights in Lesotho remain a massive challenge. This is a similar situation in Zambia where child abuse constituted 23% in 2013.

This results shows that Southern Africa countries like Namibia, Zambia, South Africa face almost similar challenges, which can be attributed to poverty<sup>4</sup>.

Furthermore, the media is commended for highlighting the spread of the prominent issues that affect children of Lesotho and consequently promoting their rights.

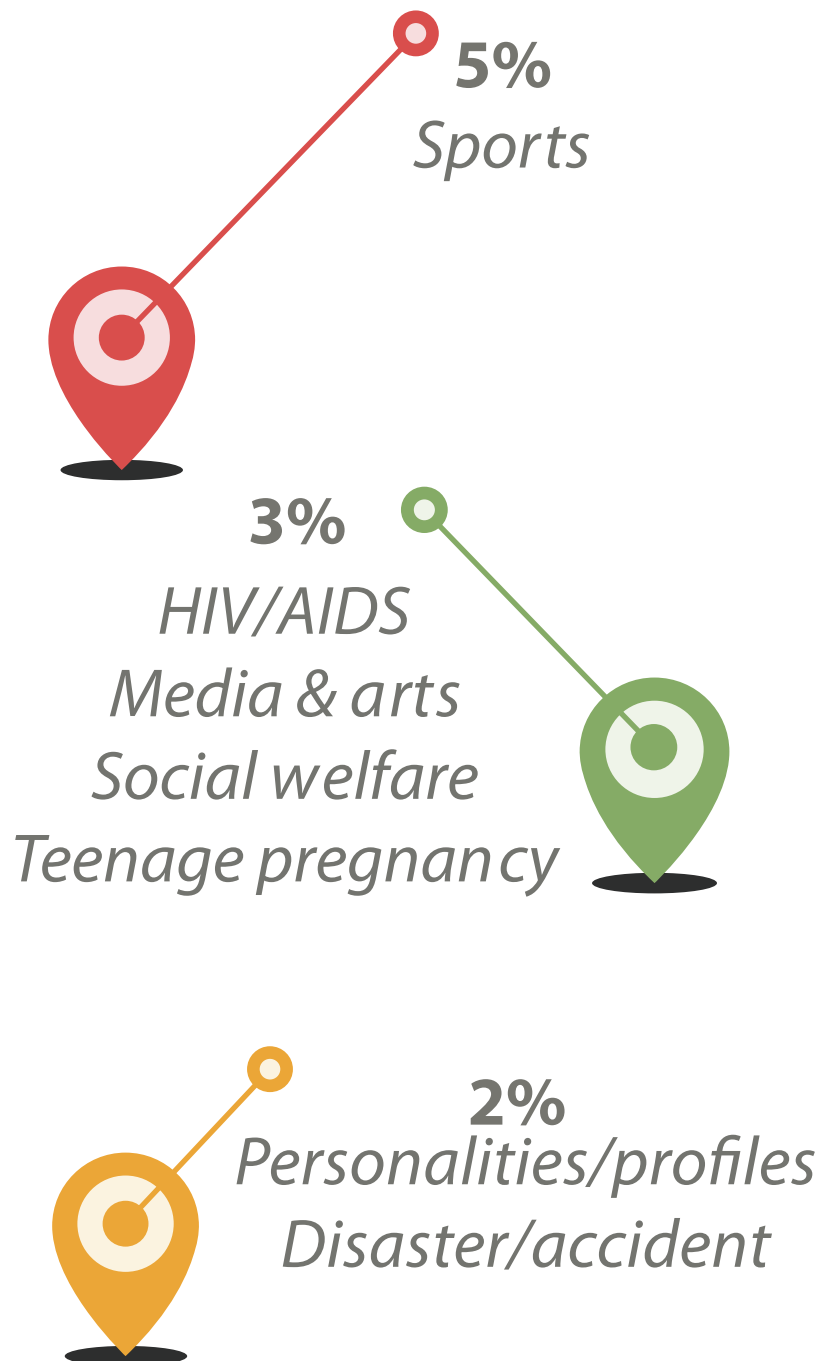
Figure 2 - Top five topics



## 6. What are the stories not about?

Despite the media highlighting the challenges that faced Lesotho children; media has reported less on issues such as HIV and AIDS of which is disappointing because 23 percent of people in Lesotho are living with HIV and AIDS. Media should therefore write more on issues that affect children and not only rely mostly on newsworthy events before doing so.

Figure 3 - Less covered topics

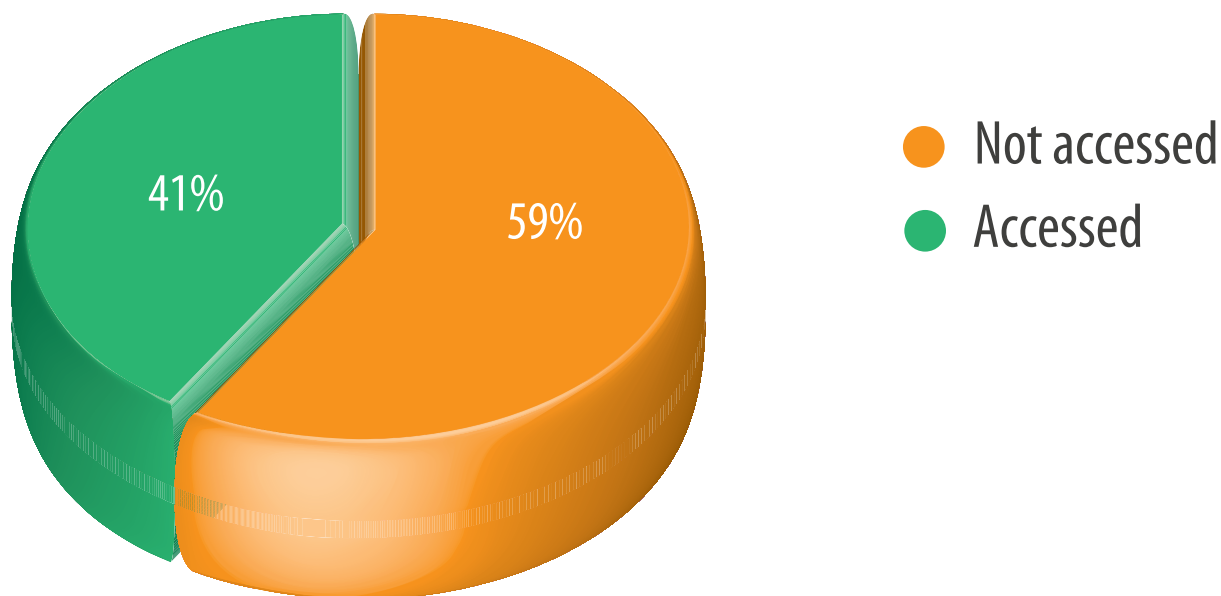


## 7. Do children speak in the articles?

Media should always seek to ensure that the voices of children are heard in their stories because their voices are fundamental part of their human rights. However, this should be done when is in the best interests of children to be accessed.

The results show that media in Lesotho have a large number of children participation. When compared to other Southern African countries such as South Africa and Namibia which mostly mention and make reference to children instead of accessing them<sup>5</sup>.

Figure 4 - Children's voices



## 8. How are children portrayed in the articles?

Portrayal of children in the news is very important in determining and understanding how media views children and the issues that concern them. For example, if news stories are dominated by roles of children as victims it gives listeners the impression that media is mostly concerned about issues that negatively affect the lives of children. Figure 5 below shows the top 5 roles.

Figure 5 - Children's roles

# *Children*

## *Sportspersons*

## *Learners*

## *Victims*

## *Children in need*

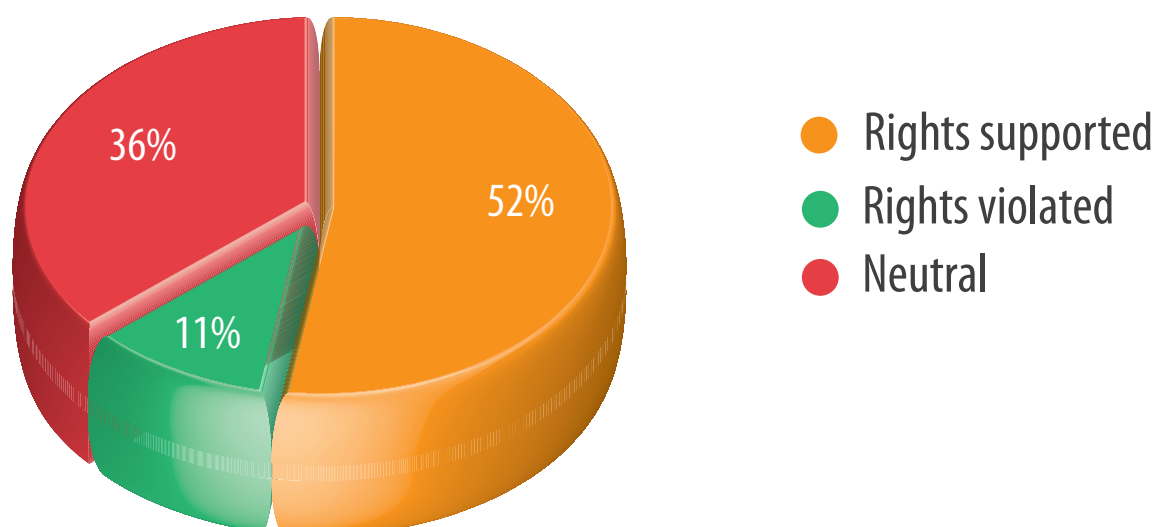


## 9. Are children's rights respected in the articles?

Children, like many members of human race are entitled to all the fundamental rights and to be valued as human being. Media, like any other institutions on the land have prerogatives to ensure that children rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>6</sup> and the African Charter are respected. Specifically, Article 4 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child states that "In all actions concerning the child undertaken by any person or authority the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration."

Despite the presence of UNCR and African Chapter<sup>7</sup> as the guide to report on children media still fails to protect their right to privacy, and participation. Lesotho is not alone; South Africa and Namibia still fails to protect children's rights. Media should always protect the identity of children in stories such as abuse and rape; and promote children's rights by affording them the opportunity to express their views and actively participate. When reporting on children, media practitioners should think of questions like, would I be happy if it was my child or children reported in this manner? What are the consequences to the child or children and their family?

Figure 6 - Children's rights



<sup>6</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

<sup>7</sup> IBID

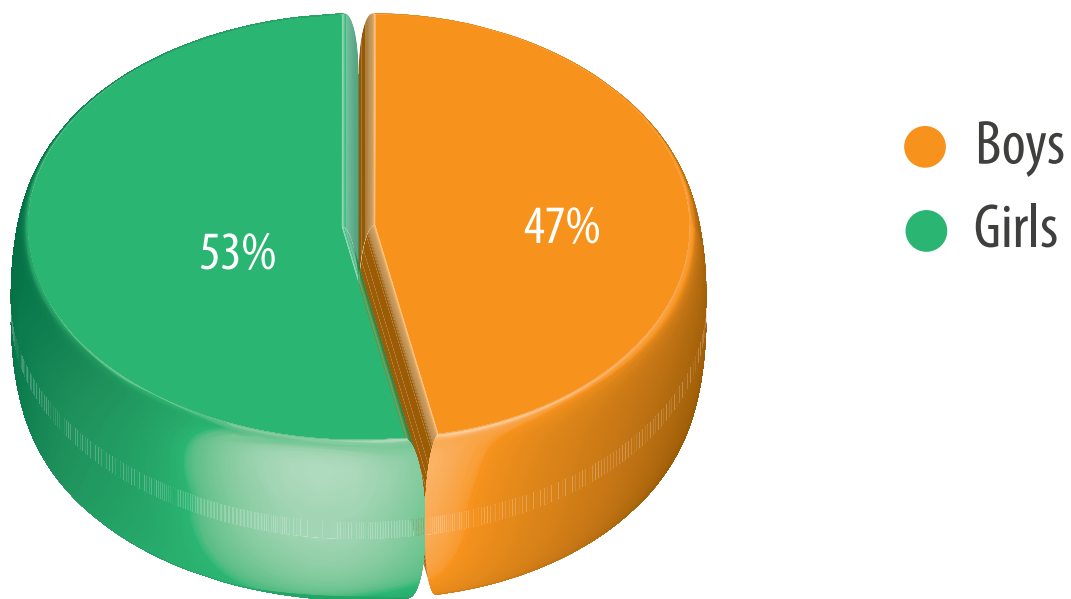


## 10. Are girls and boys given equal attention in the stories?

Gender inequality is amongst the challenges that many countries in the world still faced with. Therefore it is of fundamental importance how the media represent the difference sexes associated with male and female gender. This will help to inform us about the status quo regarding gender in the media. Figure 8 shows us show boys and girls coverage in the media.

The result shows that there is a slight difference in the coverage of boys and girls in the Lesotho. This is in line with the findings in South Africa<sup>8</sup>.

Figure 8 - Girls vs boys

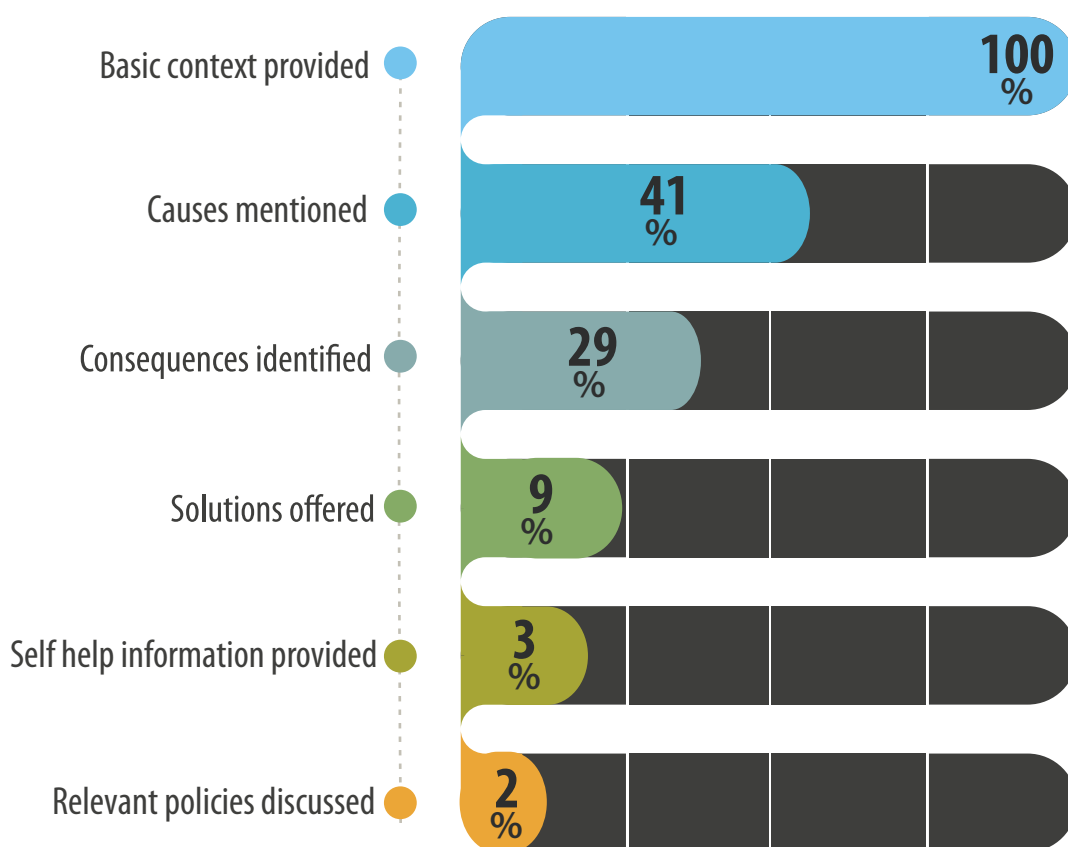


## 11. Is the information provided in these articles enough to raise awareness about children's issues?

The media's role is to inform, and educate; therefore the media should ensure that the stories they report on is fully of information to help the reader and audiences to make an informed decision. Figure 8 shows the details content of all stories monitored in Lesotho.

This results shows that the media has failed to go beyond proving a basic context in the stories. Considering the top 5 topics (See figure 2) shows that the most covered top is child abuse at 44% media would report these stories in greater context. This informs us that the stories lacked information and are therefore consequently disempowering the readers.

Figure 8- -Quality of information



## 12. Conclusion and recommendations

Media in Lesotho have a few numbers of stories about children. Therefore based on this finding and some other findings above we recommended the following;

- ∅ Media should report more on children's stories as the coverage show that the media is not reporting enough on children's issues.
- ∅ Media should thus ensure that the quality of the information provided in their coverage help the readers understand the issues at stake and their ramifications as well as what is being done about it, if any
- ∅ Given the percentage of stories that violate children's rights, media are urgently encouraged to take steps that ensure that their coverage does not violate children's rights.
- ∅ Media should aim to portray children in wider and more positive roles instead of roles that are limited and perpetuate negative stereotypes.
- ∅ Media should continue to cover diverse topics that concern children and this means going beyond relying on newsworthy events in order to report on children.



Empowering  
Children &  
the Media

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