

CHILDREN'S MONITORING REPORT



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INTRODUCTION

In 2003 it was made abundantly clear that children, children's rights and their issues are afforded very little coverage in the South African media. Monitoring conducted by Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) in 2003 as part of the Empowering Children & the Media (ECM) strategy showed that only 6% of all news included children.

The latest data to emerge from the ECM reveals that representation of children has improved, marginally, to 8.4% of all news monitored in 2009. The monitoring shows that not only are children's issues frequently sidelined, but un-careful and unethical reporting often leads to further violations of their rights.

Reporting on children is one of the most challenging aspects of journalism. Children are arguably afforded greater protection under law than any other grouping in order to respect and protect their rights. Media similarly have greater responsibilities when it comes to reporting on children. These responsibilities pose a range of ethical and professional challenges which have to be overcome if media are to meet their own standards of professional, ethical and fair reporting. While excellent reporting on children requires commitment, and professionalism, and while it may pose significant ethical dilemmas, reporting on children is both personally and professionally rewarding.

This report aims to encourage professional and ethical reporting on children by outlining and discussing some of the most recent findings on children's representation in the South African media, as monitored from 17 May to 30 August 2009.

As part of their commitment to empowering children, the ECM includes the views of children media monitors in their research. The comments of these children, as recorded during the 2009 monitoring period, are cited throughout this report.



KEY MONITORING FINDINGS

Some of the key findings to emerge from the research:

1. Children are significantly under-represented in the media – with only 8.4% of stories monitored dealing with children and their issues. Although this is a slight increase since 2003, given that children account for between 37 and 40% of South Africa's population (Stats SA Mid term Review 2008) it is clear that children's issues are still sidelined.
2. Even where children are the subject of news stories, their voices are rarely heard. Of the 8.4% children's stories, only 42% actually refer to children as sources. Of these 42% child sources, a mere 21% are eventually quoted (directly or indirectly).
3. For every story on children, on average 1.28 children are involved or consulted. This has more than halved since 2003. Considering that it may be expected that children would be at the centre of these stories, the figure is dissatisfyingly low.
4. Journalists very seldom approach children directly (9%). In most cases, children are either just referred to, often by age only (42%), only photographed (24%), only named (14%), or photographed and named (11%).
5. Very few articles on children are in-depth analyses or features (8%). The vast majority of stories on children fall within the category of (hard) news (62%). This leaves little room for addressing children's concerns.



6. 3% of stories monitored clearly violated the rights of the children in those stories – either by being directly or indirectly identified when it was clearly not in the child's best interests to be identified. Most commonly this tends to occur in stories on abuse, where the child's identity is revealed. It is very positive to note that this figure has reduced significantly from 10% of items on children that were monitored in 2003 that clearly violated children's rights.

7. Children's rights are often outweighed by the need for catchy headlines and enticing copy. Whilst headlines appear to respect children's rights in 62% of the cases, only 39% of the actual stories clearly made efforts to respect or reinforce children's rights. Collectively, the headline, copy and photos clearly considered children's rights in only 3% of all stories on children.

8. Education, child abuse and crime are the three most reported on topics, collectively comprising 34% of all child news stories. This enforces the representation of children predominantly in roles of "victim" or "student".

9. Representation of children by race and gender appears to reflect the status quo quite closely. Boys and girls are represented almost equally and black children make up the majority of children mentioned. This appears to have improved considerably since 2003 when results indicated an over-representation of boys and white children. However, representation of race and gender still lends itself to stereotyping.

10. Whilst *The Times* scored highest in terms of the quantity of stories on children published (15.25%), the *Saturday Star* was rated highest in a qualitative assessment of its representation of children (as evaluated with the DRIVE criteria - see methodology, below).



METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

During a period of three months (from 17 May to 30 August), Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) monitored thirteen of South Africa's major news publications for content on children. Daily and weekly newspapers were standardised to produce the same monitoring result.

Of a total of 25 055 monitored stories, 2 107 (8.4 % of all news) dealt with children.

Each story that was identified as representing children – either showing an image of a child, making mention of children or referring to issues pertaining to children – was then further assessed by monitors, using a customised monitoring tool (see USER GUIDE). The results provide interesting insight into the representation of children in the South African media and are discussed in detail in the following section.

This analysis also offered an opportunity to evaluate the monitored newspapers (mediums) on their individual performance. The DRIVE criteria, outlined below, was 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, 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 the context and additional information contribute to the protection of child rights.

Issues Covered:

Are 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:

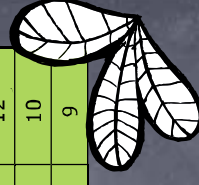
Have the children been approached directly or otherwise included? Whenever it is in their best interest, children should be accessed by the media as this adds to the credibility, relevance and representivity of the story.

Ethics:

Reporting on children requires careful attention and focus on respecting their rights, including respecting their confidentiality and anonymity. This requires strict adherence to journalistic codes of ethics as well as the relevant laws.

Each item was monitored and then different elements located under each of the DRIVE criteria. Using a specially developed weighting system the elements were combined to reveal the following ratings:

Medium	Ranking				Overall Rating
	Rights Respected & Ethical	Voices Heard	Issues in Depth	Diversity	
City Press	5	4	6	7	4
Daily Sun	7	9	7	2	6
Mail & Guardian	1	12	3	11	5
Saturday Star	2	3	1	9	1
Sowetan	10	6	5	3	8
Sunday Sun	13	13	12	12	13
Sunday Times	4	1	4	8	2
Sunday World	3	10	13	14	11
The Citizen	9	7	8	1	7
The Star	6	5	2	5	3
The Sunday Independent	14	2	9	10	12
The Times	11	8	10	4	10
The Weekender	8	11	11	6	9



Limitations

During the three-month monitoring period, violence and bullying in schools featured prominently in the news. This, together with the outbreak of H1N1 could have lead to an unusual increase in news stories about children during the monitoring period. This may slightly skew the findings.

Only major publications, predominantly from Gauteng, were considered for this study. This meant that all thirteen monitored newspapers were in English. Letters and advertorials were also excluded from the monitored items.

Since the initial 2003 study, the monitors user guide has been updated to cover more topics and allow for the recording of more detail. A new tool (MAD OAT) that assesses the extent to which children's rights are respected in the media was also added to the user guide. These additions may lead to slight inconsistencies when findings from the two studies are compared.

All monitors received the same training and applied the same user guide. Still, the possibility of minor human errors cannot be entirely discounted.

WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN?

Reading about children and their issues in the media

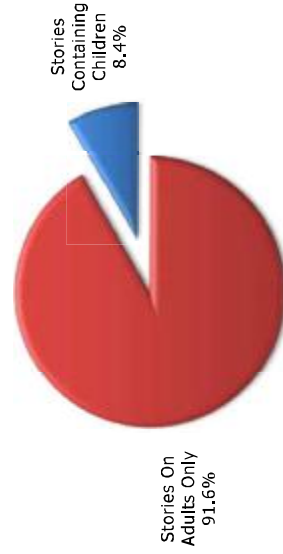
Children are significantly underrepresented in the media. On average, their stories make up only 8% of the news. A mere 42% of these stories actually include children as sources. In the instances where children are referred to as sources, adults often speak on their behalf – children are quoted in only 21% of these cases (either directly or indirectly).

The nature of these stories does little to improve their plight, or ensure their fundamental rights are respected and protected. The bulk of the coverage of children is in the form of (hard) news stories, centred mainly around discussions of crime, child abuse, health and education. This leaves scant room for in-depth analysis and features that would allow children to raise and address their own concerns, and ensure the complexities of the challenges children face are contextualised and explained. . .

Children in the media

Of the total 25 055 stories monitored in the thirteen selected newspapers, 2 107 dealt with children. This means that stories about children accounted for just over 8% of all news media during the monitoring period. Whilst low, this figure represents a 2% increase from the 2003 study.

Children's Stories in the Media



Considering that children account for between 36 and 40% of the total population (Stats SA mid-term review), the 8% coverage suggests that the interests and voices of children are significantly underrepresented in the South African media.

Representation by publication

The extent to which children were represented in the various monitored publications varied considerably. Children's stories constituted as much as 15,25% of all news in The Times and as little as 2,87% in The Sunday Independent.

The newspapers highlighted in grey published fewer than the average 8.4% children's stories.

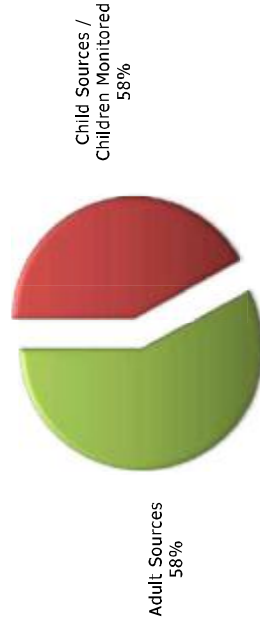
Newspaper	Coverage
The Times	15.25%
Sowetan	9.90%
The Star	9.83%
Daily Sun	9.01%
City Press	8.43%
Sunday Times	8.23%
Saturday Star	7.86%
Sunday Sun	5.66%
The Weekender	5.32%
Citizen	5.32%
Mail & Guardian	3.69%
Sunday World	3.05%
The Sunday Independent	2.87%



Children telling their own stories

Whilst children are already seriously underrepresented in terms of the quantity of stories published about them, even fewer of these stories actually access or consult these children.

Child Sources vs. Adult Sources



Even in their own stories, the voices of children are often suppressed by those of adults. Adults accounted for over half (58%) of the sources consulted in the monitored stories about children.

This is a considerable improvement compared to the 2003 study when adults made up 72% of the sources in children's stories. However, at the time of the 2003 study, over two children (2.4) were included on average per story. The most recent data shows that this has halved as only 1.28 children being included on average in 2009. This is markedly low, considering that it may be expected that the children's interests, and therefore their voices, would be at the heart of these stories.

When children are included as sources, the media and other adults frequently speak on their behalf. This could be done by approaching them indirectly (through a parent or teacher) or simply by assuming how they feel might about a certain issue. As the figure below suggests, children were only quoted (directly or indirectly) in 21% of the stories in which they were mentioned as sources.

Children Quoted



Accessing and including children in their own stories

"Identifying the child is not in the child's best interest because the killer can come after the child because he is a witness."

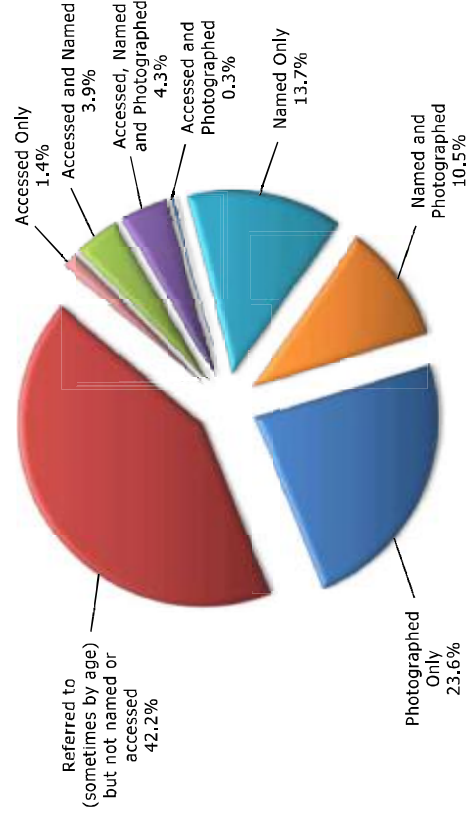
12 year old girl from Park Senior Primary

For a journalist, approaching and identifying children in the media can be challenging. A concerned parent or guardian might choose not to allow a reporter to speak to the child in question. Sometimes it might not be in the child's best interest to reveal his or her identity. 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.

However, not consulting children and then simply referring to them by citing their gender or age often creates the impression that the child is immaterial to the story. As the graph below shows, even when children are at the centre of a story, they are typically not accessed directly by journalists (represented in red). Most articles make only brief reference to the child (often only citing age), or include a photograph or name the child.

Accessing Children



Children were approached in less than 10% of the stories in which they were mentioned (represented in blue). This was done to varying degrees of exposure where children were either only accessed, or also photographed and named.

"I feel good about the story because someone is standing up for children. People feel that children are pieces of biscuit."

13 year old boy from Troyeville Primary

Ideally, a reporter should try and access a child except where it is not in the child's best interests, but it can be done even if their identity must remain hidden. In most cases, just including the child's opinion will not reveal his or her identity and may add depth to the story as well as a fresh and honest perspective..

Adoption agencies feeling the pinch

The Star, 31 July 2009, p. 24

In this article the reader is introduced to twin girls – one who is HIV positive. Whilst neither of the girls are identified, they have clearly been approached and involved in the story. In this case, approaching the girls did not reveal their identity but still allowed for the plight of orphans to be shown by telling their stories.

"The story mentions the other twin is HIV positive. Not showing who the child is, this is good because children have a right to privacy."

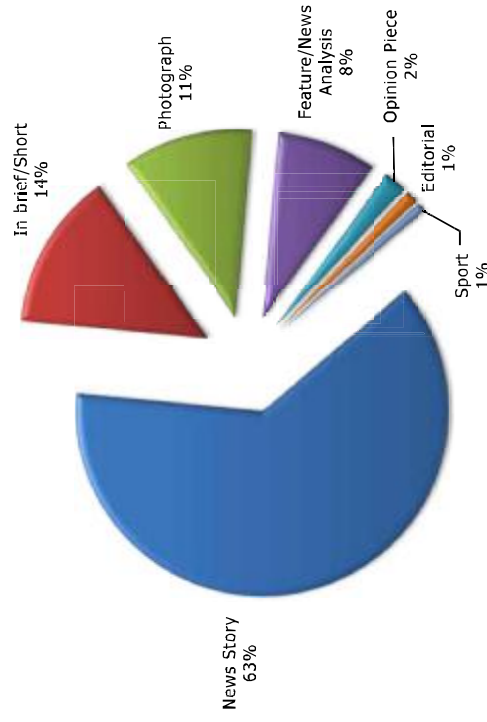
12 year old girl from Eastgate Primary



Type of stories in which children appear

Children's stories fall predominantly in the hard news category. This correlates strongly with the topics that seem to dominate stories about children: education (12%), child abuse (11%), crime (11%) and health (10%).

Types of Stories on Children



Over-representation of children in news stories means that they are frequently portrayed as helpless victims. This imbalance also leaves little room for their concerns and interests to be addressed in a meaningful way. Only 8% of the news that covered children was a feature or news analysis story – the kind of articles most likely to put important issues on the agenda and facilitate change.

"If they really cared, they would make the story bigger and add a picture"

12 year old boy from Troyeville Primary

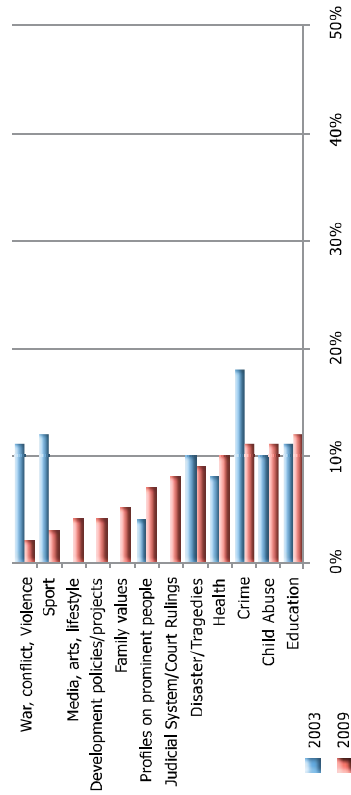
Topics in children's stories

The 2009 research has revealed some change in the popular topics in children's stories since 2003. Most notable of these is a trend away from reporting on children in the context of war, conflict and violence as well as crime. Children have also featured considerably less in sports news in the most recent study.

There is also a notable increase in reporting on development and related policies, family values and the judicial system and court rulings. None of these categories were in the top ten topics in the 2003 study.

However, in 2003 HIV and AIDS was the subject of 3% of the stories on children. In 2009 stories on HIV and AIDS and children constituted only around 1% of news.

Topics in Children's Stories

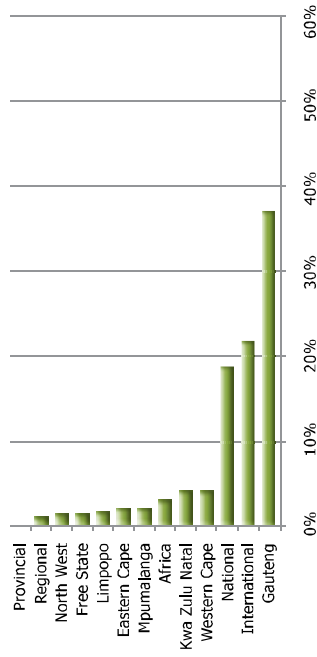


The heightened awareness around health issues due to the H1N1 outbreak during the monitoring period could to some extent be responsible for the slight increase in health-related news noted in 2009.



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.



Topics dominating Gauteng-based children's stories included crime, the justice system and disasters. This suggests a strong trend towards negative reporting on children. National stories on children considered mostly education and health issues whilst international stories tended to take the form of personality profiles or covered health and disasters.

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CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE MEDIA

Children's status in society makes them particularly vulnerable to abuse and rights violations. In addition to the extra protections afforded to children under the law, media have greater responsibility to ensure that reporting on children is consistently professional and ethical. However, as this section shows, whilst the media generally does take care not to be unethical in their reporting or violate children's rights, few efforts are made to benefit the children or affirm their rights. Motivations for writing about children seem to be derived mostly from elsewhere than pursuing the child's best interest.

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 include and analysis of the headline, image and actual article. Secondly, the article's support of certain ethical principles was 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

When considered as a whole, only 3% of the monitored stories clearly violated the rights of the children in those stories. This presents a significant decrease compared to the 2003 monitoring results when 10% of all stories clearly violated the rights of the child or children involved. These violations occurred most frequently in stories on abuse, where the child's identity was made public in spite of this not being in the child's best interest. The 7% decrease in these violations could be considered an indication that journalists are taking greater care to protect children's identities when reporting on them.



Whilst this is a very encouraging trend, these cases present clear violations. When the instances in which these rights were merely disrespected (and not clearly violated) are considered, it becomes apparent that there is still much room for improvement in the manner in which children are covered in the news.

The extent to which stories clearly respected children's rights was 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.

18 Sex orgy girls removed Sowetan, 4 June 2009, p. 8

This headline does not respect the rights of the girls involved. It is misleading and degrading and suggests that the girls are promiscuous and out of control.

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 – consider "sex orgy girls" (above) or "Mxit girl" (below). Consequently, the headlines of only 62% of all monitored stories on children were thought to clearly consider children's rights.

Surprisingly, the content of articles fared even worse, as only 39% of articles were mindful of children's rights. Such violations might include identifying a child when it is not in their best interest. When considered as a whole (headline, content and photo – where relevant), only 4% of the stories truly regarded children's rights.

The "Mxit Girl"

During the monitoring period, a story about the disappearance of a school girl which was linked to the social chat site Mxit, unfolded. The media almost immediately labelled her "Mxit girl" or "Mxit teen". The label persisted even after the girl was found, as is evident in The Times article: "Family of Mxit girl lays rape charge" (7 August 2009, p. 5). Apart from still using the stereotyping label, the girl's rights were further violated as she was openly identified as a rape victim.

"The story does not talk about children's rights"

12 year old boy from Eastgate

Overall, according to the MAD OAT criteria, of the monitored articles covering children, only 32% were considered to have been written and published in their best interest. This suggests that around two-thirds of the news on children is published with motives other than benefiting the children in mind. This is strongly aligned with perceptions of the media pursuing profit-generating strategies that lead to the exploitation of others in their financial favour.

Observing Ethical Principles

Stories were also assessed to determine the extent to which observed ethical guidelines. These guidelines, as set out by MMA, incorporate journalistic codes of conduct as well as human rights and best practice principles.

As the table below indicates, whilst only a small fraction of stories constituted blatant violations of these principles, they still received comparatively little clear positive support. Ideally, stories on children could be used as a platform to create awareness around and enforce their rights. This is particularly vital considering the dearth of children's news. However, whilst most stories made a concerted effort not to violate ethical codes, it seems not many stories were intentionally ethical or supportive of children's rights either.

	Principle Supported		Principle Violated	
	Number	%	Number	%
The story does (not) seek and express the truth	270	12.81	15	0.71
The story is (not) independent and objective	91	4.32	14	0.66
The story does (not) minimise harm	43	2.04	14	0.66
Children are (not) afforded special protection	122	5.79	42	1.99
Stereotypes are (not) avoided	17	0.81	4	0.19
Children's interests are (not) taken into account	106	5.03	131	6.22
Child abuse is (not) presented as a Human Rights violation	14	0.66	9	0.43
Stories do (not) respect and engage with cultural and sexual practices or create drug awareness	5	0.24	0	0.00
The HIV/AIDS dimensions of child abuse stories are (not) mentioned	2	0.09	1	0.05
The story is (not) gender proactive	1	0.05	0	0.00

Anguish of murdered editors wife and son

Sowetan, 14 August 2009, p. 4

The son, a minor, was named in this article. A witness to a crime, and someone who is clearly traumatised by the murder of his father, the identity of this boy should have been concealed.

"I would change the part where they say they saw the two killers running away with guns and naming the child because it is not in their best interest as the killers will come back for him"

13 year old girl from Eastgate Primary



THE FACE OF CHILDREN IN THE MEDIA

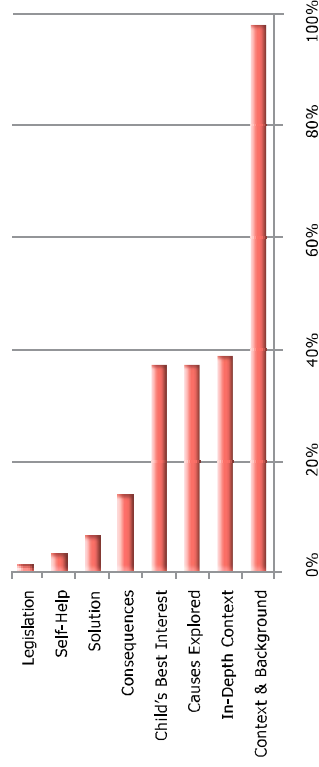
Including information points

Particularly stories reporting on injustices to children (like abuse or rape) offer a good opportunity to educate readers and other children on what do to should they have a similar experience.

Most monitored stories on children incorporated a fair amount of context into the story, frequently exploring causes and sometimes touching on consequences and solutions. However, only very few used the opportunity to provide self-help information, offer a solution or link the story to relevant legislation. By neglecting to include these important aspects, the stories have lost out on a vital opportunity to provide readers (and children-readers in particular) with information that could both educate and empower them.

Especially in news where children's rights are at jeopardy (abuse, crime or disaster) including information about self-help, relevant legislation and providing a solution wherever possible, would be a great advantage to children who find themselves in similar positions. This, as the children who were consulted during the monitoring process have noted, would make the story more useful to them and could also allow them to help a friend who might be going through something similar.

Inclusion of information points

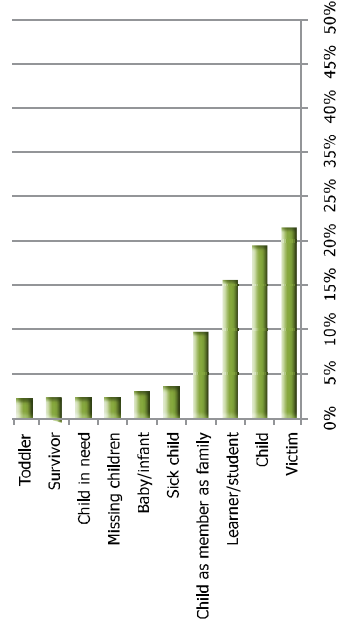


Representation of the children in the media

The media's tendency not to approach or involve children in stories about them (as noted earlier) often results in the depiction of children in stereotyped roles. Because they are not approached personally, their individuals characters are seldom portrayed. Consequently, children in the news are most frequently portrayed superficially as victims, students or just innocent children. It is concerning that the second most frequently portrayed role for children is victim, while down from 25% in 2003, it suggests that this is still the most common understanding of children. While it is true that children are often victims of terrible tragedies and abuse, children's resilience and capacity to survive is seldom highlighted. Not only do these portrayals makes children feel unhappy, it also discourages them from reading the news.



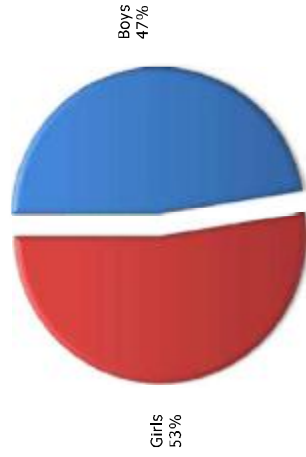
Child Role Representation



Girls and boys in the media

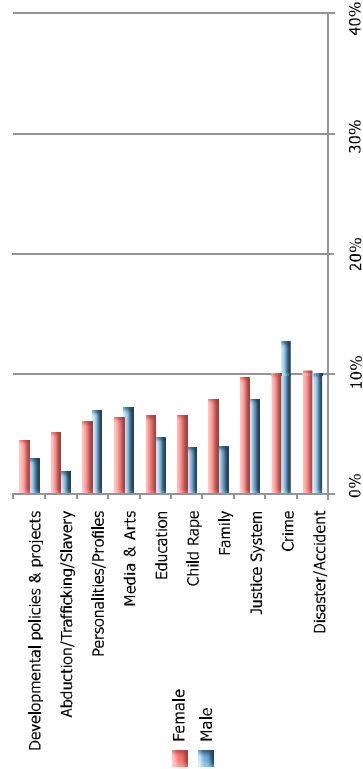
In terms of children in the news, girl and boy children are represented fairly equally in the media. These results suggest a slight shift (6%) in favour of girls when compared to the 2003 study where girls were mentioned in 47% of the news on children.

Girls and Boys Accessed



However, the same tendency to stereotype girls and boys in gender-defined roles that was noted in the 2003 study seems to have persisted. Girls are represented much stronger in stories about child rape, abduction, trafficking and slavery, suggesting they are mostly victims. Their female nurturing capacity is also over-represented in stories about development, education and family. Boys' high involvement in crime stories as well as strong representation in personality profiles and media and arts stories seems to affirm both their aggressive nature as well as their relative ambition and heroism, when compared to the "more submissive" girls.

Types of stories in which boys and girls appear



Interestingly, sport was not frequently covered in the 2009 study - unlike in 2003 where sport featured quite prominently and boys were involved in 72% of the sports stories. This might in part explain the increase in girls' overall representation since 2003.

The monitoring period also included a time when bullying and violence in school was widely covered by the media.

'I'm afraid he may rape me'
The Star, 14 July 2009

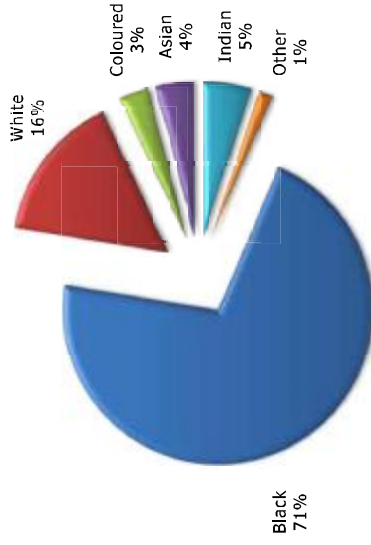
The Star ran a series of articles on violence at schools after news broke about widespread bullying at schools.



Race

The South African history of racial segregation and marginalisation makes issues of race and representivity vital considerations. Race representation of children in the media has become significantly more balanced since the 2003 study where the stories of white children seemed to dominate the news.

Race of Children in the Media



The representation of black children has increased considerably since 2003 when only 39% of children in the media were black. Presently, at 71%, the representation of black children is a much truer reflection of the racial reality in the country. However, black children are still predominantly portrayed as victims and overall, reporting on black children seems to be very negative.

White children are represented in 16% of the monitored articles. This figure has halved since 2003 when 30% of the children in the media were white. Again, this is a closer resemblance to the reality. This shift goes a long way in portraying children more equitably. Presenting a more realistic mix of races means that no one group is favoured or treated as particularly newsworthy or important.

Race representation in the context of children is still seldom discussed in the news. Unless the story is about racist-driven violence which has significant news value, it would appear that these stories are generally avoided.

Racial tension on the boil after farm shooting

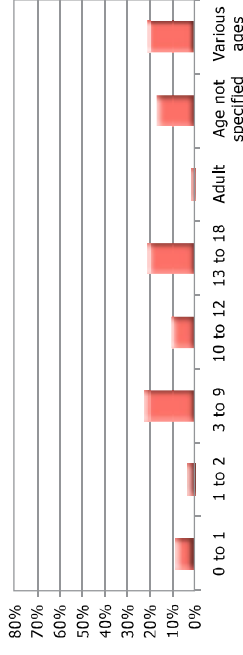
The Times, 8 July 2009, p. 6

This story raised race issues amongst children when a white farmer allegedly shot at four black boys for crossing his farm on their way to the neighbouring property. The matter went to court and the farmer was let off on bail. Regrettably, The Times identified the minors at a time when they were witnesses to a crime.

Age

Children's ages are not always specified in the news. This makes compiling age-related data problematic. None the less, these figures do offer some insight into the relative ages of children that are covered and accessed in the media. In 2003, the 13 to 18 age group was reported on in 44% of all stories. This has declined quite significantly to 21% in 2009. The spread across the different ages suggests a greater understanding of the different issues faced by the different age groups.

Age of Children in the Media



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The monitoring findings indicate that for the most part, children are "spoken of" and not "to" in the media. The result is that the voices of children are barely audible in the news – dominated almost entirely, it seems, by adult discussion about children.

In the 42% of children's stories where they are referred to as sources, only 21% of the children are actually quoted directly or indirectly.

Children's special status and additional protections means that reporting on them requires greater adherence to ethical and legal codes. This appears to be a challenge many journalists prefer avoiding, as only 9% of children mentioned in the news are directly approached. Instead, children are most frequently just referred to in the news (often by mentioning their age), might be photographed or simply named (but not spoken to, or listened to). This tendency to not engage with children means that they are easily moulded into stereotyped roles – as students, victims of abuse or just "typical" children. It also means that children are rarely portrayed as diverse characters, with their own voices and opinions. It could be argued that not only are children under-represented, but also largely misrepresented.

The majority of coverage of children in the media is in the news category. This leaves little room for actual in-depth discussion of children's issues.

Perhaps most troubling, however, is the apparent lack of concern reporters show for the child's well being. While considerably down on previous research 3% of items that further violate the rights of the child is 3% too many and every effort must be made to ensure that this figure is further reduced. Only 32% of all articles appear to clearly have the child's best interests in mind. Also, whilst very few stories in the monitoring period were considered to be outright unethical, stories seldom attempted to reinforce children's rights. On the whole, it seems that stories on children serve predominantly adult interests.

The way forward

The research suggests that coverage of children in the news is guided predominantly by perceptions of the story's news 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 only when something dramatic (and often tragic) has happened to them – effectively, when they have "made the news". This means they are usually already in a vulnerable position and are then often further 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 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 hocking or otherwise "newsworthy" events to happen before covering children's issues.
- 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 a society, but most adults have children and therefore are interested in 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 also 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 with 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 news room to adopt MMA's guidelines on reporting on children that have been developed with children and journalists.

USER GUIDE

Drawing on previous monitoring experience, MMA have made a number of improvements to their user guide. Additional considerations include refugee-related issues as well as the gender of the journalist.

The monitoring criteria used in this study include the following:

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

Headline	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.
Image	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.
Article	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.
Source	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?
Identity	The privacy/identity and HIV status of the child has been sufficiently protected where in the child's interest.
Abuse	Has the article reported that the child has been abused?
Child Central Focus	A 'YES' or 'NO' box is ticked to determine if the story is centered around the child or children in question.
Rights Respected	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	The Story does/does not seek and express the truth	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	The Story is/is not independent and objective	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	The Story does/does not minimise harm	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.
4	Children are afforded special protection	Have identities/names of children been revealed. Has an effort been made to prevent harm to the child? 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 minimise harm? Are the children's rights to privacy and/or dignity protected?
5	Avoid stereotypes	Have identities/names of children abused/violated been given? Is there clear informed consent? 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	Children's interests are/are not taken into account	Is the story disregarding of children's feelings? Does it make them feel sad about themselves?
7	Child Abuse is a Human Rights Violation	Does the story clearly represent child abuse as human rights violation or does it clearly trivialise child abuse?
8	Stories do/do not respect and engage with cultural and sexual practices as well as drug awareness	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	Be aware of the HIV/AIDS dimensions to child abuse stories	Does the story raise HIV as a clear issue linked to child abuse? Does the story consider the HIV implications of child abuse?
10	Be gender proactive and consider the gender angles to all stories	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:

Code	Description
CB	Context basic: Does it mention any basic statistics or facts about where it happened, does it show a map, etc.
CI	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?
Y	Causes: Does the story explain the causes of the event?
O	Consequences: Does the story describe the consequences of the accident or disaster or how it impacts on broader society?
S	Solutions: Does the story offer any possible solutions or means of addressing the problems?
L	Relevant legislation: Does the story mention any relevant legislation or policy?
SH	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?
CBI	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.

EMPOWERING CHILDREN AND THE MEDIA (ECM)

In their pursuit of better representation of children in the media, Media Monitoring Africa has incorporated children into their monitoring process - making them not just the subject of these media evaluations but also empowering them as media monitors. Their views and criticisms have added important depth and valuable insight to the project.

For this 2009 study, three schools were randomly selected from which 20 children each were chosen to participate in the monitoring process. After teaching the children basic media monitoring skills, each school was asked to monitor a selected newspaper on a daily basis.

MMA would then visit these teams weekly and discuss whether the articles they selected made them "MAD" or "GLAD" – and why. After discussing and analysing the particular article with a coordinator, children also drew pictures on how the article made them feel.

At the end of the three month monitoring period, a final workshop was held to establish what the children have learnt during this time.



For more Information see:
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