

Media Monitoring Africa's 2014 Findings

On the Media Coverage of Children



Produced by



In Partnership with Save the children and SIDA



Save the Children



Sida

Questions to Consider:

Did you know that children have the right to freedom of expression and that their participation can enhance media stories?

Do media afford children the opportunity to exercise this right and how?



To find out follow me as I present Media Monitoring Africa's 2014 findings on the media coverage of stories about children.

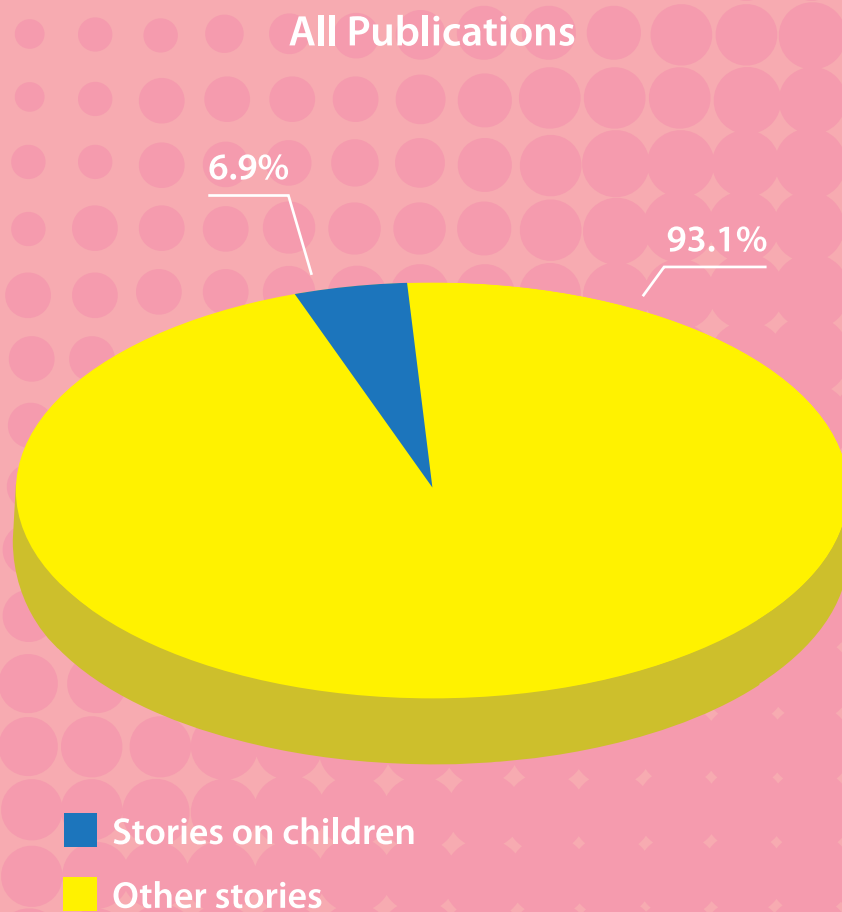
These findings were drawn from the information that was gathered and analysed between 1 May 2014 and 30 September 2014.

Media Monitoring Africa's Child Monitors were asked for comments on the final results so you will read their comments as you go along the presentation. The default presentation covers all media but you can compare individual media findings by clicking on individual media at the top right corner.

This will enable you to compare individual media findings with average findings.

Stories about Children

How often do we see stories about children covered in the media?



Stories about children
versus other stories

Although children constitute 35% of South Africa's population, media in the country tend to neglect covering children's issues. Out of a total of 78,912 stories that were published by media over a five month period (1 May 2014 to 30 September 2014), only 5,413 or 7% were about or mentioned children. Whether 7% is enough is debatable especially given that South Africa has other issues that deserve to be covered.

However, this represents a significant drop from 2013 where the average stories about children were 10%. Given that politically children's issues have been further marginalised through the entire sector being placed under the Department of Social Development it may be the reduction is also indicative of the broader political malaise.

What is clear however is that of the media monitored, The New Age had the highest coverage of content relating to children at 15%. This is commendable because the newspaper has consistently been among the top three with the highest coverage of children's stories in the last three years. Of grave concern is the coverage of children by SABC 3 English News at 2%.

This is particularly worrying when one takes into account that the SABC is the public broadcaster with a mandate to cover South Africa in all its diversity and that mandate certainly includes children.

"The media is making everything seem more important than children and that is wrong"

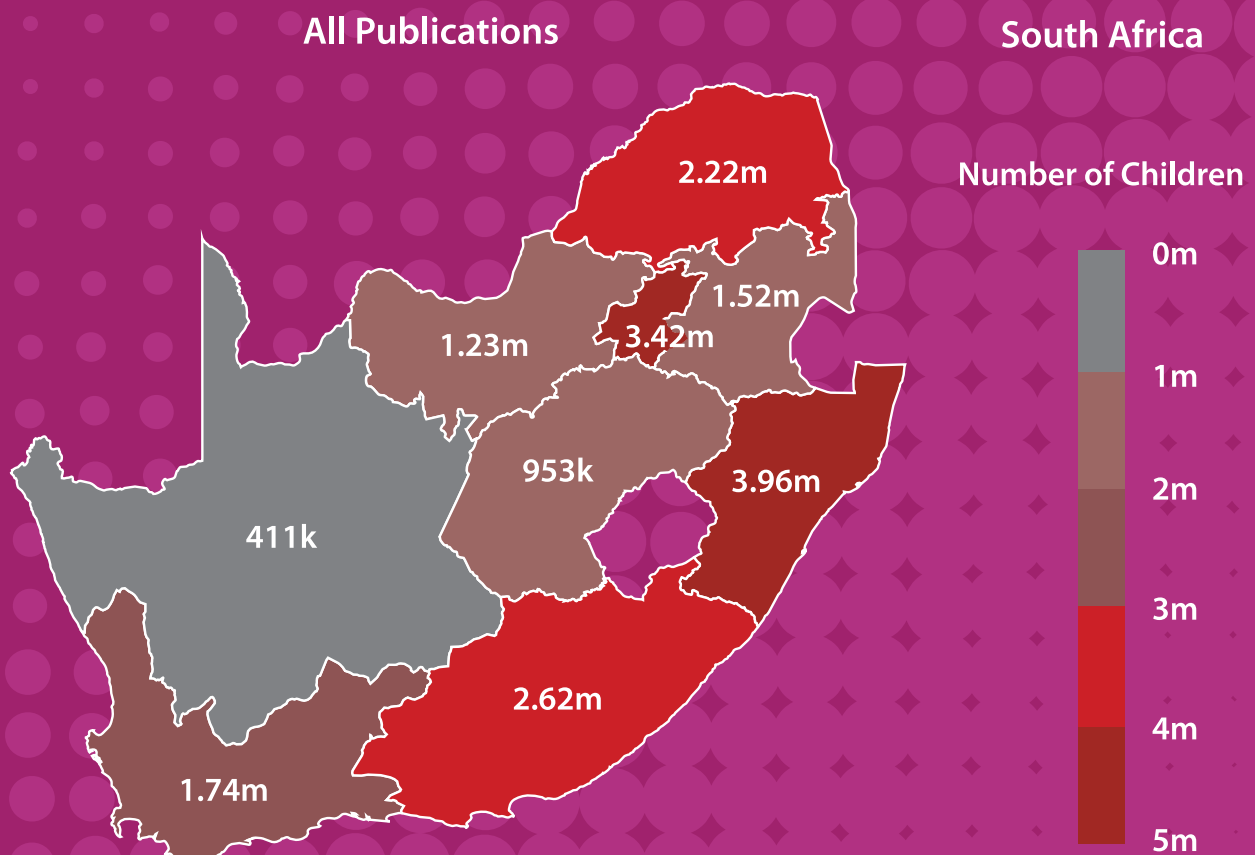
– Anonymous child, Media Monitor.

"If The New Age could have many stories on children, why can't other media do it?"

– Zainab Dredericks, 12 years, Media Monitor.

Origin of Stories

Where do these stories come from given that children are all over the country?



Province	Stories About Children	Media Coverage	Number of Children	Children on the Ground
Gauteng	1616	47%	3423211	19%
Western Cape	542	16%	1739425	10%
KwaZulu-Natal	381	11%	3956728	22%
Mpumalanga	191	6%	1515405	8%
North West	167	5%	1229071	7%
Limpopo	162	5%	2216457	12%
Eastern Cape	144	4%	2623533	15%
Free State	133	4%	953384	5%
Northern Cape	113	3%	410757	2%

Stories about children versus children's population

As Media Monitoring Africa has observed over the previous years, provinces with bigger metropolitan areas like Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal continue to receive the most coverage with a lot of stories coming from these provinces.

While it is understandable that this could largely be attributed to the fact that these areas are easy to access, this presents a problem of coverage not being equitable and in line with where children are in South Africa.

Issues affecting children that are peculiar to under resourced areas can end up being overshadowed and not represented. Although it could be assumed that provinces with the highest population of children would in proportion have the highest number of stories on children, this is not necessarily the case with provinces like the Eastern Cape and Limpopo being underreported.

On the other hand, when one looks at the results for individual media, they present a mixed bag with Sowetan for example dedicating coverage that is proportional to the population in Limpopo.



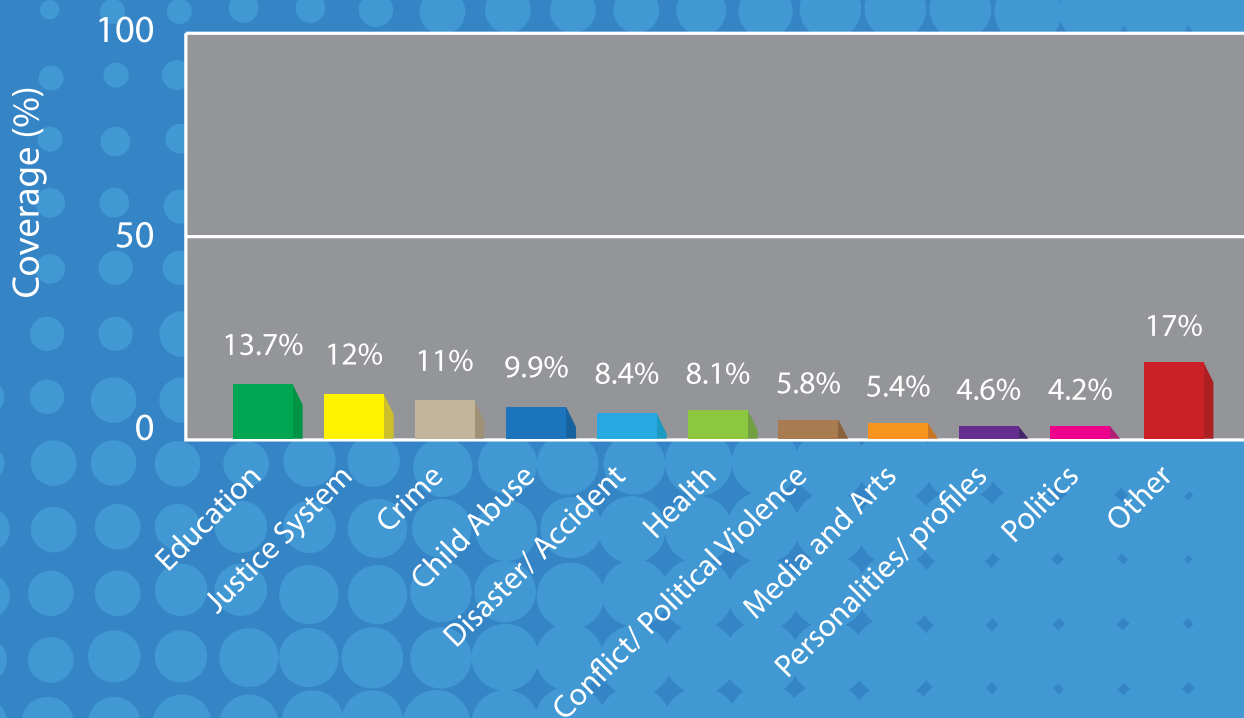
“We make up a very big population in South Africa therefore we should take up a fair amount of the newspaper coverage”

– Shaquillah Sarkhot, 12 years, Media Monitor”

Topics Covered

What are these stories about?

All Publications



Top 10 topics covered

Children face a multitude of problems and often these are interlinked hence it was important to enquire into the diversity of the issues concerning children that media covered.

The most common topics covered by the media have largely remained unchanged with the same topics as in previous years more or less making the top five. This could be attributed to varied reasons. For example, it is not surprising that education continue to be the most prevalent topic because education still remains one of the key priority areas for the country. Children continue to face abuse hence child abuse, crime and justice system continue to be in the top five.

It is commendable that media covered these and other issues that affect children such as health but what is interesting to note is that the top 10 topics constitute over 80% of total coverage. This leaves one wondering whether other issues that share the remaining 17% are of less importance.



“Majority of the topics in the top 10 are negative”

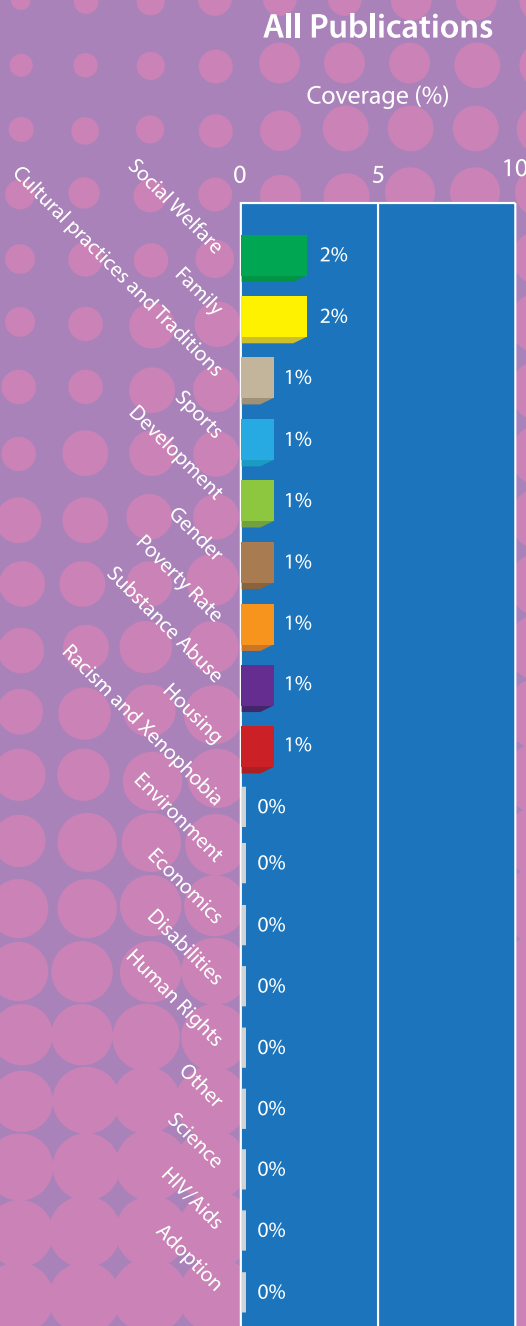
– Anonymous child, Media Monitor

“Health should be one of the highest topics covered because children’s health is very important to the economy”

– Anonymous child, Media Monitor

Topics less Covered

What are these stories not about?



Top 10 topics covered

It is clear that not all topics relating to children will receive the same coverage, however it is disheartening to notice that some topics that are pertinent to children received little or no coverage at all.

For example, children are among the most affected by poverty yet the topic received 1% of total coverage. Both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) now Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the National Development Plan (NDP) identify poverty and lack of housing as real issues that need to be tackled yet these issues received very little coverage. It is therefore vital that media also cover other issues that affect children in the country as reflected in the NDP and SDGs.

“It is bad that teenage pregnancy is one of the topics less covered and worse that it received zero coverage because it is a serious challenge in our society”

– Anonymous child, Media Monitor

“Sports should be represented more in the media because this topic gives children the opportunity to be represented more in a positive light”

– Anonymous child, Media Monitor

“The media should pay more attention to children than anything because children are affected by many things such as crime, divorce, drugs and if they don’t talk to children, they won’t know what is really happening in their lives”

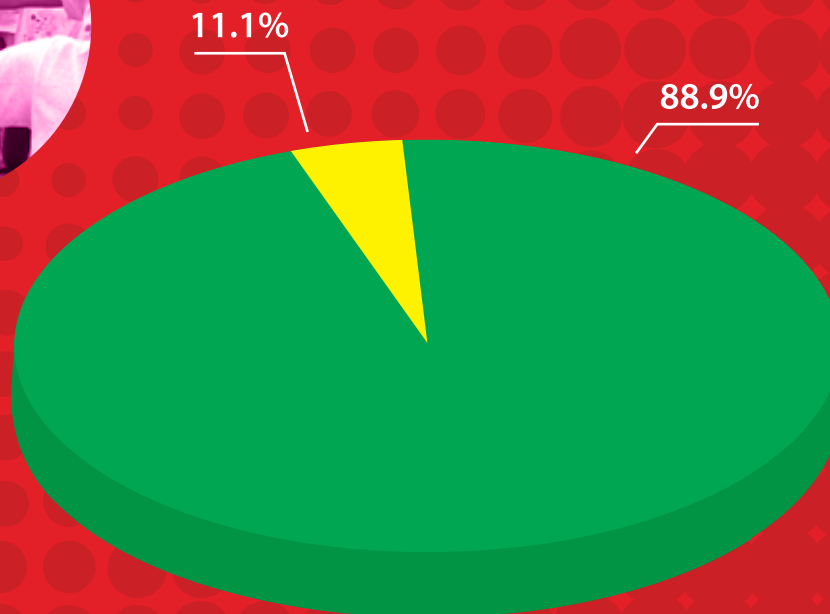
– Ziyaad Moosa, 14 years, Media Monitor

Children's Voices

Do we hear children's voices in these stories?



All Publications



■ Accessed
■ Not accessed

Children accessed
versus not accessed



Hearing children's voices on issues affecting them is a crucial aspect in ensuring that children exercise their rights to be heard and to participate. It is also the logical convention in stories concerning adults to try and source those directly affected.

Children's voices also give depth and nuance to media stories. However, these results indicate that children's voices are not amplified by the media even on issues that directly affect children as only 11% of children are actually accessed or quoted in the stories. Despite this low percentage it is significant that the figure is up from 7% in 2013 which suggests a more consistent attempt by media to ensure children's voices are heard.

While it will not always be possible to access children in all stories because of ethical considerations especially on stories of child abuse, these results on the one hand are a serious indictment on the opportunity that media affords to children to exercise their right to freedom of expression and to also contribute on issues that affect them.

On the other hand, that children's voices are lacking could be an indication of the media's reluctance to source children and/or an indication of the perceived value (or lack thereof) that a child's contribution can enhance a story. Where possible, media should strive to access more children in a way that ensures that children's best interests are preserved.

"Children have the right to be seen and heard but the media is not giving them that opportunity"

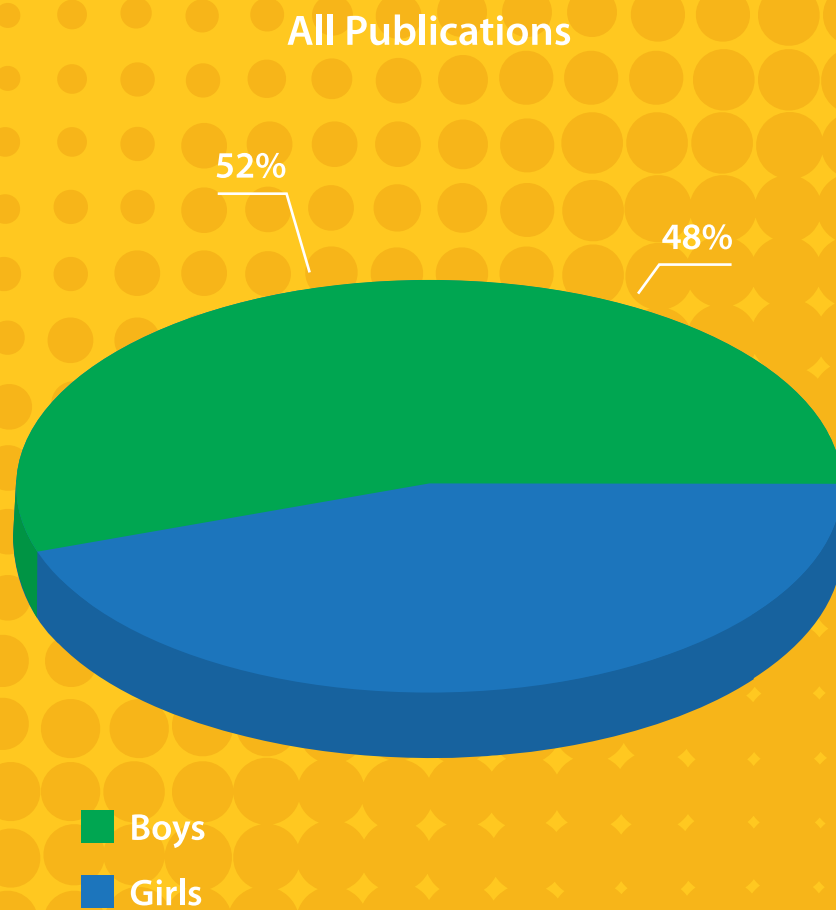
– Azraa Subrathi, 12 years, Media Monitor

"Children should be accessed, they have the right to be"

– Ishah Hundu, 11 years, Media Monitor

Gender Coverage

Are girls and boys given equal attention?



Girls versus boys coverage

Gender inequality is a problem that still persists in South African communities. As a result it is vital to mainstream gender in every aspect.

In the spirit of encouraging active participation, media should provide a platform that allows for equal participation of both girls and boys.

In Media Monitoring Africa's 21 years of monitoring media coverage of elections, health, racism and other issues, men are always accessed more than women, with the previous elections monitoring revealing 75% against 25%. However, the children's results indicate that over the years (and on average) media has consistently sourced boys and girls almost equally.

This is of particular importance when one considers that the number of girls and boys in South Africa is almost equal. So why do media get it right when it comes to accessing children and yet fail when it comes to adults?

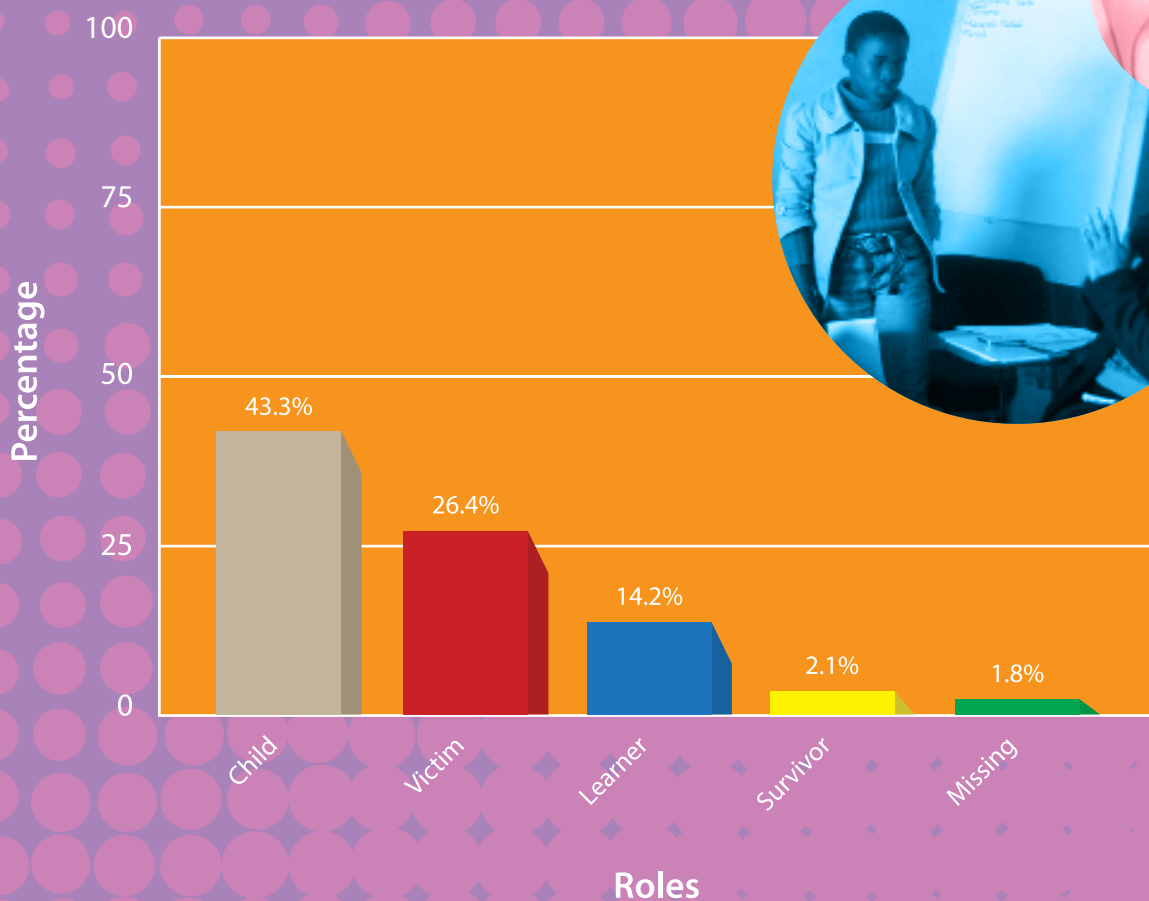
Whatever the reasons, media should emulate their children's coverage with regard to gender and ensure that they do the same when covering other issues such as elections.



Children's Portrayal

How are children portrayed in these stories?

All Publications



Top 5 children's roles

Generally, adults tend to view children in a very limited way. This feeds from the perception that children have to be seen and not heard. It is therefore essential for media to portray children in roles that show the diverse aspects of their lives and to negate such perceptions. However, this has not been the case as media continually portray children in roles that are very limited and mostly in negative stories.

In the current results the highest role children were portrayed in is “Children” - a role which in itself does nothing to show children’s capabilities. The next highest role is “Victims”. It is therefore easy to conclude that the media’s attitude is that bad news sells and thus are more concerned about sensationalism, especially when it involves children as evidenced by the big crime stories that involved children being victims of hijackings that made headlines during the course of 2014.

While there is need to recognise the vulnerability of children and to report on these issues, it is also important to show what children are capable of by covering those stories that portray children as heroes and survivors as these stories are often empowering. This is not to encourage “positive” or “sunshine” journalism but good quality journalism that covers the good, the bad and the ugly – all in an empowering way.

“Media should show children more as survivors than victims. Society tends to view survivors as good while victims are seen as the bad ones. The role of a survivor is more positive while that of a victim is negative”

– Ishah Hundu, 11 years, Media Monitor

“Children should be seen more as heroes than just a child because it helps children feel good about themselves”

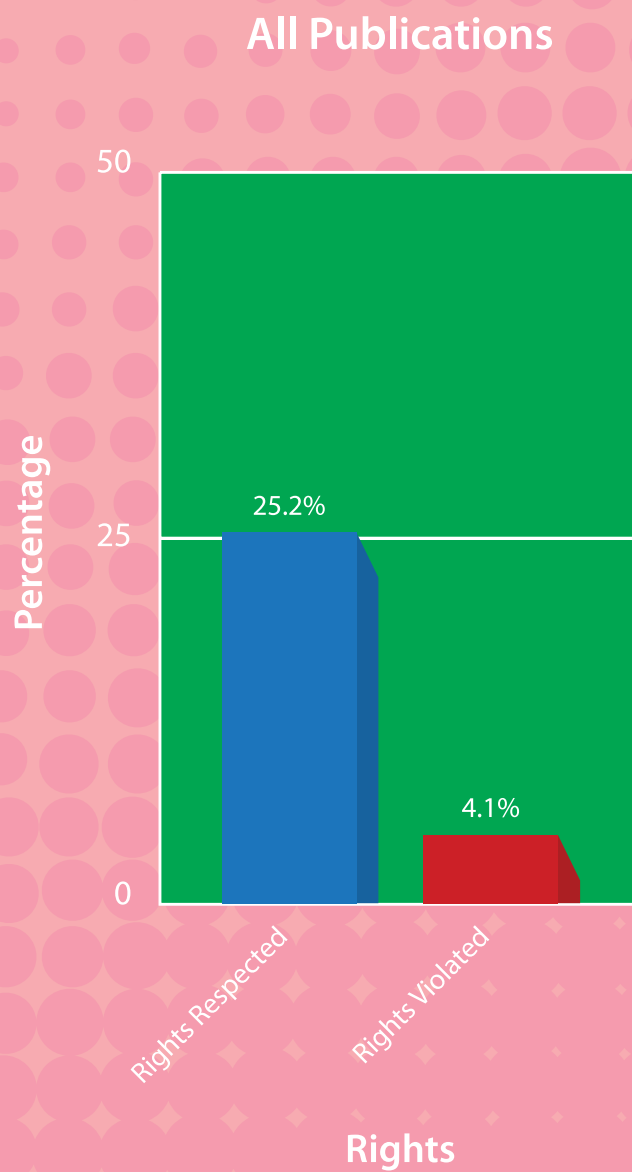
– Ziyaad Moosa, 14 years, Media Monitor

“Babies should be shown more often because they are also important. Babies can’t speak for themselves. So the media has to play a part in making sure that their challenges are heard”

– Gehaan Holmes, 12 years, Media Monitor

Rights Respected

Are children's rights respected in these stories?



Rights respected versus rights violated

Children are afforded special protection by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and by the South African Constitution and rightly so. Both these documents emphasise the importance of considering the best interests of the child in all interactions.

Journalism ethics include the principle of limitation of harm. The rights of particular importance in media professionals' dealings with children are the rights to freedom of expression, privacy, dignity and participation. The percentage of stories that did not respect the rights of children has remained unchanged at 4%. Although the figure may seem low, it demonstrates consistency in the violation of children's rights, which raises several pertinent questions.

Possibly, the consistency could be explained in a number of ways. It could be an indication that media professionals are more concerned with the bottom-line at the expense of children's rights. It also could be a result of the cutting down of resources and downsizing of newsrooms that led to haemorrhaging of skilled journalists. It could be that specialised children's reporters are not necessarily covering children and those that do cover children are not in a position to promote the rights of children? It could also be an indication of the ineffectiveness of media accountability systems. Whatever the reasons may be, media need to ensure that children's rights are respected, protected and facilitated.

**"I think that the rights violated should be 0.1%
and rights respected 99.9%"**

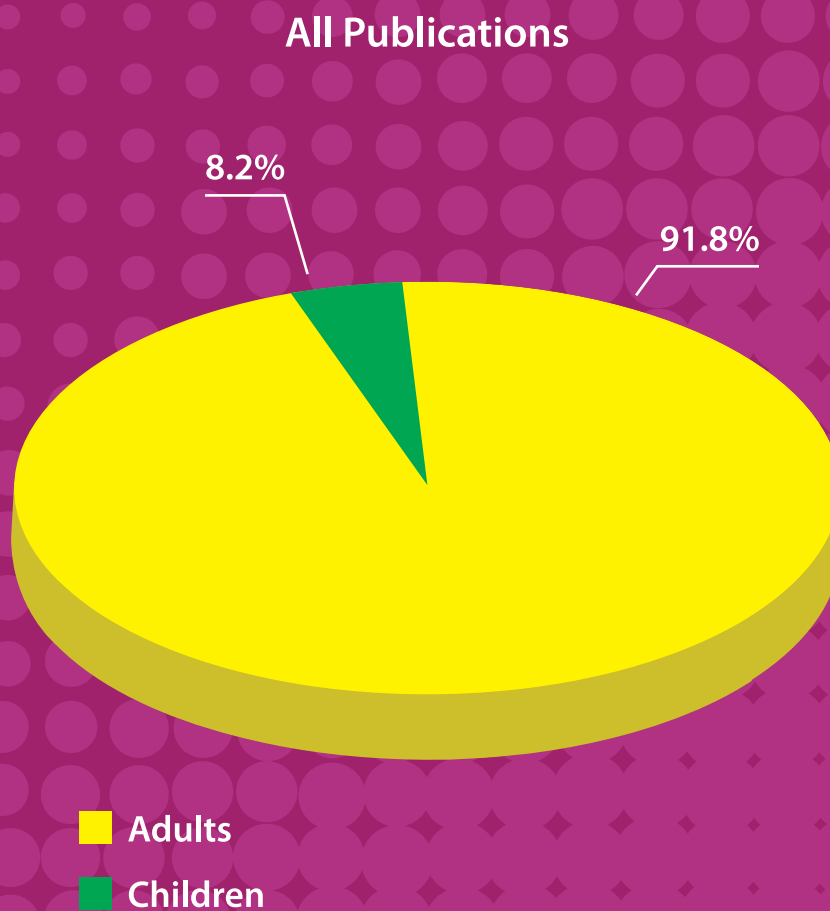
– Ammaarah Nordien, 11 years, Media Monitor

**"I think that the journalists reporting should be of
excellence and not be unfair towards children and their
rights. Journalists should be trained to be sensitive towards
children and should be trained on how their
stories affect children's lives"**

– Shaaista Sonan, 13 years, Media Monitor

Children versus Adults

How often do we hear children's voices compared to adults'?



Child voices versus adult voices:

Despite the fact that children constitute a sizeable proportion (35%) of the population and are bearers of almost the same rights to participate in the media as adults, the results indicate that in comparison to adults children are seldom accessed.

That children are seldom accessed on issues that directly affects them is problematic for several reasons. As mentioned earlier it points toward the media's "belief" that children bring very little value to stories.

By not accessing children where possible and in their best interests, media are essentially denying children the right to exercise their rights. As media are powerful agents in shaping perceptions, not accessing children entrenches the perception that children are not important and active members of society who deserve to be heard.



Media should therefore strive to afford as much opportunity as possible for children to comment on issues that affect them. Perhaps children may help come up with solutions to some of the problems South Africa is currently grappling with.

Word Clouds

What do adults actually say in these stories?



What adults said

As children's voices were overshadowed by adult voices, we sought to find out what adults actually said when accessed by media on issues that affect children. Where possible we collated all the direct and indirect quotations attributed to adults and put them into a word cloud so the bigger the word the more it was repeated in the quotations.

Since only stories relating to children were analysed it was to be expected that the word "children" and/or "child" would be repeated the most. Given the poor quality education that the majority of children in South Africa receive, it was also to be expected that words like "school", "schools", "pupils", "department", "education" "government" and "teachers" would also feature. In addition, the high rates of crime against children like rape, abuse and others also contributed to words like "police" and "case" featuring prominently as well.

What is missing though are words with some empowering connotations like "quality" in relation to education issues and "protection" in relation to crime issues. Children in South Africa need better quality education and also need to be protected from abuse. What is also missing are words that relate to other issues that affect children like poverty, housing, HIV and Aids, teen pregnancy and migration. This word cloud confirms that the majority of the stories were about education and crime at the expense of other issues affecting children. This shows that either media or adults do not fully comprehend the issues that affect children hence there is need to access children.

If children were accessed more perhaps the word cloud would be different with words like "play" and "sports" featuring the most. However, we can only know this if media develop the habit of hearing from children on issues that affect them.

"Safety should be mentioned more often in the media because we all know that children are not safe"

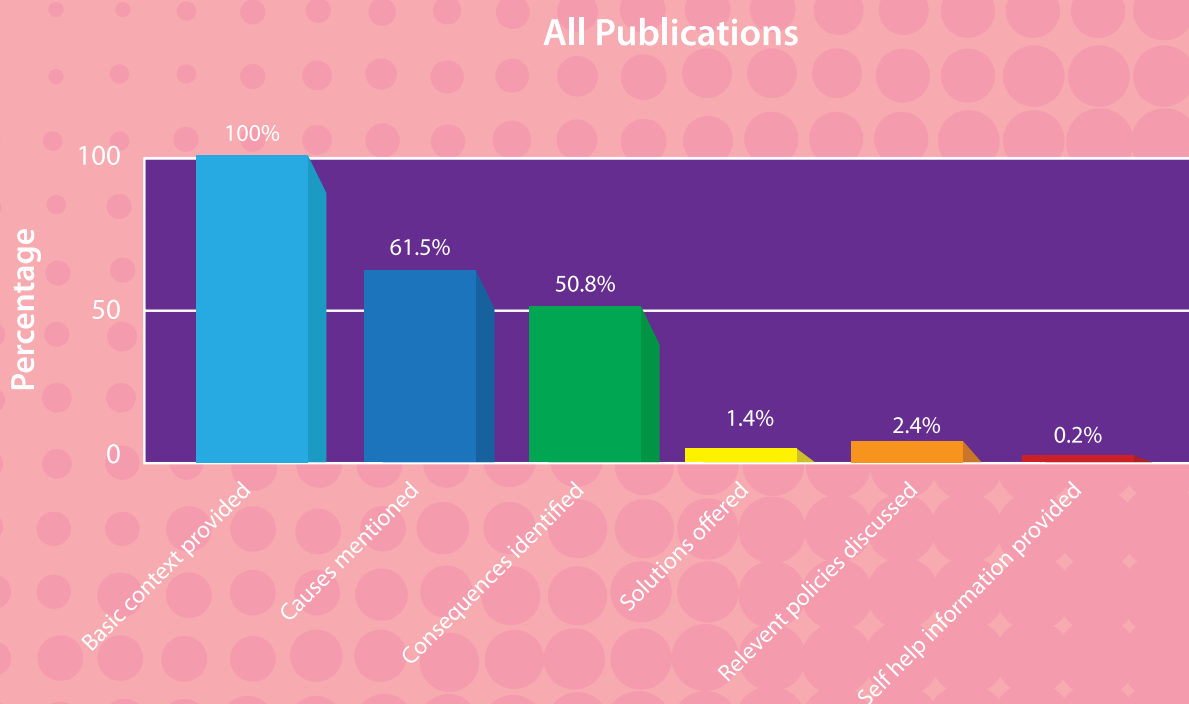
– Anonymous child, Media Monitor

"Health should also be one of the words most mentioned in the media because children's health is very important"

– Anonymous child, Media Monitor

Quality of Information

Do media adequately inform readers about children's issues?



Quality of information

People rely on media as a source of information and in order for them to be adequately informed on issues that affect children there is need for media to go beneath the veneer and unmask information that help society understand its diversity. It is also the duty of the media to connect the dots by showing how issues affecting children are interlinked and also how they affect other sections of society.

In this monitoring period, all stories monitored provided basic information about the “who”, “what”, “when”, “where”, “why” and “how”. In any event this is to be expected as the basics of journalism. What is rather disappointing however is that the stories hardly went beyond providing the basic context, mentioning the causes and identifying the consequences of the issues or events discussed.

The reasons for this could be many, ranging from tight deadlines to lack of guidelines and/or policies on the quality of information to be provided in stories. Where possible, media should endeavour to empower their audiences by offering possible solutions, discussing relevant policies and also providing self-help information, especially on stories about child abuse, substance abuse, etc.

This may be achieved by through research and accessing as many people (including children) as sources of information.

“There could be more improvement in the important things. For example in stories about teen pregnancies, drugs, peer pressure there should be more information on how to deal with these difficult situations”

– Shaaista Sonan, 13 years, Media Monitor

Recommendations

What needs to be done?

Based on the observations made in this presentation, a few recommendations can be made:

- Since children constitute a substantial proportion of the population in South Africa, there is need for this to be reflected in the number of stories about children that media cover. We do not advocate for a quota system but at least a broader recognition of their importance to our present and our future.
- Children face an array of challenges and media should cover the diverse issues that affect children, and this not only includes diversity of topics covered but also diversity in terms of geographical coverage. Children also bring fresh perspectives and can reveal different sides to common stories on issues from the economy to politics and sport.
- Where possible, media need to go beyond just mentioning children to accessing them as much as possible. Given that at times accessing children can be cumbersome and daunting it is essential that media practitioners are constantly reminded of the value of including children's participation and are continuously trained on how to ethically access them.

- Media should aim for zero tolerance on infringing on children's rights in their reporting. This may be achieved through continuous training as well as effective media accountability systems that ensure that media practitioners who fail to act ethically in their reporting are held to account.
- Children are capable of much more than they are given credit for and media should strive to portray them in roles that are empowering than disempowering. For example, instead of portraying children as victims of abuse they should be seen as survivors since the latter has positive connotations.



“There is no excuse for the lack of children's stories as there is very much sufficient amount of news about children”

– Imaan Patel, 12 years, Media Monitor

Methodology

How do we know all this?

We know all this because every year and together with children we analyse how the media report on children.

In 2014, we analysed content published by 18 media (print, radio and television) between 1 May and 30 September. Some of the media published their content online, which was also analysed.

A total of 78,912 stories were published by all media but only 5,413 stories were related to children.

It is these 5,413 stories that were analysed further.

For the purposes of the analysis adults used Dexter, our newly developed online monitoring tool that allowed us to report on the following findings:

- Number of stories about children:

This was determined through counting the number of stories about children against total stories published/broadcasted by each media during the monitoring period.

- Origin of stories about children:

This was measured by assessing the spread of media coverage across the different geographical areas and whether attention given to a particular geographic area by the media was representative of that area's population of children.

- Topics covered:

This was determined by looking at the topics that media focused on during the monitoring period. This in turn helped us to determine the topics that were less covered.

- Children's voices:

This was reached at by counting the number of times children were accessed directly or indirectly by media. This was compared to the number of times children were just mentioned or photographed only.

- Gender coverage:

This was achieved by looking at the gender of all the children that were accessed directly or indirectly by media.

- Roles coverage:

This was attained by looking at the roles of all the children that were accessed directly and indirectly as well as those who were just mentioned or photographed by media.

- Rights respected:

This was determined by looking at whether each story promoted or violated principles including but not limited to dignity, privacy and the best interests of the child

- Child versus adult voices:

This was achieved by comparing the number of times children and adults were accessed directly or indirectly by media.

- What adults said:

All the direct and indirect quotes from adults were amalgamated into a word cloud. So the bigger the word in the cloud the more it was repeated by adults.

- Quality of information:

This was achieved by examining each story against a set of quality indicators.



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