Reporting on Children:
Is the coverage getting any better?

Ayabulela Poro and Sandra Banjac

Edited by William Bird

MEDIAMONITORING
AFRICA

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Promoting human rights and democracy through the media since 1993

Graphic Design by Melanie Hamman

Contents

"Most children know that they are important or valuable, but the media does not show them as such. It is important to read both good and bad things that happen to children. But when we read about children's achievements or when we see children are heroes, we get motivated, encouraged and educated."

Tebogo Makamo
Park Senior Primary School, child media monitor, 2010

1. Introduction

Children have many thoughts and feelings, so why are they so often not given an opportunity to speak? Children are also sensitive beings yet the issues that affect them are so often treated insensitively.

This report shows the frequency and the manner in which children are portrayed in South African media across a variety of elements e.g. the roles they occupy, how often they are accessed and the ratio of girl and boy sources.

Throughout the report, 2011 findings will be compared to those of 2010 providing a comparative insight into whether the media's performance has improved or not.

Given that South Africa is a signatory to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which promotes children's freedom of expression and right to participation, amongst other things, along with the South African Bill of Rights, media is expected to reflect these commitments to children's rights in their reporting.

While coverage of children and children's issues is gradually improving, there is still room for more focus to be devoted to these issues and the manner and quality in which they are reported.

In a span of 20 months it is concerning to note that children are still underrepresented in the media and the few times when stories on them are reported, they are rarely accessed or portrayed in a variety of roles considered as outright positive.

Newspaper content changes on a daily basis, however, the impact that stories have on children reported on in the media can have a lasting impact on a child, when reported in a manner that is not in their best interest.

This report poses a challenge and invites journalists and media at large to include children and their issues more frequently in media content and also calls for children's rights to be given due consideration.

2. Key Monitoring Findings

Coverage of children in 2011 continues to be low compared to the overall percentage of children in South Africa's population. Of 87 389 stories scanned over a period of 10 months, only a proportionately small number were stories which were about children or stories where they were mentioned – 10 263.

Other sections of the monitoring project produced findings that were significantly different from those in 2010, namely child sources, origin of stories and story topics.

- Across all newspapers a large number have decreased coverage of children. Of note was The Star newspaper, whose reporting on children has halved in 2011. Going from 2912 stories in 2010 to 1174 stories in 2011. The reasons for the significant difference are not clear and will be investigated independently of this report.

- There has been a marked increase in child sources, from 31 percent in 2010 to 46 percent in 2011.

- Children continue to appear in news stories usually as mentions more than any other manner, e.g. accessed or accessed and named etc.

- A news story is still the most dominant style of coverage and has even increased by three percent.

- There has been a striking decrease in 'personalities/profiles' as a topic of news, most likely due to the monitoring in 2011 being the post-World Cup period. Likewise, Justice System as a topic has also seen a drop in coverage, while education has increased by two percent and is now the leading topic.

- Provinces in South Africa saw a boost in coverage, due to the Local Government elections which took place during the monitoring period.

- Without any change, as in 2010, media in 2011 continue to respect children's right in 97 percent of cases. However it remains of concern that three percent do clearly violate children's rights.

- Across headings and articles, only a small percentage were considered to be clearly in the best interest of the child.

- Compared to 2010, when children were afforded special protection in six percent of stories, in 2011 that figure has dropped to only one percent.

- Aside from including basic information in reporting, there was an increase in the inclusion of other information points in monitored articles, such as causes, consequences and solutions to issues reported on.

- When it comes to roles that children occupy in media reporting, 'child as member of a family' continues to be the most frequent way of representing children. Furthermore, only two roles out of the top 10 are outright positive (learner and survivor).

- When looking at the relationships between roles and gender, 'victim' remains the most dominant role for both boys and girls, although more frequently for girls.

- The gender ratio between girls and boys remains identical to findings in 2010 – 48 percent girls and 52 percent boys.

- Based on the ratio between the percentage of races in South Africa's child population and the representation of different races in media, it becomes evident that some groups are reported on more than others.

- The correlation between race and roles shows that 'child as member of family' is the most dominant role for children who are Black, White, Asian and Indian, with the exception of Coloured children who were most frequently portrayed as victims.

- Teenagers (13 – 18) continue to be the most sourced age group, although there was a drop by four percent.
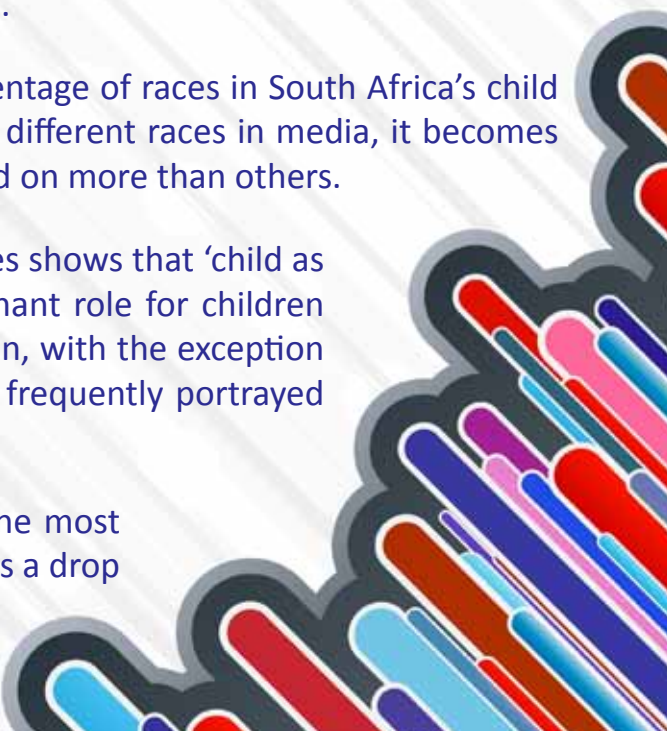
3. Methodology and Media Ratings

This report by Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) has monitored 14 of South Africa's major news publications for content on children for a period of ten months (from January - October 2011). All stories in every newspaper were accounted for and recorded in a database system.

Of a total of 87 389 counted stories, 10 263 (11.74 percent of all news stories) dealt with children. The total story count is calculated by averaging the sum of articles per newspaper over a period of five days, and multiplied by the total number of days in the monitoring period (equivalent to 10 months).

Each story that was identified as having mentioned or referenced children (either by means of an article, picture, headline or caption) was then monitored and assessed by media monitors using a customised monitoring tool (MMA's User guide has more detail – see Appendix 1). Media monitors undergo a week-long intensive training, to ensure monitoring quality, which is also regularly checked by research coordinators.

3.1 Rating the Media

MMA has applied its Media Rating System (MRS) method, used previously to assess media performance during research projects that focus on South Africa's elections as well as reporting on gender-based violence. MMA also developed a Media Rating System specifically designed to enable individual media performance to be evaluated on their reporting on children. 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 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 interests, children should be accessed by the media as this adds to the credibility, relevance and representation 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.

3.2 T-Scores: The Weighting System

When monitoring, it's always crucial and important that media performance is rated especially where reporting on children and relevant issues is concerned. Rating media performance enables healthy competition between media, and therefore encourages ongoing improvement in the quality of reporting on children. Each newspaper's performance was rated under each of the DRIVE criteria (listed above), by applying a specially developed weighting system.

The weighting system, referred to as T-scores is commonly used in statistics. For current project purposes, T-scores enabled each media's performance to be measured and compared against other media by allocating a value to each monitoring element, and to be placed on the same scale.

The T-Score ratings and rankings are for the following five elements:

1. Who is in the news? – Voices Heard or Sources.
2. How ethical is the coverage? – Ethics and Respect for Human Rights.
3. Which events are covered from which regions? – Diversity.
4. What information is provided? – Depth of Information on various issues.
5. Overall score.

Based on the assessments of stories, each newspaper was allocated a T-score which was later converted into a rating allowing us to rank them from one to ten, on each element. For example, if a newspaper is ranked one, it means that it is the best in that category; while ten indicates it performed worst. Finally, the overall combined rating for each radio station was calculated by weighting representative T-scores for each element before being converted into a rating.

The following ratings were revealed, with The Star performing the best overall:

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

3.3 Limitations

During the ten-month monitoring period only major publications, predominantly from Gauteng were considered for this study. This meant that all 14 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. The New Age was only launched in late 2010, and was not included in that year's monitoring period. Its addition to the monitoring in 2011 had impact on the results, which needs to be kept in mind when interpreting findings and drawing comparisons between the two years.

4. Findings: Children in the Media

The South African Child Gauge (2010/2011) reports that children in South Africa account for 38 percent of the population. However, when one takes a look at the media, it seems like this significant portion of the South African community is still underrepresented.

Of the 87 389 stories which appeared in the mediums monitored by MMA, 10 263 (11.7 percent) involved children. These include stories which were about children as well as stories that mentioned children in their content regardless of whether they were directly or indirectly quoted. Although a minor difference in findings, it is disappointing that the 2011 figure has in fact further decreased since the last monitoring period in 2010 where children were mentioned in only 12.09 percent of all monitored news media.

Figure 1: Percentage Of Children's Stories in the Media
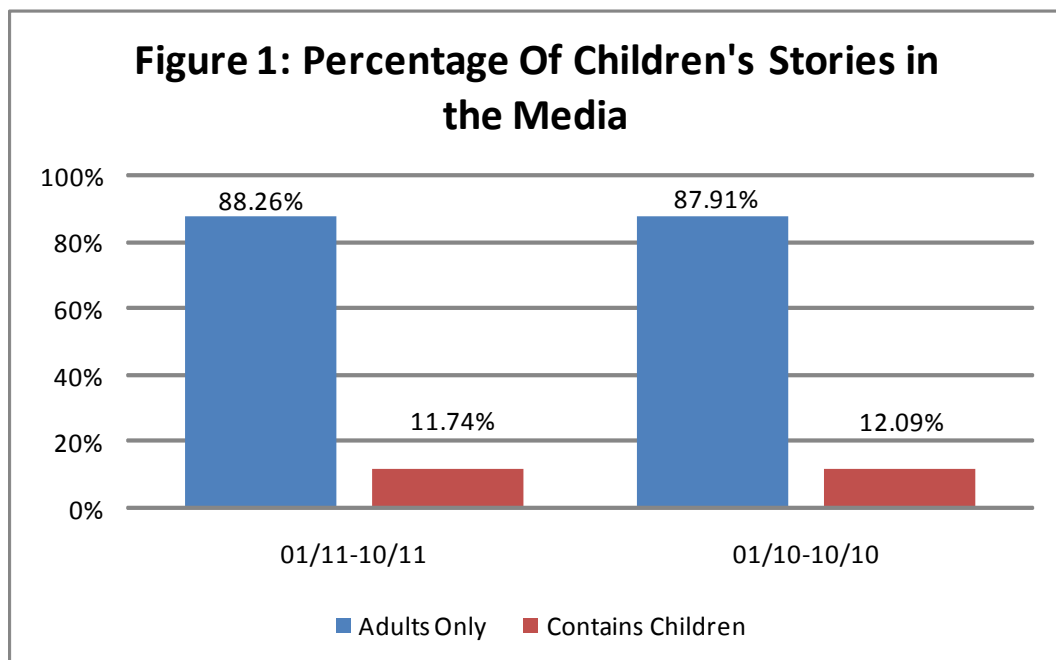
4.1 Representation by Publication

A closer look reveals how children are represented in different media outlets. Of all the monitored mediums, Saturday Star had the highest percentage of content related to children standing at 24.4 percent. Newcomer, The New Age, came second with a competitive 18.2 percent. This is rather impressive considering that the newspaper surpassed all the other newspapers which have been in existence for longer.

Significant increases in the coverage of children are apparent in the Sunday Times which had a 4 percent increase since our last monitoring period and the Mail & Guardian with a 1.3 percent increase.

A sharp decrease is noticeable from The Star which dropped in child-related content by half.
A decrease is also recorded for most newspapers namely, City Press, Sowetan, The Citizen, Sunday Sun, Sunday World and Business Day since the last monitoring period, while The Times maintained the same percentage. MMA makes a call for an improvement in this regard.

Figure 2: Representation by Publication

MEDIUM	2011	2010
Saturday Star	24.4%	24.3%
The New Age	18.2%	0%*
Daily Sun	16.1%	15.5%
The Sunday Independent	14.4%	13.5%
Sunday Times	13%	9%
The Times	13%	13%
City Press	9.9%	10.5%
Mail & Guardian	9.1%	7.8%
Sowetan	8.5%	9.9%
The Citizen	8.4%	9.1%
The Star	7.5%	15.3%
Sunday Sun	6.7%	7.8%
Sunday World	5.3%	9.2%
Business Day	5.1%	6.2%

*Data for The New Age was unavailable in 2010 as the newspaper was launched after the reporting period.

4.2 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 gives us an indication of the geographical scope the media tends to focus on and by extension the issues that are considered to be of importance in those regions. These range from provincial to international topics. News generally tends to be dominated by coverage stemming from issues on international and national levels as well as provinces that are political hubs or metropolitan areas, resulting in the neglect of other provinces. For this reason the below findings (Figure 3) are both surprising and promising.

Figure 3: Origin of Stories on Children
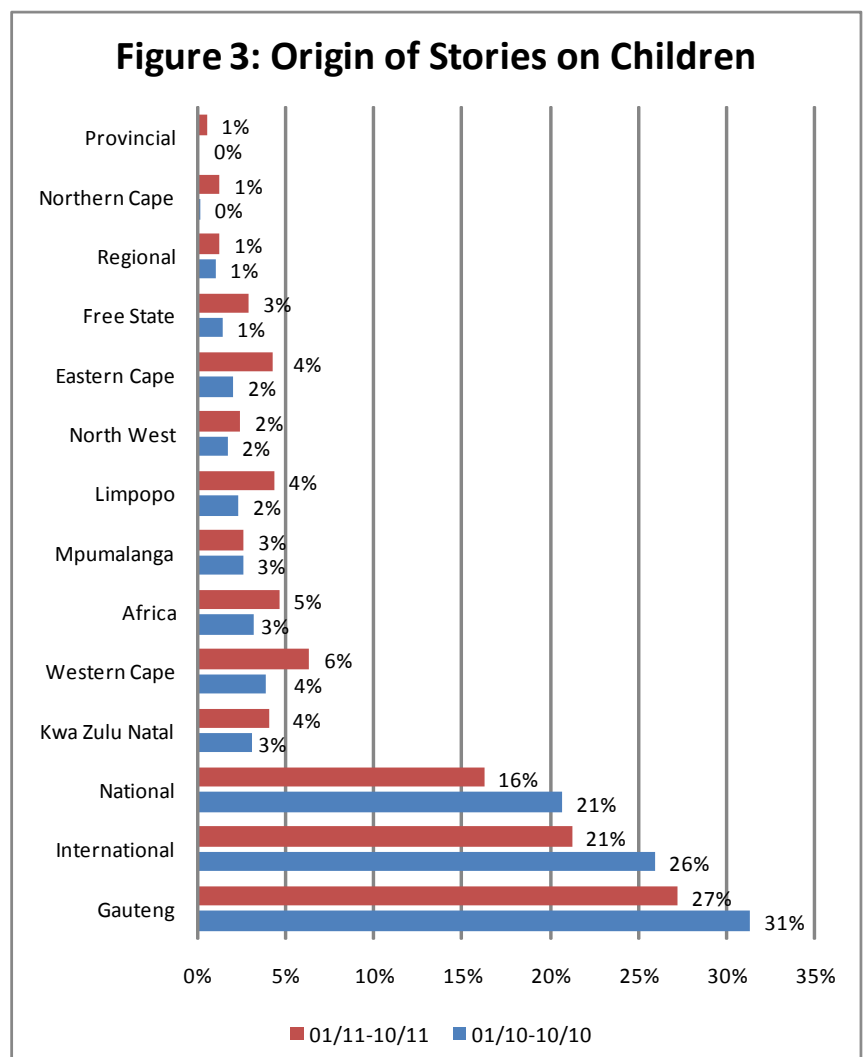
Compared to 2010, six provinces have all seen a rise in media attention. The local government elections which took place in South Africa during the monitoring period could have contributed to this increase. Likewise, the boost in coverage could partly be explained by the introduction of The New Age into South Africa's media landscape; a newspaper designed in such a way that its content is broken down into sections focusing on each province. Similarly, the drop in coverage on International, National and Gauteng based stories, could be attributed to media's shift to focusing on issues affecting provinces in the lead up to and during the local elections.

While we would like to think that the rise in media coverage across most provinces was a sign of a concerted effort by media to include children's voices in politically driven debates during the elections, the likely reason behind this increase is an inevitable focus on children's issues. Meaning, the increase in stories about children is likely a direct result of the focus of news during the election period on stories such as, municipal issues (basic services) affecting ordinary citizens including children, and issues around education in provinces etc. Considering that in addressing children's issues we are addressing the next generation of South Africa, voting sentiments will be influenced by the ability for politicians to bring to the forefront challenges that affect children.
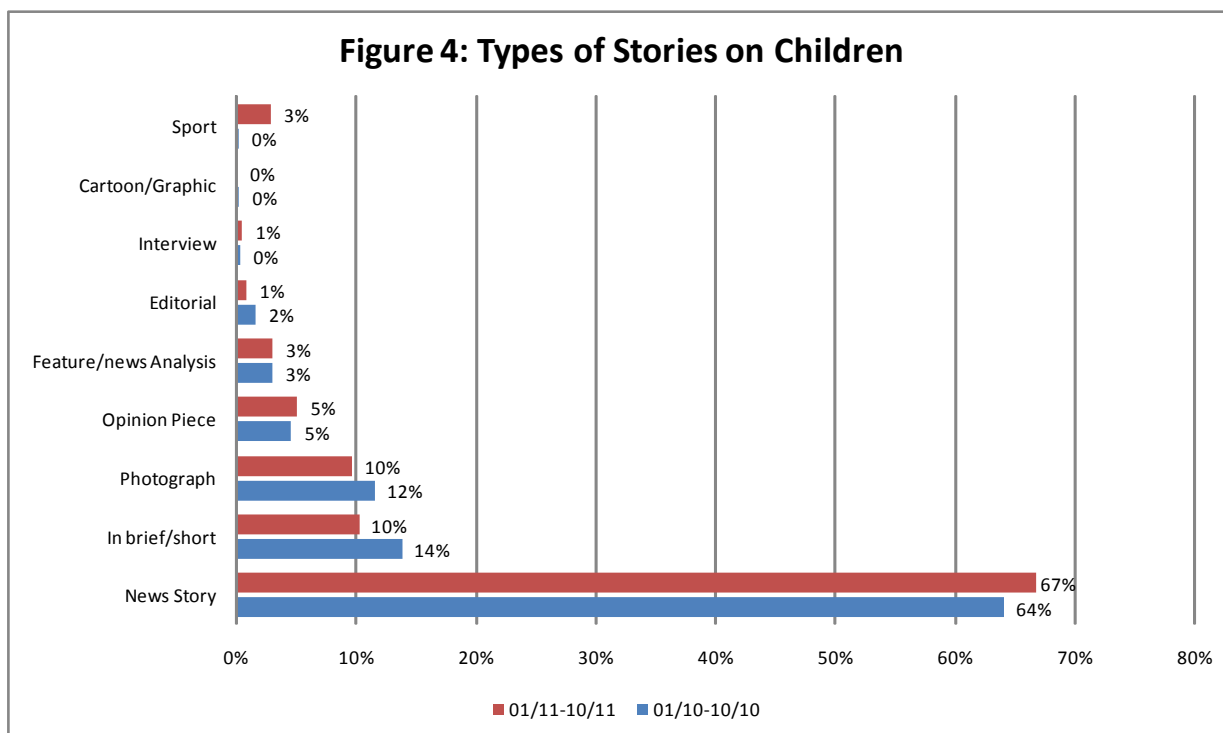
In evaluating provincial media coverage further, findings show that most of it revolved around topics such as personalities and profiles, crime, the justice system and disasters/accidents.

Although education as a topic increased by 2 percent in 2011 this shift wasn't reflected in the top three provincial topics despite the fact that education continues to suffer in these regions. The bulk of stories dealing with education were covered on a national level.

4.3 Types of Stories

Knowing the format in which children and children's issues are communicated or covered provides us with an indication of the journalistic/editorial value attributed to children's stories.

News stories are largely event-based and make up the majority of the newspaper's contents. Therefore it is more likely that children's stories are going to creep into this format of reporting. At the same time, feature/news analysis requires more time and resources dedicated towards exploring an issue in more depth. To come across feature analyses on children's issues would therefore mean that the media recognises the value in examining topics relevant to children.

Figure 4: Types of Stories on Children

Type	01/11-10/11	01/10-10/10
Sport	3%	0%
Cartoon/Graphic	0%	0%
Interview	1%	0%
Editorial	1%	2%
Feature/news Analysis	3%	3%
Opinion Piece	5%	5%
Photograph	10%	12%
In brief/short	10%	14%
News Story	67%	64%

As in the previous monitoring period, stories on children are largely covered in the form of hard news (Figure 4, above). Hard news featuring children in fact went up from 64 percent in 2010 to 67 percent in 2011. While the media seems to have taken an interest in news / current events involving children, we note with concern that features / news analysis pieces on children and issues facing children remain stagnant at three percent. The implication of this figure means that while stories on children are predominantly packaged as hard news, the issues linked to these stories are seldom unpacked in an analytical manner to allow for debate and possible solutions for them. If children's issues are to be addressed in a meaningful way, and if they are to be placed firmly on the agenda, they need to be the focus of more opinion pieces, features, editorials and interviews.

4.4 Topics

Children face a myriad of challenges in South Africa. These include educational challenges, health and health care, child abuse, access to justice and poverty. It is therefore important to analyse whether media reporting focuses on these topics and the issues that fall under them. Furthermore, the link between topics and children's roles are also explored in the following section, to gain insight into the likelihood that story topics that are overtly negative in their nature will also feature children in negative roles. For example, stories on the topic of crime are likely to feature children as victims or perpetrators of crime, both negative representations.

Figure 5: Topics

Topic	01/10-10/10	01/11-10/11
Conflict, Political Violence	3%	5%
Sport	3%	5%
Health	4%	5%
Child Abuse	5%	5%
Crime	7%	7%
Media and Arts	8%	10%
Disaster/Accident	10%	10%
Justice System	10%	8%
Education	13%	15%
Personalities/Profiles	21%	9%
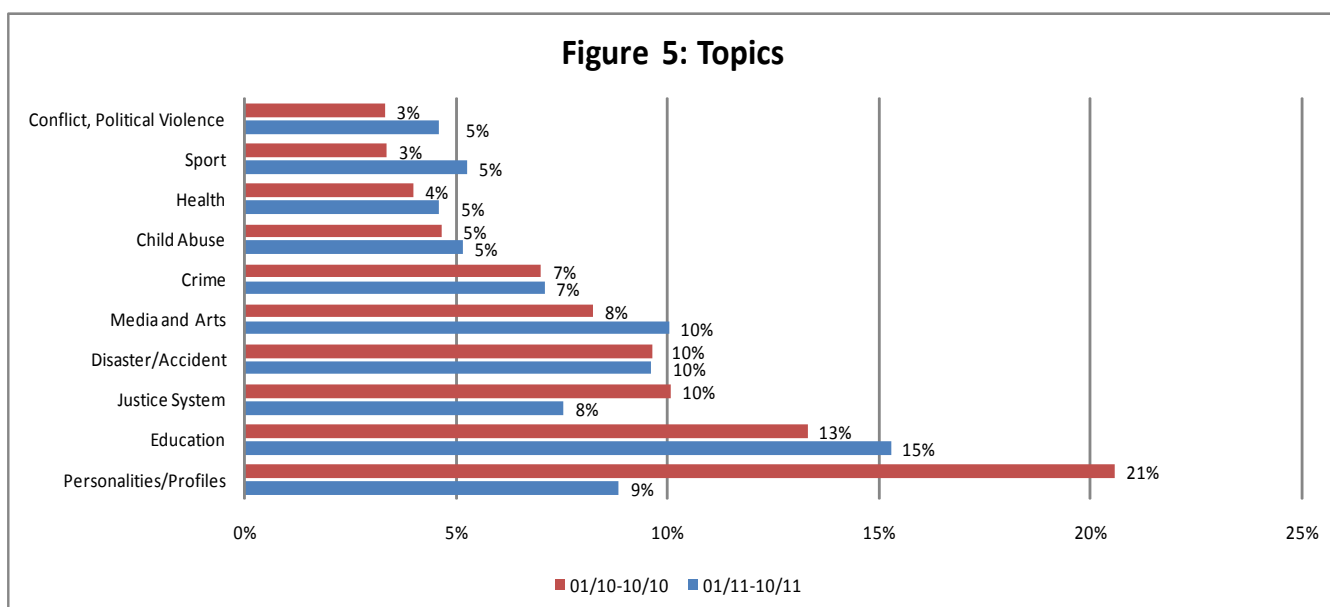
The striking difference in the percentage of stories featuring personalities/profiles between 2010 and 2011 (Figure 5, above) can be attributed to the fact that the World Cup took place in South Africa in 2010. This resulted in a dramatic upsurge in profiles or personality pieces featuring children during the 2010 monitoring period.

It's not a significant rise but it is nevertheless an encouraging finding considering that the education system in South Africa is in crisis, marred by provincial inequality in terms of the distribution of resources and challenges around infrastructure. For this reason it is important that the media continue to devote coverage and expose these issues.

A drop in stories focusing on the justice system is of concern in a country where the level of child abuse is very high but the rate of conviction very low. Stories identified as being about the justice system included those focusing on court rulings, constitutional issues, legislation, bills, amendments, judicial system, all of which contribute to the enforcement of justice and the improvement of South Africa's justice system.

Media and Arts focus on subjects such as new media, lifestyle, culture and fashion; topics which generally tend to be positive. Although such stories could be seen as light, that is, not adressing South Africa's most pertinent issues when it comes to childen (e.g. education, health etc.), the two percent rise in such stories is nevertheless optimistic due to their positive nature.

Service delivery, better government accountability, all of which are pillars of democracy and are seen to improve the lives of South Africa's citizens. That there is a rise in stories that focus on such issues featuring children could be an indicator that children are being recognised as actively contributing and lending their voice on these issues. Alternatively this finding could indicate that children in these stories are victims of conflict, active participants in demonstrations or even war.

4.5 Children Telling their own Stories

Monitoring media in order to determine the ratio of children and adult sources allows us to analyze and evaluate the perceived value a child's voice has in the eyes of the journalist, versus that of an adult. Accessing children gives them a voice and agency, allowing them to become active contributors to media discourse and debate through expressing their thoughts and opinions. Children are often perceived to lack the mental and emotional maturity to provide journalists with articulate quotes, but this couldn't be further from the truth. Children are often better placed to offer fresh and honest perspectives on issues.

The criteria for a child to be deemed a source, included whether they were accessed (directly or indirectly), merely mentioned by name or age, photographed or whether the child themselves was the author of the story. Adult sources had to be merely quoted (directly or indirectly) in order to be identified as sources.

As noted earlier, of 87 389 stories monitored overall, 10 263 (11.74 percent) were identified as children's stories. Within the contents of the 11.74 percent of children stories, a total of 35 544 child and adult sources were identified. Of these, 16 347 were child sources (46 percent) compared to 19 197 adult sources (54 percent). This is an encouraging improvement since 2010, as can be seen in Figure 6, below.

Figure 6: Child Sources vs Adult Sources
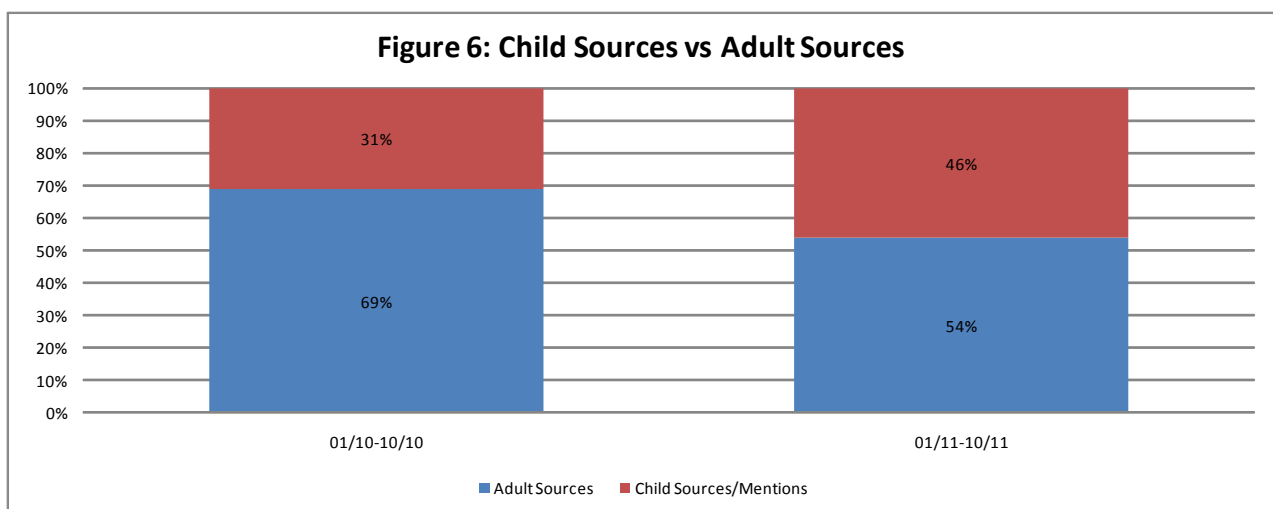
Although the ratio between child and adult sources appears to be almost equal, it is important to bear in mind that due to the broad criteria applicable to children sources there was more of a chance for a child to be identified as a source, meaning they still continue to be under-accessed directly. This could be attributed to the fact that accessing children is often challenging, and even when it is in their best interests, speaking to children requires journalists to spend more time and to employ specific skills.

4.5.1 Accessing and Including Children in their own Stories

MMA understands and acknowledges that approaching children can be a difficult task for a journalist. A concerned parent or guardian may be reluctant to allow media to identify or access a child, and sometimes with good reason, because it may not always be in his or her best interest.

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 he or she and guardian have given informed consent and it is demonstrably in the best interest of the child.**

- **The child might be exposed to harm, stigma, victimization or suffer similar injustices.**

However, that there are instances in which a child should not be accessed does not mean children should never be interviewed or identified by journalists. It is at times a challenging and delicate balancing act. But, when it is in the best interest of a child, their participation can enhance media content, frequently offering fresh insights and new perspectives. Too often though, journalists shy away from this challenge, silencing children's voices even when there is no justifiable reason to do so. A common trend is for journalists to merely refer to children by citing their gender or age rather than consulting them. This creates the impression that the child is immaterial to the story.


Figure 7: Accessing Children
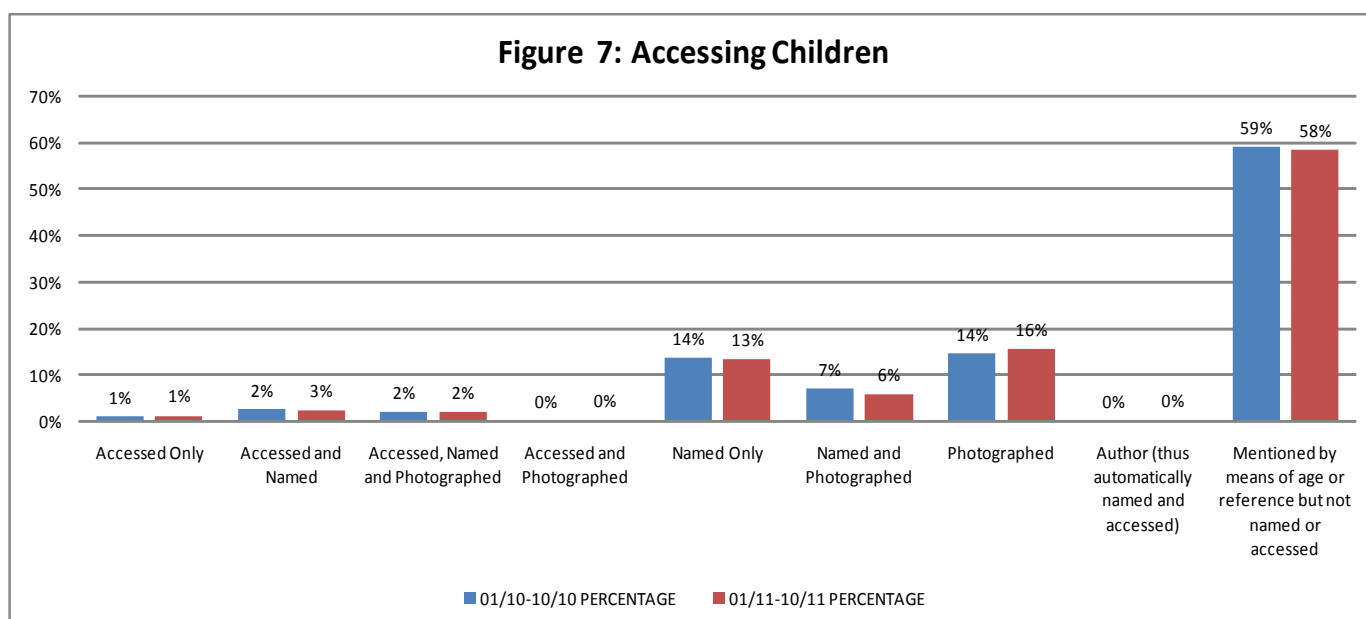
While in the previous section we highlighted the ratio of children and adult sources, in this section (Figure 7, above) we break down children sources further to gain insight into the manner in which children are accessed. For example whether they are being accessed, that is, quoted directly or indirectly, or whether they are merely being mentioned, or even just photographed in an article. Knowing this allows us to more accurately evaluate the perceived value of a child's voice and individual identity to a journalist. Therefore, to access a child and give him or her a voice indicates that his or her opinions and thoughts are considered to be valuable contributions to enriching the story, while mentioning or only photographing a child can indicate a disregard for his or her voice, rendering them less important. In light of this, it is discouraging to note that in both 2010 and 2011, children continue to be largely mentioned by age or name, as opposed to accessed and given a voice.

4.6 Representation of Children in the Media: Who are They?

The representation of children in the media remains limited and we are still seeing children merely mentioned in a way that perpetuates stereotypes about them, whether through their roles, gender, race or age. All of these elements are explored and discussed in the following sections.

4.6.1 Children's Roles

One of the ways in which children are often negatively stereotyped is the roles which they occupy in media reporting. An example of this is where a child is simply referred to as "a member of a family unit" – a role that does not offer any agency and indeed renders the child merely an extension of a family unit. Similarly, a child is often defined as a "son", "daughter", "sister" or "brother", and therefore seen not as a person in their own right, but merely as an extension of a family member, frequently an adult, that is considered much more important in the context of the story.
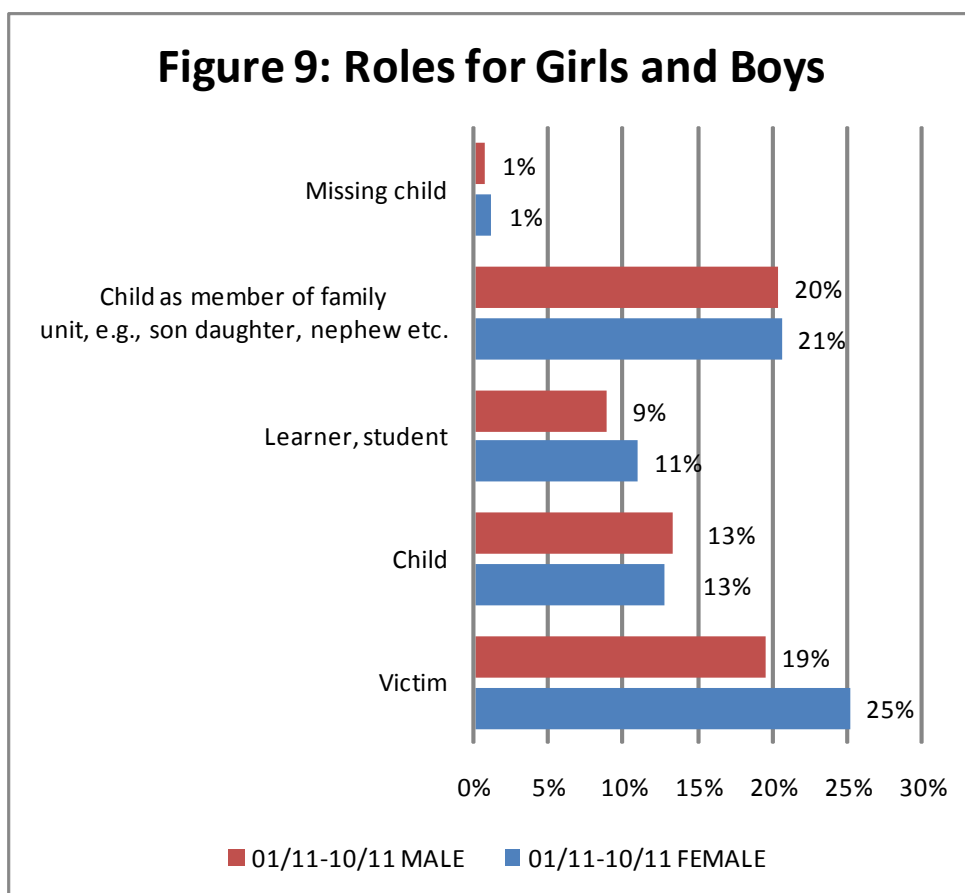

Figure 8: Children's Roles
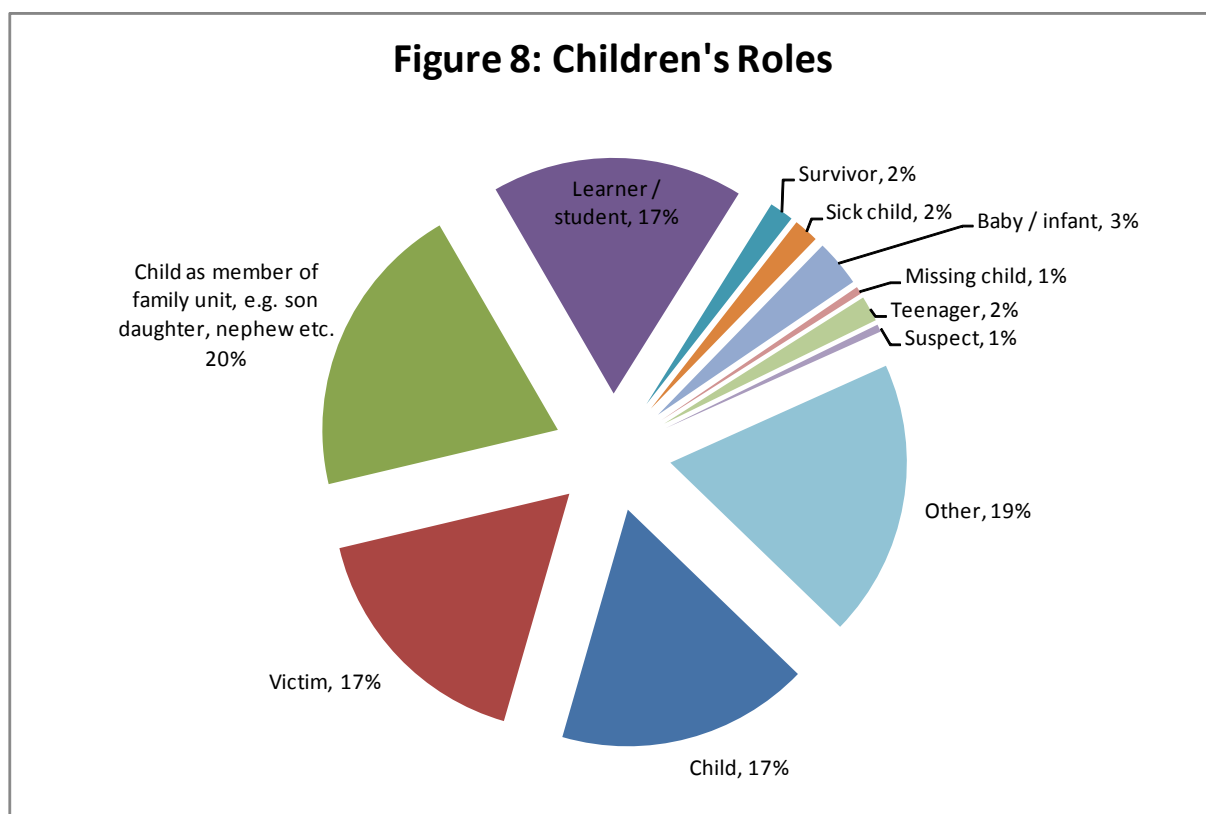
While it's encouraging that compared to 2010, the identification of children as members of families has gone down by 12 percent (Figure 8, above), it is discouraging to note that this role remains the most dominant and that the identification of children as just a child has increased by four percent. As noted earlier, this type of identification can strip children of their individual identity, character or agency. The rise in children's roles as learners / students is reflective of the increase in news reporting on the topic of education which is positive considering that education is a challenge and therefore demands constant media attention and debate.

Child abuse as a news topic remains as common in 2011 as in 2010 but on a positive note, the identification of children as victims has gone down by two percent. Survivor, seen as a more positive way to portray a victim remains the same. We encourage journalists to use the term survivor instead of victim as the former is empowering and the latter can lead to further victimization.

Of the top 10 roles (excluding 'other') displayed in the above pie-chart, only two can be considered positive, learner and survivor, constituting 19 percent. The remaining eight roles, while not necessarily negative become discouraging when found in such high percentages. For example, a child isn't necessarily a negative role but that 17 percent of stories don't make the extra effort to go beyond identifying a child as just a child, is a negative trend.

## 4.6.2 Children's Roles According to Gender

Gender inequality is a persistent social reality that affects children and can be detected in media reporting as well. It is therefore crucial to look at the roles assigned to boys and girls in the press and the disparity in their frequency. Journalists should be careful not to reinforce stereotypes, and to challenge them where possible, while representing boys and girls in a fair and unbiased way. The following section will also look at gender ratios between girl and boy sources.

Figure 9: Roles for Girls and Boys

Role	01/11-10/11 MALE	01/11-10/11 FEMALE
Missing child	1%	1%
Child as member of family unit, e.g., son daughter, nephew etc.	20%	21%
Learner, student	9%	11%
Child	13%	13%
Victim	19%	25%

It is a positive finding that girls and boys are on par on most topics (Figure 9, above), and especially encouraging to note that in the role of learners and students – where girls are traditionally disadvantaged – they surpass boys in how frequently they appear in articles. In drawing comparisons between children's roles and their race, across four out of five race categories (Black, White, Coloured, Indian, Asian) children were portrayed as members of family units more than any other role. Victim was the second leading role affecting Black, Asian and Indian children and was the top role for Coloured children and the third for White children (for Tables with breakdown, refer to Appendix).

4.6.3 Girls and Boys Speaking in the Media

Gender inequality can be perpetuated by consistently negating the voices of women/girls, and by disproportionately featuring the voices of men/boys as sources. Therefore, it becomes necessary to evaluate the opportunities given to different genders to air their views in the media.

Figure 10: Percentage Of Girl and Boy Sources in the Media
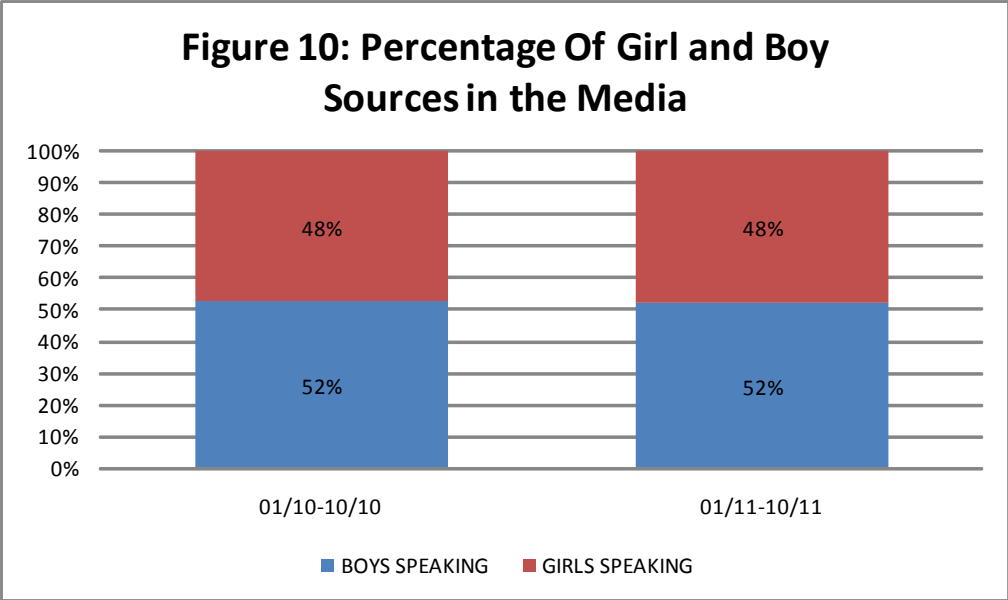
According to Statistics South Africa, the gender ratio among 0-19 year olds in the mid-2011 population estimates is 51 percent boys and 49 percent girls. Although the above estimates include those aged 19, and the monitoring for this report considers children up the age of 18, comparisons can still be drawn. Monitoring results (Figure 10, above) are almost equally reflective of the general gender ratio among children in the South African population.

4.6.4 Race of Children in the News

South Africa's history of racial segregation and marginalisation makes issues of race and representation extremely important considerations for the media. Based on Statistics South Africa racial breakdown of the children (0-19) population, 35 percent are Black, 2.3 percent are White, 3.3 percent are Coloured and 0.8 percent are Indian/Asian.

Figure 11: Race of Children in Media
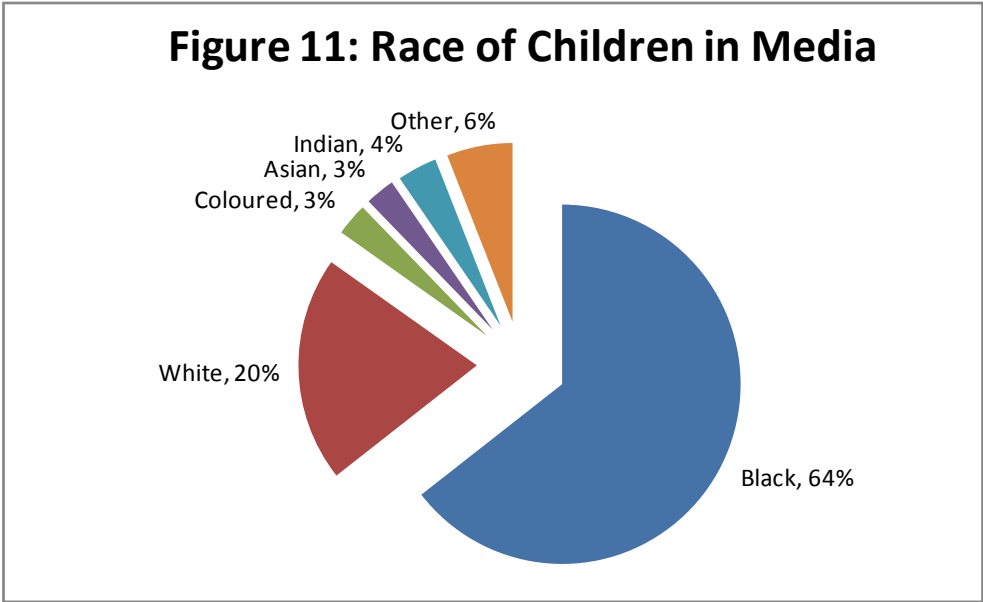
In comparing the percentage of races in South Africa's population aged 0 – 19 to the representation of different races in media, it becomes evident that some groups are reported on more than others (Figure 11).

This is especially the case with White children, who feature in media coverage almost 10 times their representative population (2.3 percent versus 20 percent). Black children occupy 64 percent of media coverage; almost twice their representative population. The group that is clearly underrepresented and doesn't follow in the same suit as others is Coloured children, who represent 3.3 percent of the population and occupy even less media coverage at 3 percent.

4.6.5 Age of Children in the News

Children's ages are not always specified in the news, but where this information is available it gives context to a story. It also provides an interesting picture of how the media deals with children of different ages and the apparent "news value" associated with them. Determining which age group is mostly reported on also allows us to monitor the media's role in addressing or reporting on issues faced by the different age groups. Likewise, we are able to confirm or dispute the implication that media frequently assume young children don't have the mental capacity or maturity to contribute to issues discussed in media. The assumption of this research is that media should strive to be diverse and representative of issues affecting different age groups.

Figure 12: Ages of Children in Media
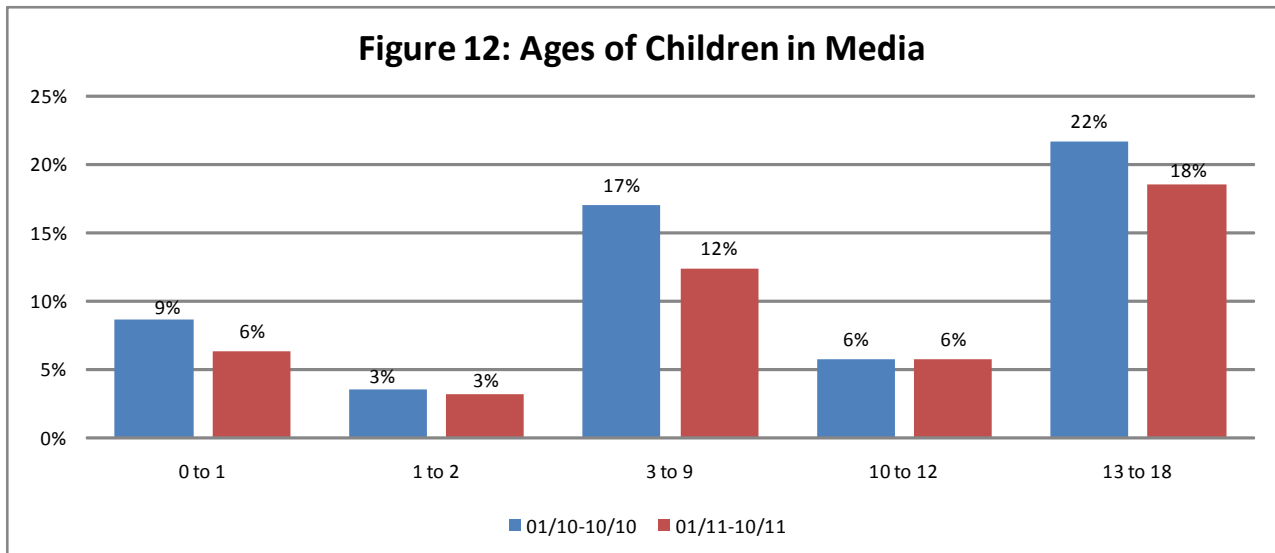
Above findings (Figure 12) indicate media's inclination to source children in the 13-18 age group. The research attributes the high percentage in this age group in comparison to other age groups to the fact that they are perceived to be more accessible. It also confirms the implication that teenagers are perceived by the media as more able to articulately contribute to media commentary. Although there's been an overall 15 percent rise in child sources / mentions versus adult sources, a large portion of these continue not to have their age specified in news reports, hence the general drop in the mention of ages of children as shown in Figure 10.

4.7 Children's Rights in the Media

As vulnerable members of society, children are afforded special rights and protection, under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the South African Constitution and 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 its reporting or to 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 contextualize the story but also empower children by reporting in their best interests, was determined.

4.7.1 Respecting Children in Headlines, Images and Text

Given the extra protection afforded to children it is essential that journalists take special care when reporting on them. Headlines, photographs, and articles should never stereotype, use derogatory language, or identify a child victim, amongst other things. MMA has revised and further refined its assessment criteria for establishing whether media has violated children's rights in order to ensure and improve their accuracy. 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.

In determining whether the child's rights are protected or violated, the following things are taken into account: whether the above elements of an article are in the children's best interests, support stereotypes, are representative of overall story topic, does article bring attention to children's rights, raise awareness of the prevention of drug abuse/child abuse/sexual offences and or HIV among young people, relevant sources, such as parents/guardian/welfare group have been used in the article, and the privacy/identity and HIV status of the child has been sufficiently protected where in the child's interest.

Figure 13: Children's Rights Respected

Stories Did Violate Rights, 3%

Stories Did Not Violate Rights, 97%
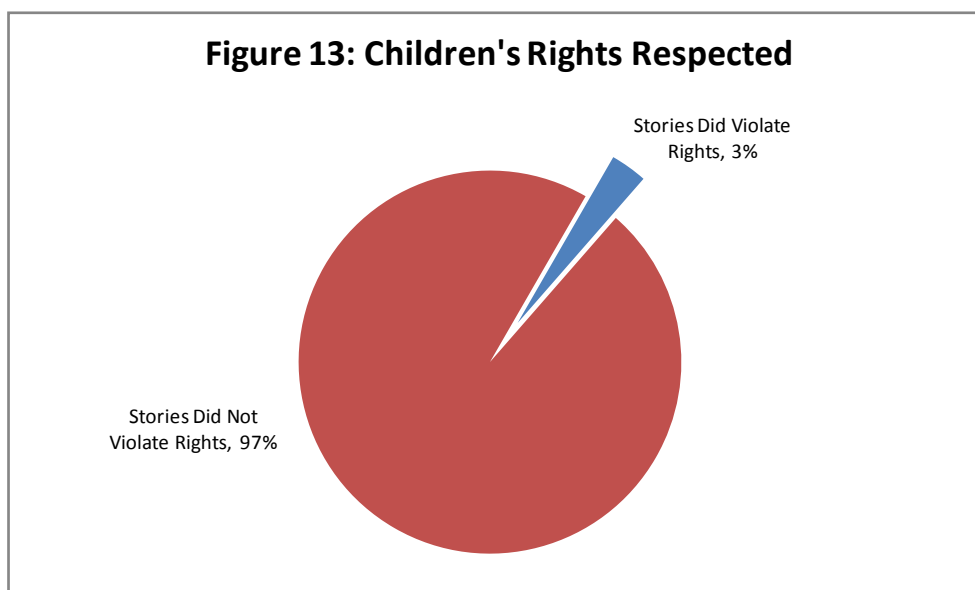
Although the percentage of those stories that clearly violated children's rights is seemingly low at three percent, this still accounts for 293 stories out of a total of 10 263 children's stories (Figure 13, above), and each story is one too many. The remaining 97 percent of stories may not have clearly violated children's rights; however that's not to say that all of those stories clearly respected children's rights either, meaning that some of the articles might not have necessarily made an effort to promote children's rights in their reporting.

For example, if a child is not identified in a rape case, then it is not a "rights respected" story as this is common practice that should be adhered to by journalists. However, if the article states "the child cannot be identified as it is not in his or her best interest," then their rights are respected as the journalist is putting an emphasis on explaining the need for the child's right to be respected (See example below).

> "My daughter told me of the incident two days after it had happened, when I asked why she wasn't walking properly. That is when she told me about the boy, who is our neighbour," said the mother, whose name has been withheld to protect her daughter's identity.

The New Age, 17/01/2011, p. 7

The abbreviated nature of headlines means that catchy and often derogatory labels like "Rape girl" are used, despite the negative impact that this may have. To derive at the findings below, the different elements of an article had to be clearly identified as being in the best interest of the child. The below findings (Figure 9) indicate a striking shift in headings and articles identified as being in the best interest of the child. Contrary to obvious interpretations this does not indicate a failure to report in the best interest of the child but rather a change in this section of the monitoring methodology.

For example, unlike in 2010, in 2011 the monitoring guidelines specified that it was no longer sufficient for a headline to read "Boy wins chess competition." Instead a headline such as "Exceptional talent sees boy at the top of chess league" would be marked as being in the best interest of the child, as it went a step further in portraying the child in a positive light. (See example below).

Disability not an inability for this teenager

The New Age, 16/06/2011, p. 20

This alteration in monitoring affected articles in the following way: For example, a report of a natural disaster that affected a school would be considered event-based reporting that impacts the education of children. However, a story in the best interest of the child would go a step further and link the event to the implications and impact it has on education and the child as an individual by accessing them in the story.

Figure 14: In the Best Interest of the Child
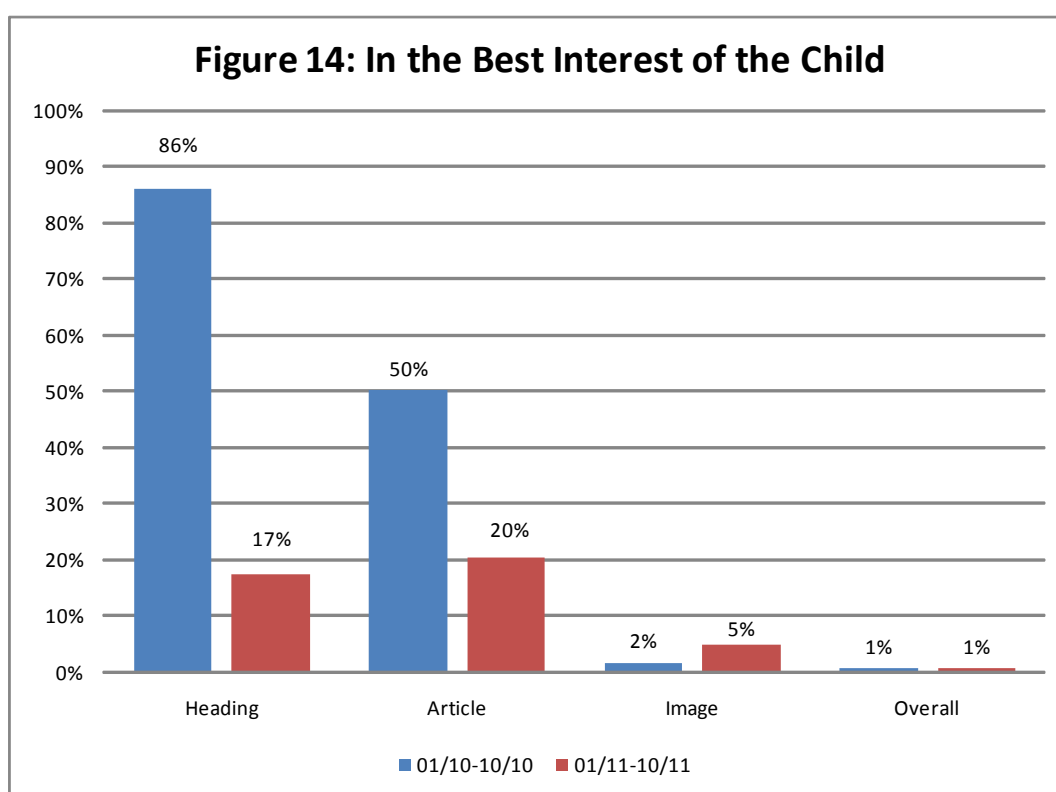
Even as a stand-alone figure, 17 percent (Figure 14, above), is still a small fraction of headlines deemed to be clearly in the best interest of the child and calls for significant improvement. Similarly, that articles came in at only 20 percent leaves room for progress. It is positive to note an increase of images seen as portraying children in a manner that is in their best interests.

4.7.2 Observing Ethical Principles

Stories were 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 beyond doubt adhere to these specific criteria are deemed to have clearly supported ethical principles and only those that unequivocally failed to abide by these same criteria are deemed unethical. Only one and the most dominant principle in the story can be chosen. Such a strict criteria means that the percentage of stories drops significantly. Those articles that do no harm, but that also miss the opportunity to do some good, are not included.

The following principles which were either supported or violated were coded for:

The story seeks and expresses the truth
(Accuracy, correct scientific and statistical information, variety of sources, transparency)

The story is independent and objective
(Showing all sides of the story and providing context)

The story minimises harm
(Caution is exercised when reporting on sensitive issues to avoid further harm)

Children are afforded special protection
(A clear effort to protect the child's identity has been made in stories dealing with abuse, crime etc)

Stereotypes are avoided
(Stereotypes about children are challenged and not perpetuated)

Children's interests are taken into account
(Children's voices are included in matters affecting them, making them the primary subject in the article, the story being told through their voices)

The tables below show the number of stories, out of a total of monitored stories in which principles were supported and violated and how they compare between 2010 and 2011.

Principles Supported	01/10 - 10/10	01/11 - 10/11
The story does/does not seek and express the truth	5	69
The story does/does not minimise harm	37	105
Children are afforded special protection	647	62
Children's interests are/are not taken into account	264	141

Principles Violated	01/10 - 10/10	01/11 - 10/11
The story does/does not minimise harm	45	65
Children are afforded special protection	136	56
Children's interests are/are not taken into account	103	45

Of significant note in the above results, is the drop in the number of stories where children were afforded special protection, for example by having their identity concealed. Meaning a story may have protected the child's identity but there was no clear effort to explain to the reader the editorial decision to protect the identity. An example of a principle supported in this case would read, "the child cannot be identified as he is a witness in a criminal court case."

4.7.3 Including Information Points

Information points assist the reader in acquiring context for a story. This can be done, for example, by providing background information, relevant legislation, and self-help contacts or tips where appropriate. Displaying all these elements in a story shows that a journalist has linked an event to an issue by providing the reader with causes, consequences and possible solutions, rather than just reporting on it in isolation. Knowing this type of information, the reader can gain better understanding and feel more empowered to become an active agent in solution seeking.

Figure 15 : Information Points Included
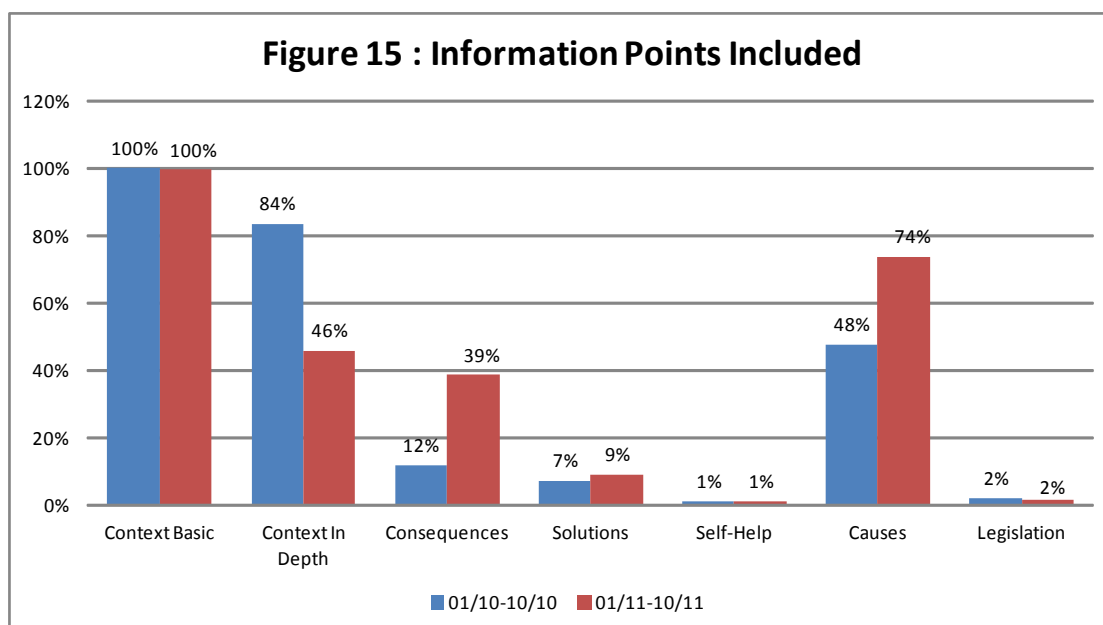
It is to be expected that all monitored stories will meet the context basic criteria at 100 percent (Figure 15, above), meaning they will all include the basic information that is required of a report. The challenge often lies in coming across stories that go beyond the basic context and manage to "connect the dots," that is, make an effort to explore the issue in more depth by providing further information points.

It is a positive finding to note that compared to 2010, monitored stories more frequently included information on the consequences, causes and solutions in 2011. Self-help as an element includes information on where a reader, potentially a child, could access help if they identify themselves to be in a similar situation that the article is reporting on. That the percentage is so low shows that stories are often failing to take the extra step in offering this information and therefore ensuring that readers are able to approach someone for help. Lastly, as a means to educate readers and promote democracy and the importance of children's rights as stipulated in South African law, referencing existing legislation in place to afford them rights is crucial and points to the ethical obligation the media holds to inform readers. A finding of two percent is therefore insufficient.

5. Conclusion

Coverage of children in 2011 continues to be low compared to the overall percentage of children in the South African population. Of 87 389 stories monitored over a period of 10 months, only a proportionately small number were children's stories – 10 263 – reflected in the large number of newspapers which decreased their children content.

Although there has been an increase in child sources, children continue to be accessed by means of being mentioned or referenced, more than any other manner, e.g. accessed or accessed and named etc. News stories are still the most common way to report on children's issues, and there has even been an increase. While there was a slight increase in reporting on the topic of education there was a decrease on issues around the justice system, one of several topics of importance to children, aside from health which also saw a decrease and child abuse which remains the same.

On a positive note, provinces in South Africa saw a boost in coverage, most likely due to the Local Government Elections which took place during the monitoring period, resulting in a focus on issues affecting children in provinces that don't often receive much attention.

Without any change, media in 2011 continue to respect children's right in 97 percent of cases. However it remains of concern that three percent clearly violate children's rights. Furthermore, the percentage of stories where children were afforded special protection has dropped.

When it comes to roles that children occupy in media reporting, 'child as member of a family' continues to be the most frequent way of representing children. Furthermore, only two roles out of the top 10 are outright positive (learner and survivor). On observing the relationships between roles and gender, 'victim' remains the most dominant role for both boys and girls, although more frequently for girls. The gender ratio between girls and boys remains identical to findings in 2010 – 48 percent girls and 52 percent boys.

Only a small percentage of headlines, images and articles are considered to be clearly in the best interest of the child and media generally tend to include basic information in reporting, resulting in a lack of comprehensive reports on issues in mainstream media.

When evaluating the race of children in the media, it is apparent that some groups are reported on more than others. The correlation between race and roles shows that 'child as member of family' is the most dominant role for children who are Black, White, Asian and Indian, with the exception of Coloured children who were most frequently portrayed as victims. Teenagers (13 – 18) continue to be the most sourced age group, although there was a drop by four percent.

6. Recommendations

Through its Make Abuse Disappear Online Accountability Tool (MADOAT)[1] MMA continually engages with media professionals on a practical level to bring attention to instances of reporting where children's rights were violated, or alternatively where they were respected or promoted. It is through this process and training of journalists that MMA, on an ongoing basis, ensures that reporting on children improves.

In its submission as part of the Press Council Review Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) said "the inclusion of a dedicated clause on children is essential." Since 2010, when this submission was made, the Press Council, has included a further clause in the Press Code that reads: "Exceptional care and consideration must be exercised when reporting on matters where children under the age of 18 are involved." While this addition is a step in the right direction MMA believes there is room for further emphasis on the need for the protection of children, in the Press Code, and therefore supports recommendations made by the Press Freedom Commission to the Press Council, on reporting on children in the media.

In addition, MMA has, together with children and with input from journalists and editors also improved and launched the editorial guidelines and principles on reporting on children in the media, which have been recommended by the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF). It is these additions and improvements that can help journalists continually improve the coverage of children, especially in light of the challenges currently posed to media freedom in South Africa.

In speaking to MMA's child monitors on the topic of better media reporting practices in relation to children's rights, their suggestions are often as follows:

- "Even if a parent says it is ok for you to identify [or interview] the child you should at least try and speak to the child and see what they think about the decision made by their parents.

- If putting a child's picture in the newspaper will endanger or embarrass the child in any way at all, they should not put it in, even in blur, no matter what the situation is.

- If a child is uncomfortable you should not push the issue. Try to be very patient with him or her. It is the child's choice. Don't write lies just because he/she refuses to talk to you.

- If these laws [or codes] are broken, severe punishment will be given.

- The child's rights shall be respected and protected at all times no matter what the circumstances. The rights are rights to freedom of speech, participation, dignity and privacy.

- You will not pass judgement no matter what the child tells you. You must listen and not judge him or her."

The above quotes have been extracted from MMA's 'Children's Views not in the News' report launched in December 2010.

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1   The *Make Abuse Disappear Online Accountability Tool* (MAD OAT) aims to raise awareness and improve the representation of child abuse in the South African media. It does this through the use of technology and a network of child abuse experts, as well as a reference group of children.

Specifically in relation to the findings of the 2011 monitoring, the following are recommendations and suggestions for improvement in the reporting of children:

- Media should make an effort to increase their coverage of children and children issues so that it more closely reflects that percentage of children in the South African population.

- Although there has been an increase in child sources in 2011, media should continue in this trend and also access children in various ways, rather than just mentioning them. This means quoting them directly or indirectly (when this is in their best interest) to give them a voice etc.

- While news stories as a style of coverage are the most dominant component of a newspaper, MMA encourages journalists to rely more often on analyses, interviews and opinion pieces which would allow them greater space to delve into children's issue in a more comprehensive and in-depth manner.

- Despite a two percent increase in media coverage on the topic of education, journalists need to devote further attention to topics of high relevance and importance to children, such as health, child abuse and the justice system, as well as the Millennium Development Goals, specifically hunger and poverty.

- Although the spike in provincial coverage is likely attributable to the Local Government Elections, we call for media to continue this trend and not revert back to neglecting issues that affect children in less covered provinces.

- Although three percent is a seemingly low percentage of clear violations of children's rights, ultimately journalists should strive to ensure that this figure stands at zero percent.

- That across headings, and articles, only a small percentage are considered to be clearly in the best interest of the child, requires effort by journalists to address this challenge.

- The significant drop in the principle affording children special protection, calls for a drastic improvement, meaning journalists should treat stories about vulnerable children with sensitivity and provide readers with insight into why there is a need to protect children in these circumstances.

- Aside from including basic information in reporting, journalists need to provide more background information and more often make links between facts and larger societal issues.

- There is a need to diversify the roles of children in media content particularly roles that can be deemed as positive, to correct the current imbalance and tendency to represent children as merely family members or victims. Furthermore, that 'victim' is the most common role for both girls and boys is of concern, but that girls tend be portrayed in this role more often is a gender stereotype that needs to be challenged.

- Based on the ratio between the percentage of races in South Africa's child population and the representation of different races in media, it becomes evident that some groups are reported on more than others; an imbalance that needs to be corrected.

- The correlation between race and roles shows that 'child as member of family' is the most dominant role for children who are Black, White, Asian and Indian, with the exception of Coloured children who were most frequently portrayed as victims.

- Teenagers (13 – 18) continue to be the most sourced age group, although there was a drop by four per cent. Although these age groups tends to be easier for journalists to access, they need to be encouraged to diversity and make effort to access children of all ages, in accordance with their mental maturity and ability to comprehend and articulate opinions around different issues.

7. Appendix

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 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. E.g. Mother, teacher etc. This role is determined from a set list of codes.
Children's Role	The role of the child in the story. E.g. 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. E.g. 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? E.g. named and accessed, named only or mentioned by means of age or reference but not named or accessed.

The **MAD OAT** (Make Abuse Disappear - Online Accountability Tool) is implemented to assess ethical issues in reporting on children. It takes 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 are 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.
		Have identities/names of children been revealed. Has an effort been made to prevent harm to the child?
4	**Children are afforded special protection**	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?
		Have identities/names of children abused/violated been given? Is there clear informed consent?
5	**Avoid stereotypes**	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, v
		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 sterotyping. Often the gendered aspects to a story, including how events, poicies, 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** is 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 is provided where information could be recorded that has not been captured elsewhere.

Race and Roles: Breakdown

	Role	Source Count
Black	Child as member of family unit, e.g., son daughter, nephew etc.	1943
	Victim	1143
	Learner, student	972
	Child	682
	Missing child	127
White	Child as member of family unit, e.g., son daughter, nephew etc.	973
	Child	281
	Victim	244
	Learner, student	99
	Entertainer	68
Coloured	Victim	68
	Child as member of family unit, e.g., son daughter, nephew etc.	54
	Child	23
	Sick child	21
	Learner, student	12
Indian	Child as member of family unit, e.g., son daughter, nephew etc.	143
	Victim	139
	Child	104
	Learner, student	42
	Refugee	10
Asian	Child as member of family unit, e.g., son daughter, nephew etc.	85
	Victim	72
	Child	72
	Learner, student	21
	Survivor	14