



Summary of Results



The Media Monitoring Project
in partnership with



Save the Children

Sweden



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Monitoring the media since 1993

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1 Introduction

The overall aim and objective of the project is to monitor how children and children's rights are represented in the South African news media. The monitoring will serve as a baseline study which will not only enable the development of policies and strategies to address strengths and weaknesses but will also be used to further the development of a culture of human rights in the media through training and advocacy initiatives

2 Theoretical Framework & Assumptions

The MMP draws on contemporary media theory including both qualitative and quantitative methods and employs discourse and close content analyses. MMP's extensive media monitoring experience, international media monitoring practice as well as a thorough literature review have informed the development of the theoretical framework applied to this particular project. In addition to this the MMP operates within a framework of human rights and advocates for balanced, fair, accurate and informative media coverage as well as the promotion of a culture of human rights.

MMP operates on the following assumptions:

- The discourse of news is generally negative where bad news usually makes good news (or is regarded as newsworthy).
- The media has the ability to shape and influence perceptions and therefore has the responsibility to inform the public.
- With regards to children's rights, children deserve special treatment. Children are the most vulnerable sector of society and as such are afforded special protection by the law specifically the South African Constitution and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This protection is extended to the media's treatment of children so that their rights are upheld in reporting on or about children in the media.
- Reporting on children in the media is difficult – it presents the media with some of the most difficult ethical questions. Children are often associated with innocence, purity and vulnerability. At the same time children are often exposed to the worst treatment and human rights violations. This explains to some degree their newsworthiness but covering such items has the potential to further expose them to secondary trauma.
- MMP encourages media to continue highlighting issues affecting children, however every effort must be made to ensure that the best interests of the child are not compromised.

For the purposes of this study a child has been defined by the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the South African Constitution as any person under the age of 18 years.

3 Methodology

The Empowering Children & Media project monitored and analysed over 22 000 items from 36 different media including print, radio and television. From March to May 2003 every item that contained a reference to a child or children was monitored by the MMP and relevant information was captured about the topic, sources, representation and other issues.

The most exciting and innovative of the project was participation of children themselves. The children engaged in a parallel monitoring project where they monitored the media for a two-week period. This was done so that the children could express their views directly and so that they could see for themselves how the media represented them.

Participation workshops were held in three provinces (Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Kwazulu Natal) and gave children the opportunity to share their perceptions of the way they are represented in the media, what they thought was important in the news and most importantly they were able to develop critical media literacy skills. In addition the children were given the opportunity to make their own newspapers. This exercise illustrated that news is determined out of choice and that the perspectives of journalists and reporters shape the news.

In addition to the provincial diversity children from different backgrounds and diverse ages, races and sexes participated in the project. Working with children in participatory workshops requires a skilful, ethical and professional approach. For this reason Clacherty and Associates, who are experts in this field, were contracted to run these workshops.

In order to ensure that children would be able to continue applying the critical media literacy skills they had acquired during the project, they were provided with radios from the Freeplay Foundation. As many of the participating children had limited access to resources, it was important that they were not disadvantaged and this was ensured through the selection of the solar and friction powered Freeplay radios.

As a key element of the MMP's partnerships with the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) and other media stakeholders, the MMP will, during 2004, conduct specialist journalist training to bring the diversity of children's issues into the newsrooms, address strengths and weaknesses in reporting and help ensure the participation of children in the media.

3.1 Limitations

The sample of media monitored covers print, radio and television media, but is necessarily limited in that not all of the media in South Africa could be included. For print media all news items in the paper were monitored, advertisements and

supplements were specifically excluded. For radio three news bulletins per day were monitored. The study is limited in that current affairs programmes were not monitored. For television only news bulletins were monitored. The research is therefore limited to analysis of the news as monitored in the media included for the period March to end May 2003.

4 Putting the monitoring into perspective

The spread of children's items over the three-month monitoring period indicates that children feature prominently at some times and less prominently at other times. Identifying some of the key events that occurred during the monitoring period helps us contextualise the monitoring and helps us understand and explain some of the key research findings.

4.1 What were the key events that occurred?

- The war/invasion of Iraq
The war/invasion received extensive coverage from March through to May documenting the issues of weapons inspections, the war itself and reconstruction efforts after the war.
- Political and prominent figures
 - Investigations of fraud and subsequent trial involving Winne Madikizela Mandela (March to April)
 - Investigations of corruption involving Toni Yengeni (March to May)
 - Marike de Klerk's murder trial (April)
 - Death of Walter Sisulu (5th of May)
- Major sporting events especially the Cricket World Cup hosted in South Africa (to end March)
- Metro Bus Strike (March)
- TAC protests regarding government's anti-retroviral policy (March to May)
- Boeremag treason trial (March to May)
- Spread of SARS virus (April)
- Easter road death toll (April)

4.2 Which children's items received extensive coverage?

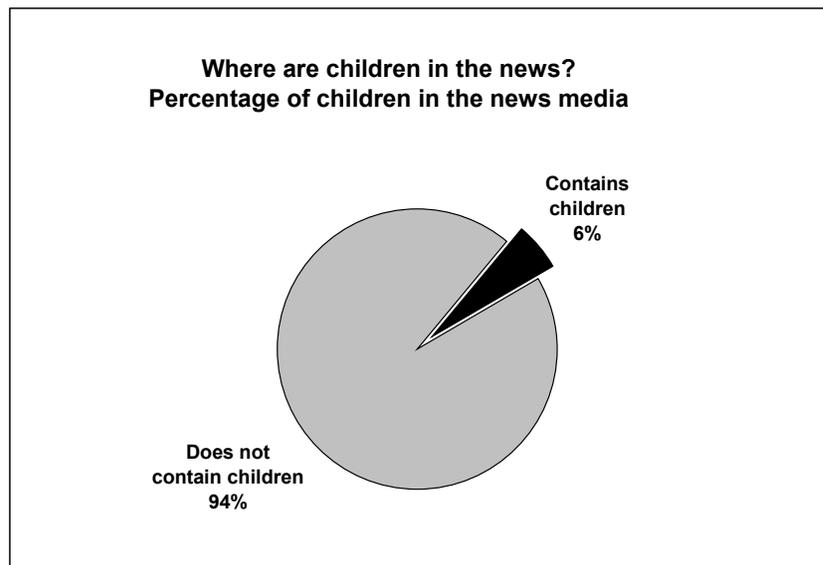
- Return home of a 15-year-old American girl who had been kidnapped (March)
- Deaths of children in the Cape Flats gang violence (March)
- The re-opening of the child-rape case against a prominent Premier (March)
- Happy Sindane, racialised coverage of a young man who claimed to have been kidnapped and raised by a Ndebele speaking family (May)
- Prominent mobile phone company's "Take a girl-child to work" campaign (May)
- Items highlighting children in need of liver transplants (May)
- Issue of religious study at schools – discussions with Kader Asmal on whether or not religion should be included as part of the school curriculum (May)
- Child Protection Week (May)

While the overall coverage of children is low, as revealed later in this report, there were instances where children were almost entirely absent from the news agenda. A complete drop in children's stories was found on the 19th and 20th of April. This was the Saturday and Sunday on the Easter weekend where many of the news stories focused instead on road accidents and traffic issues.

5 Key Findings

5.1 Children's representation in the media is limited

5.1.1 How often do we see children in the news?



Only 6% of all monitored news items contained children. This suggests that children and children's issues are not a key element of news agendas. Rather children's newsworthiness seems to be defined by the extreme and/or dramatic nature of stories.

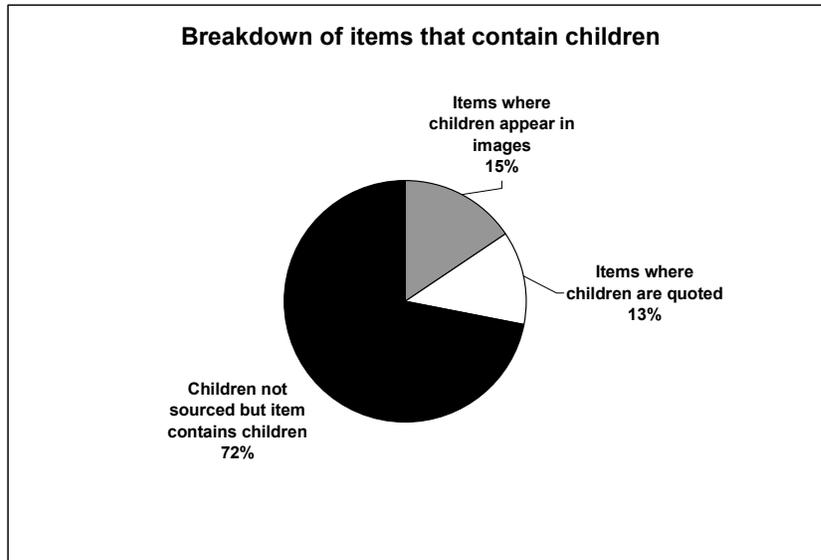
The children in the participation workshops commented on this lack of representation:

"There is nothing on the radio news about children. These guys, they don't think our issues are important."

"In this newspaper you see more information about cell phones. There is only one about children."

In the newspapers made by the children, 54% of all people identified were children. The children made sure to include children but there was also a clear adult component. While it would be expected that they would include more children, children made sure that there was equitable representation.

5.1.2 How often are children sourced or accessed for their opinions?



Children are rarely accessed for their opinions. Children were quoted directly or indirectly in only 13% of the items on children. This suggests that children are given a limited opportunity to represent themselves, to exercise their right to participation, and to express their views and opinions in matters that affect them.

Children in all workshops talked about how few journalists interview children themselves and ask them to tell their story.

"I realised that we can understand what is going on around us. If it is about us we are the best people to say something about it."

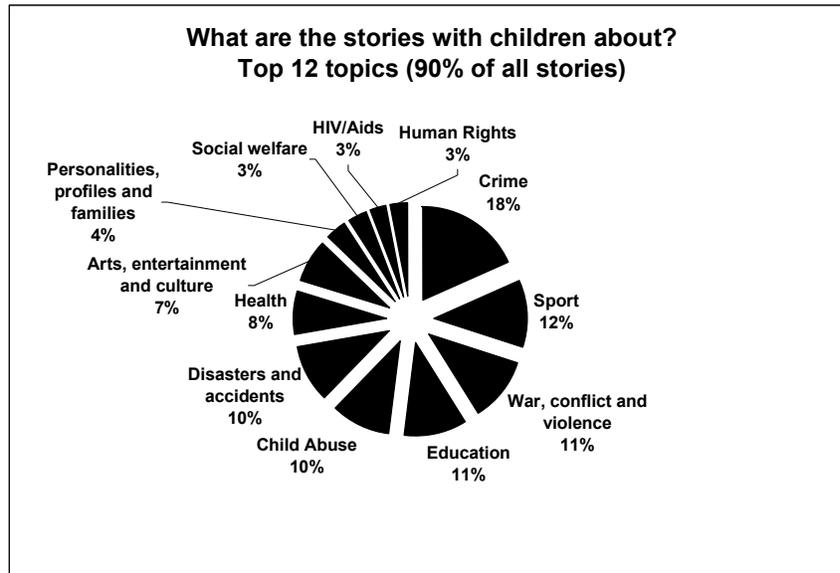
The names the children chose for their newspapers was interesting as they indicated that the children recognised that this was an inclusive forum through which they could express themselves. It also demonstrated strong ownership of the newspaper and recognition for what children are capable of achieving.

"We called it 'Children's Voices'. We made this newspaper and it is our voice."

"We chose that because we put things that are happening in 'Our World Today', things that are affecting us."

When children were sourced, their comments were limited to sport, arts/culture, and war/conflict/violence.

5.1.3 What are the types of stories in which children appear?



The stories in which children appear are predominantly negative. The results show that almost 50% or 1 in every 2 stories on children is negative. While it is a common feature of news to report on “bad news” stories such as crime, violence and abuse, this severely narrows the representation of children and helps locate children more often as victims in “bad news” stories.

The children in the workshops were acutely aware that most of the coverage afforded to children in the media tends to be negative.

“They only show bad things that happen to children. They never speak about good things that we do as children.”

“There was a story about children but it was only about the bad stuff happening”

“I feel sad because nothing is said about the good children do.”

In addition, the participants raised the fact that the media tends to focus on dramatic issues, such as child abuse, and may ignore other children’s issues. This was also reflected in the monitoring done by adult monitors, thereby indicating a fairly narrow representation of children in the news media, both in terms of topics and roles.

“There is always a story about abuse in the paper and when a child is abused then the story is discussed by people on the news but then what about other things that happen to children. Teachers beat children and they send them home if they have no uniform. What about those stories?”

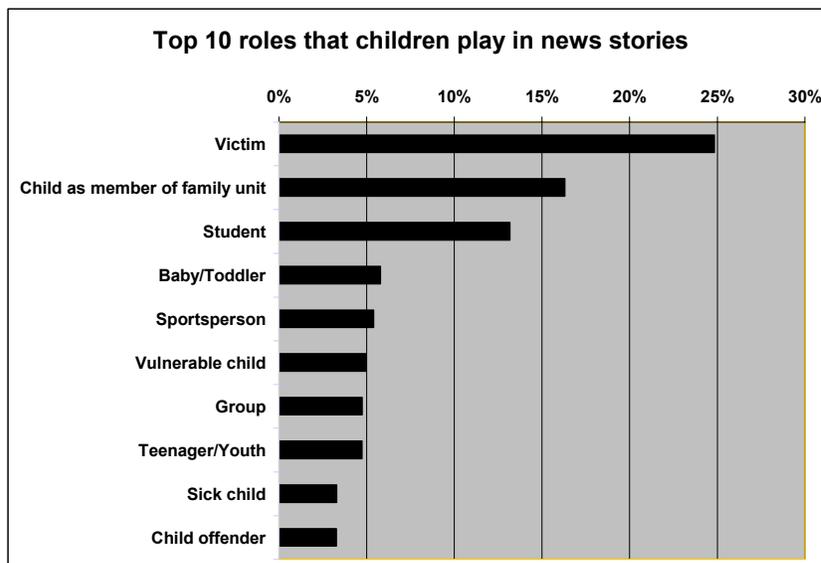
In their own newspapers, the children strived to maintain a balance between positive and negative news stories, and often tended to juxtapose a positive item with a negative item. Even though they used negative images or stories, there was a distinct sense that these were employed in order to deliver more positive or meaningful messages. They also demonstrated a need for news that is relevant to their lives.

Children's stories do make big news. The results showed that the majority of children's stories appear on the first 3 pages of a newspaper or in the first 3 items in a news bulletin. Almost 60% of these prominent topics were about crime, disasters/accidents, child abuse, and war/conflict/violence. It would seem that children are newsworthy when the topics are dramatic and extreme.

- E.g. Child who lost his limbs in a bomb blast in the Iraq war/invasion
- E.g. White pupil shoots black boy
- Recent e.g. Teacher burns pupils genitals

Such stories typically shock audiences and capture their attention. It is understood that the media must report bad news in order to raise awareness of particular issues in society, but when it is predominantly these stories that receive prominence, it limits the way that children are represented in the media.

5.1.4 What roles do children play in news stories?



Children were represented as victims in 25% of the items monitored. The depiction of children as victims either through language or the use of photographs can have the intention to elicit sympathy from readers/viewers, or to shock them about the particular event. Children represented as victims ties in to the types of topics in which children are found i.e. crime, abuse, disasters/accidents. It would seem that an additional component of

children's newsworthiness is their role as victims. One of the effects of this representation of children is that children are primarily viewed as powerless, helpless, vulnerable victims.

Many of the children commented on the way in which they are frequently represented as victims.

"In every news bulletin there are children who are raped, street kids, orphans and more. This is bad for children."

In their newspaper-making exercise, many of the children included articles about children who were represented as heroic or featured in positive roles. Many of the children selected an article about a street child who had been talent spotted and had this to say:

"Still, even if you are poor it does not mean that you will never get anywhere in life. This girl she was poor, she had nothing basically, and now she is famous. The message is no matter what happens you can always become something in life."

5.1.5 How are children represented in stories on HIV/AIDS?

How were children represented in stories on HIV/AIDS? (Top 3 roles)	
Role Description	Percentage
Victim	30%
Orphan	21%
Sick child	14%

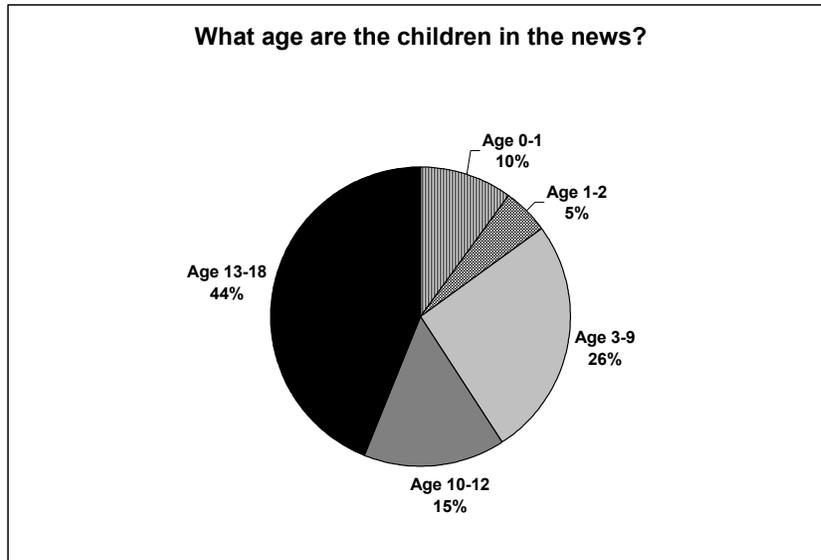
Given the scope of the problem of HIV/AIDS and its relevance to South Africa, the MMP together with the Children's Institute in Cape Town (working with Helen Meintjes and Rachel Bray) is producing a separate report on this subject. With three percent of all topics, HIV/AIDS was one of the most prominent topic codes identified.

An analysis of the roles in the HIV/AIDS items revealed that 30% of the children were identified as 'victims'. While this figure is in line with the overall representation of children as noted earlier, the identification of children with or affected by HIV/AIDS as victims is problematic as it can lead to further stigmatisation. Referring to children affected by HIV/AIDS as victims is disempowering especially when considering that many of these children survive in adverse conditions and continue to live full lives.

The second most common role in which children were identified was as 'orphans', which accounted for 21%. While the issue of children who have been orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS is a critical one, the emphasis placed on this issue obscures the diversity of additional, and in many instances more

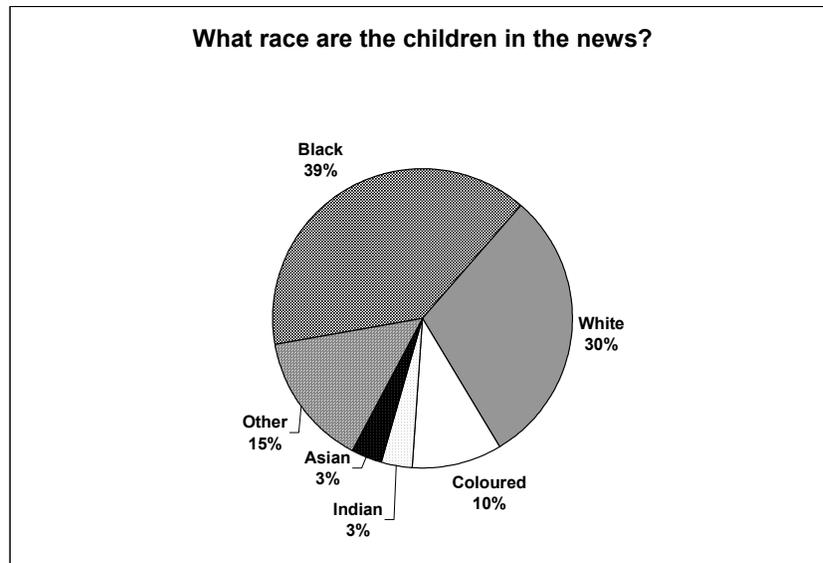
common ways, in which children are affected by HIV/AIDS. This emphasis is reinforced not only by the media but also by donor organisations and other bodies. The concern with regards to the representation of children with or affected by HIV/AIDS is therefore around the lack of attention being given to the other ways in which children are affected by HIV/AIDS.

5.1.6 What age are the children in the news?



Teenagers were found to receive the most coverage in the media i.e. children between the ages of 13 and 18 received 44% coverage. This relates in part to the topics in which children appear, particularly education and sport. This group of children are often very vocal however and it is surprising that they are accessed so seldom for their opinions.

5.1.7 What race are the children in the news?



39% of children in the news were black while 30% were white. The remaining 31% included Asian, coloured, Indian and 'other' races. ('Other' in this instance refers predominantly to Iraqi children who featured prominently because of the war in Iraq). These figures are clearly not representative of South Africa's demographics.

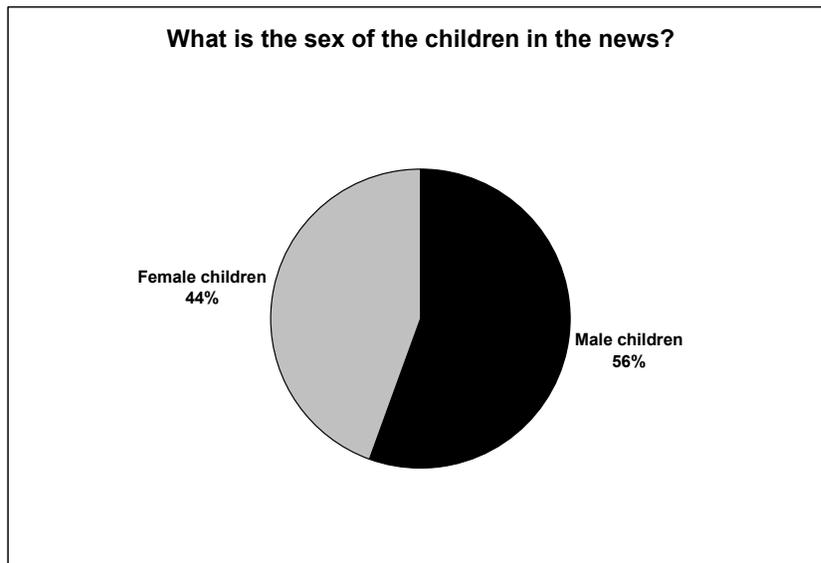
White children were most accessed for their opinions - 39%, while black child sources constituted 37%. This disparity may serve to affirm and empower white children while other children's voice are not heard and receive a more narrow representation.

The children's newspapers showed parity in the representation of race. A count of the different races represented in their newspapers found that 55% of all sources were black, while 19% were white. Although they had raised it as an issue and attempted to portray the racial demographics of the country equitably, the participants did not draw specific attention to race.

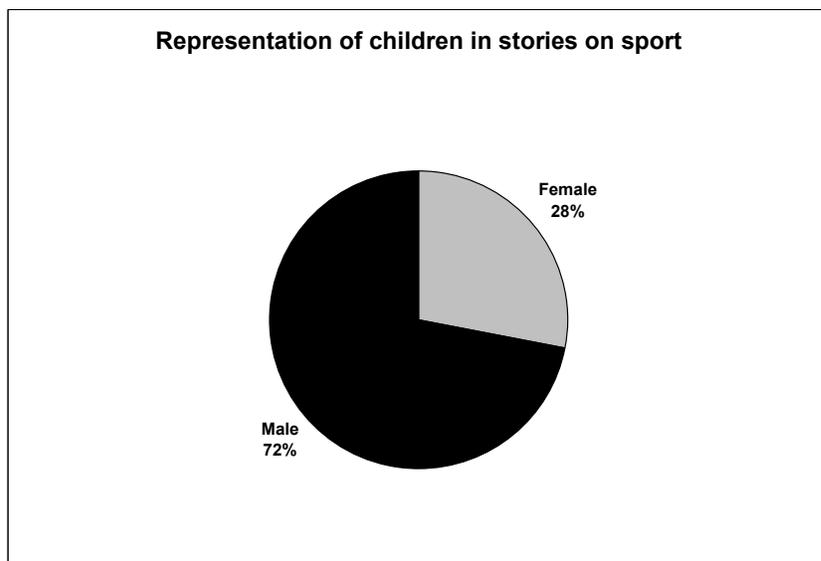
Race and racism raised in relation to children:

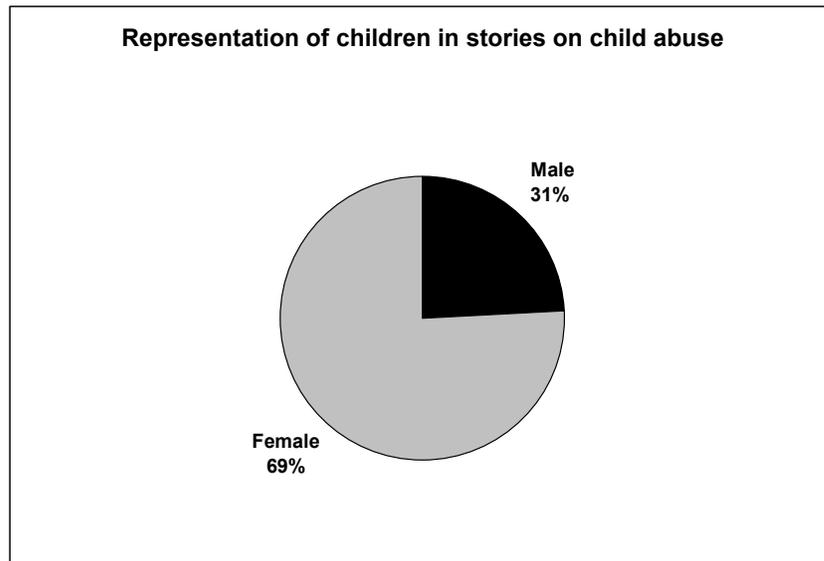
- E.g. Two black children who were forced to paint themselves white
- E.g. Happy Sindane. Race was a key issue in this story, the race of Happy as well as his parents even made headline news. Ironically and with some notable exceptions the issues of race were not discussed
- E.g. 17-year-old pupil who shot dead a fellow 14-year-old pupil
- Recent e.g. Black girl was allegedly assaulted by a fellow white pupil at their school

5.1.8 What sex are the children in the news?



Boys and girls were represented fairly equitably – boys 56% and girls 44%. This seems surprising as previous research indicates that males receive far more extensive representation than females. A closer look at the topics in which boy and girl children appear indicates that their representation is still along stereotypical lines with girls more likely to appear in stories on child abuse and boys more likely to appear in sport related stories. Such a disparity may reinforce stereotypes of girls as passive victims and boys as active and assertive heroes.





The results also indicated that boy and girl children are sourced fairly equitably – boys 53% and girls 47%. This also seems surprising, but as mentioned above, girl children are sourced more in stories on abuse while boy children are sourced more in stories on sport.

The breakdown of adult sources appears at first glance to be better than the norm, females – 35% and males – 65%. The recent Gender Media Baseline Study highlighted the disparity in male and female sources with 81% male voices against 19% female voices (Gender Media Baseline Study, MISA, Gender Links & MMP). Again, an analysis of the roles of adult sources reveals that one of the most common sources in stories on children are mothers.

Female sources are limited to more 'feminine' roles such as mothers and members of the NGO sector (it was only in these two categories that females were better represented). Similarly men were limited to more 'masculine' roles of police and government officials.

It was notable in the children's newspapers that the participants were attentive to equitable gender representation and stories featuring girls or women were far more prominent than in the mainstream media. The overall ratio of men to women was just over 1:1.

Representation of gender in the news media – examples

- E.g. Mobile phone company's "Take a girl child to work" campaign
- E.g. "Overweight" 6-year-old who attempted to cut the fat from her body

5.2 The representation of children reinforces certain stereotypes

5.2.1 How does language affect the way that children are represented?

1. Structure of a story – reports can be factual and event-based, or contain graphic detail.
 - E.g. Fanwell Khumalo rape cases (court reporting)
 - Past e.g. Child whose intestines fell out when she was badly raped.
 - Positive e.g. Business Day report on domestic violence and how children frequently witness this violence.
2. Statistical reporting - reports seldom provide follow-ups and often report on children as statistics without contextualising the story.
 - E.g. 9-year-old boy mutilated and killed in Shoshanguve.
3. Often language fails to recognise minor status of the child.
 - E.g. Child referred to as 'lover' in Jabu Pule report. This insinuates a consensual relationship between adults thus in part taking the blame off the accused and unduly apportioning it to the child.
4. Language can objectify the child (language of abuse)
 - E.g. "Tombstone boy"
5. Language can trivialise serious issues
 - E.g. Popo Molefe case "I'm a lover, Not a rapist", "Popo Faces More Dirt."
This trivialises the extremely sensitive issue of child molestation and child rape as "dirt" when charges of child molestation should be taken extremely seriously.
 - E.g. "Little Lucky not that lucky - he is HIV positive"
 - Positive e.g. Business Day report on two groundbreaking legal decisions with regards to rape.
6. The emphasis in reports on children is often on the adult or the "other" (further, the emphasis is often on the man and not the woman/girl)
 - E.g. Jabu Pule report where he is accused of kidnapping his under age girlfriend – the focus of the report is on him as a soccer player
7. Sources are more often men – this often reinforces and affirms a strong male bias while contributing to the marginalisation of females especially with the roles they occupy.
8. Language can be patronising and disrespectful.
 - E.g. "Limbless Livhuwani from Limpopo"
When the language is disrespectful it serves to further victimise the child.
9. There are often contradictions – children are seen as vulnerable and innocent, but this is often different with regards to sex

where there is a gender bias against girls. The language used when reporting on sexual issues can perpetuate gender stereotypes.

- Recent e.g. Story where teachers forced a schoolgirl whom they described as promiscuous, to insert a banana into her vagina.
10. Language can reinforce the representation of a child as a victim – by calling them victims directly, by representing them as statistics and by using language that emphasises the child's innocence, vulnerability and helplessness.
 11. Language can dehumanise the child.
 - E.g. "Dog-sex girl" reportThis type of language is not only dehumanising, disrespectful and insensitive but further victimises the child. It also inaccurately associates the crime with the child instead of the perpetrators. The perpetrators were not referred to as dog-sex employees.
 - Recent e.g. "Drain boy" – story where a child fell down an open storm water drain and drowned.The space and layout of stories play a role in the language selected but they need to be balanced against the best interests of the child.
 12. Language can be empowering when the rights of children are respected.
 - Positive e.g. Citizen opinion piece on AIDS law and its implication for children.

5.2.2 How do images affect the way that children are represented?

1. Images are an integral and powerful element of media particularly when they contain children. This suggests that children can in fact be used in a most powerful way.
 - E.g. Kevin Carter's image of the starving child and the vulture
 - E.g. Photo of 'Kim' – the girl who ran burning and naked down a street in Vietnam
 - E.g. Hector Peterson – June 16 massacre where the child is being carried by a friend fleeing the South African police
2. Children are sometimes used as tokens – their innocence and vulnerability are used in images to reinforce certain messages, but at the same time it reinforces certain stereotypes about children – often that they are vulnerable, powerless victims.
 - E.g. Images of children in the Iraqi war – often shown in extreme distress, their innocence violated.
3. The way that images are used can also perpetuate stereotypes

- E.g. A high-angle shot focused down at a child makes the child smaller and more of a victim.
- Children are also used in images to reinforce broader stereotypes
- E.g. Images of starving black children may be used to suggest that black people are not progressing.
4. There is a clear contradiction here where children can be used so powerfully but they are so often portrayed as powerless

5.3 The representation of children affects their rights

5.3.1 How does the representation of children affect their rights to dignity and privacy?

1. The identification of children in certain stories may be a violation of a child's rights and may break the law. 1 in 10 children in abuse stories are identified - this is against the law and subjects children to further victimisation.
- Recent e.g. Child who has been sodomised is identified in an image with his mother who says "My boy here's been sodomised twice already this year by those kids."
 - Good e.g. SABC 3 report featuring child criminals in jail
 - Good e.g. Star's report on AIDS orphans who cannot access grants

The participants were fairly outspoken about news articles that revealed the identity of particular children. They were quite adamant in all the groups, for example, that rape and abuse survivors should not be identified:

"It is not good to show his face. Everyone knows him and will laugh at him."

"This girl will grow up and then when she grows up she will see what they said about her and will be very sad."

2. Children are often interviewed in times of trauma or when the child may be grieving and their right to privacy may be violated.
- E.g. Interview with a child about her mother when the child has just been rescued from her dead mother's arms after a 7-storey Cairo apartment block collapsed.

The children seemed to intrinsically recognise the ethical problems of interviewing a child who has recently suffered a traumatic experience.

"I think it is wrong to keep on asking him questions. It will make him confused and more scared. When he answers their questions a picture of what happened will come to his mind."

3. Identification of children in certain stories may violate their rights to dignity and privacy. As the World Health Organisations guidelines on reporting point out, the impact of the story often affects the life of the child long after journalist has left.
 - E.g. "Little Lucky not that lucky - he is HIV positive"
Identifying a child who is HIV positive could subject him to further trauma particularly with the stigma attached to HIV and AIDS.

Children pointed out the irony of protecting the identity of the perpetrator while revealing the identity of the victim.

"They don't show a person who is a suspect and a criminal but they show the person he raped."

"If people do crime you can't see their face. But you often see the face of the innocent children. They were supposed to protect and respect the face of a child."

4. Each of these powerful stories need to be told and difficult stories need to be reported but at the same time children need to be protected from further harm.
 - E.g. The media often help with locating missing children or children who have been kidnapped by showing a picture of the child that has been kidnapped, however it becomes a criminal case when it is reported and the child is the victim and witness and thus should not be identified.

The child participants also recognised the essential role the media plays in highlighting important issues, albeit negative.

"I think it is good to have articles like this. Now I know about children who are hungry. I feel bad for them. I wish I could help them but it is not possible because I still depend on my parents."

"I think it is good to have these articles about abuse and rape as then grown-ups are made aware. Mothers can warn their children. They will be more careful about sending them out at night in the dark."

In all cases of reporting, the best interests of the child should be paramount.

5.3.2 How does the use of images affect children's rights?

1. Images are often used to elicit sympathy, however this is sometimes done in a manner that is intrusive.
 - E.g. Image of an Iraqi child sitting near the body of his dead brother in a casket prior to the funeral.
2. Images may also be used for shock purposes. The horror of some of the crimes committed against children is undoubtedly real. There also appears to be in some instances a morbid fascination which often accompanies gruesome images/stories (similar to 'spectator value' of traffic accidents). Such images can be intrusive and violate privacy and dignity. In addition, one of the effects of these images is 'flooding' – where people become desensitised after seeing so many similar images. In order to have the same effect, more horrific images are required. Another problem is that these types of images also lead to 'compassion fatigue' where people are no longer affected by the plights of those in the images.
 - E.g. "Horror of infant corpses shocks Red Cross" – graphic bloodied image of a dead child with its pacifier still around its neck.
 - Positive e.g. Sunday Sun report "where should the media should draw the line" in the publishing on mutilated corpses.
3. How can the best interests of children be protected and still ensure powerful and difficult children's stories are reported? MMP advocates for the adoption of a human rights framework where the best interests of the child remain paramount and the child's rights are protected.

5.3.3 What about children's right to participation?

1. Children have a right to participation but they are often not given the opportunity or taken seriously. This affects the way in which children are represented.
2. The media however, has a responsibility to provide balanced reporting, and one way in which the media can address the limited representation of children is to exercise their power by giving children the opportunity to participate. E.g. it would seem extraordinary to cover elections and interview all people involved except the political parties, yet when issues directly impacting on children are covered they are rarely accessed.
 - Positive e.g. SABC 1, 2 and 3 broadcast a report on the effects of the war on children where children were interviewed for their opinions
3. The media also has the responsibility to inform – this responsibility also pertains to children who not only listen to

and read about the news, but also actively request to be informed on matters that affect them.

The children in the participation workshops commented on this:

"I would like to see articles about how other children live in other parts of our country."

"We want information about HIV/AIDS. Children have to know how to protect themselves."

"We want to know when schools reject children with HIV/AIDS. We need to know also when schools send children away because they do not have school fees."

Children's participation is not only about realising the right to receive, impart and access information and participate in decisions that affect them, it also makes good business sense to do so. If children's participation is ignored and the roles they are represented in are limited, if they are marginalised, it must then be understandable that they lose this interest in the news.

It must also be recognised that children's participation can be difficult. Some of the reasons are:

- Issues of consent
- Interviewing children requires additional skills
- Intimidation on the part of the interviewer and the child
- Issues of naming and identification
- Language, lack of understanding and other communication issues

There are however, solutions to these difficulties in the form of practical guidelines as well as advice and information bodies such as Save the Children Sweden and UNICEF.

5.3.4 What issues were raised during the monitoring?

1. The results showed that the category of human rights issues was the most prominently raised category, but issues relating to this were raised implicitly rather than overtly. The media however need to use their power to raise awareness and educate the public about human rights and children's rights.

The children also commented on this:

"I think they must put in more about children's rights and responsibilities. Parents don't give children their rights and children need to know about them."

2. Individually, the most prominent issues raised related to rights to protection, provision, participation, protection from maltreatment/abuse/neglect/degradation and the right to family or parental care when removed from the family environment

6 Medium's coverage of children

Individual medium's coverage of children has been assessed in terms of a) which medium carried the most coverage of children's items and b) where children were identified where they should not have been.

7 Way Forward

Some of the critical areas are:

- The participation of children in terms of being sourced on different issues and being included in the news making process
- Broadening the representation of children both in terms of roles and stories
- Including a greater diversity of children
- Addressing gender and racial imbalances
- Specialised child-focused training for journalist and media practitioners