

# Media Coverage on Child Sexual Abuse in Developing Countries

Hayam Qayyum

**Abstract**—Print and Broadcast media are considered to be the most powerful social change agents and effective medium that can revolutionize the deter society into the civilized, responsible, composed society. Beside all major roles, the imperative role of media is to highlight the human rights' violation issues in order to provide awareness and to prevent society from the social evils and injustice. So, by pointing out the odds, media can lessen the magnitude of happenings within the society. For centuries, the "Silent Crime" i.e. Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is gulping down the developing countries. This study will explore that how the appropriate Print and Broadcast media coverage can eliminate Child Sexual Abuse from the society. The immense challenge faced by the journalists today; is the accurate and ethical reporting and appropriate coverage to disclose the facts and deliver the right message at the right time to lessen the social evils in the developing countries, by not harming the prestige of the victim. In case of CSA most of the victims and their families are not in favour to expose their children to the media due to family norms and respect in the society. Media should focus on in depth information of CSA and use this coverage is to draw attention of the concern authorities to look into the matter for reforms and reviews in the system. Moreover, media as a change agent can bring such issue into the knowledge of the international community to make collective efforts with the affected country to eliminate the 'Silent Crime' from the society. The model country selected for this research paper is South Africa. The purpose of this research is not only to examine the existing reporting patterns and content of print and broadcast media coverage of South Africa but also aims to create awareness to eliminate Child Sexual abuse and indirectly to improve the condition of stake holders to overcome this social evil. The literature review method is used to formulate this paper. Trends of media content on Child Sexual Abuse will be identified that how much amount and nature of information made available to the public through the media general view of media coverage on child sexual abuse in developing countries like India and Pakistan will also be focused. This research will be limited to the role of print and broadcast media coverage to eliminate child sexual abuse in South Africa. In developing countries, CSA issue needs to be addressed on immediate basis. The study will explore the CSA content of the most influential broadcast and print media outlets of South Africa. Broadcast media will be comprised of TV channels and print media will be comprised of influential newspapers. South Africa is selected as a model for this research paper.

**Keywords**—Child sexual abuse, developing countries, print media, broadcast, South Africa.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**T**HE role of mass media is very essential in disseminating information, increasing awareness and changing perception of the society. Mass media communicate with

larger number of people and also to a target group. discerned the significant difference between mass communications and other forms of communication. They observe that mass communication has strength to reach simultaneously larger audience through a technical device to swiftly disseminate the message to the heterogeneous audience. Media mediate information and shape public opinion. Media focus on event that we usually not take into account and make those happenings apparent and significant [1].

The Media play a pivotal role in influencing perception, attitudes and behaviour of society and increase awareness in social issues. It also influences responses of public, professional and political to specific circumstances in preventive and intervention strategies [2].

Mass media communication largely considered as broadcast media including Television and radio, print media including newspaper and awareness campaign in coverage of specific social issue and crimes like Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). Mass media with its persuasive media coverage can directly enhance the prevention of CSA crime.

In developing countries, CSA issue needs to be addressed on immediate basis. The study will explore the CSA content of the most influential broadcast and print media outlets of South Africa. Broadcast media will be comprised of TV channels and print media will be comprised of influential newspapers. South Africa is selected as a model for this research.

## II. CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

WHO Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention [3] has defined child abuse as:

"Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/ or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power".

Child sexual assault (CSA) is a persistent problem that affects physical, social and psychological wellbeing of children all around the world [4]. It is anticipated that; from 7-36% of female and 5-10% of male children experienced sexual violence worldwide [5].

For centuries, the "Silent Crime" i.e. Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is gulping down the developing countries.

The WHO report defines sexual violence as:

"Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise direct against women's sexuality, using

coercion (i.e. psychological intimidation, physical force or threats of harm), by a person, regardless of relationship to the victim, in any setting, including, but not limited to, home and work” [6].

#### *A. Types of Child Sexual Abuse*

Child sexual abuse includes different types of sexual offenses, including:

Sexual assault: Offenses means that an adult uses a minor for the sake of sexual gratification; like rape (including sodomy), and sexual penetration with an object [7]. Most U.S. states define sexual assault as penetrative contact of a minor’s body, may be slight, if the contact is performed for the purpose of sexual gratification [8].

Sexual exploitation is an offense where adult victimizes a minor for advancement, sexual gratification, and profit; like prostituting a child [9], and creating or trafficking in child pornography [10].

Sexual grooming is a term defining the offender who seeks to make a minor more accepting of their advances for the sexual gratification, for example in an online chat room [11].

Offender is more likely to be a relative or acquaintance of their victim than strangers. A 2006–2007, in Idaho study [12] of 430 cases, 82% of juvenile sex offenders were known to the victims (acquaintances 46% or relatives 36%) [13].

Male offenders are more than female, though the percentage varies between studies like incidents of sexual abuse by female perpetrators that come to the attention of the legal system is reported to be between 1% and 4% [14].

#### *B. Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse*

The global prevalence of child sexual abuse estimated at 19.7% for females and 7.9% for males. The study Clinical Psychology Review published in 2009 examined 65 studies from 22 countries. The highest prevalence rate of child sexual abuse geographically was found in Africa and that is 34.4%, due to high rates in South Africa; In Europe prevalence rate is 9.2%; America and Asia had prevalence rates between 10.1% and 23.9% [15].

As compared to the other countries South Africa has the highest rates of CSA especially the girls between the ages of 12 and 17 being particularly at risk [16]. In 2000, 52,550 cases of rape or attempted rape of women reported to South African Police Service 4. 438 girl victims were age of 18 years, and 7,898 of these were under 12 years [17].

#### *C. Reasons of Child Sexual Abuse*

High rate of child sexual abuse in South Africa has various Factors. Firstly, African history of apartheid, have deep rooted culture of violence [18]. In the apartheid society violence was used by those in power as a legitimate means of achieving their goals. So the violence was used to solve all problems from top to bottom [19]. The political violence and state sponsored oppression were used as strategy to resolve disputes and conflict and widespread in the form of gangs and criminal violence within communities [20]. The other factor is social

and economic factor. CSA is a universal phenomenon that occurs across cultures and socio-economic groupings [21].

In 2001, 57% of individuals in South Africa were living below the poverty line and ration did not between 1996 and 2001. In economically distress countries, young girls usually forcefully pushed into or adapt the profession of prostitution. Traditional reason is Labola where parent do the marriages of their children in exchange of money for either sex regardless of age and status.

### III. SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa half of the victims of sexual offences are the children. The child victims have to face the same process as the adults for administration of justice. There have been impressive legislative developments in South Africa to protect children against sexual crimes.

South Africa ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 [22] in the year 1995 and after five years ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child [23]. The important development is the Children’s Act of 2005 [24] which laid down principles of care and protection. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007 (Act 32 of 2007) [25] has created a National Register for Sexual Offenders (NRSO) on 16 June, 2009. The Children’s Amendment Act 41 of 2007 [26] laid down the procedure for the protection of children, including reporting of suspected child abuse by professionals.

#### *A. Mandatory Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse*

Legislation concerning mandatory reporting of child abuse in South Africa has been in effect since 2010, with the promulgation of amendment 41 of 2007 to the Children’s Act No.38 of 2005 [27]. The mandatory reporting of abuse of children was placed under the international spotlight with the sentencing in the UK of the alcoholic mother of Hamzah Khan (aged 4 years) [28] who died in 2009 from starvation, but whose body was only discovered in 2011. Questions were raised about the silence of officials, including teachers, social workers and policemen, who were involved with Hamzah at some point but did not intervene on his behalf. Hamzah’s grandfather is quoted as having said: 'There should be different legislation for social services, schools, doctors, all the agencies, that the moment they suspect anything untoward then the child should be seen.

In South Africa (SA), the father of 2-year-old Theopollus Groepies was sentenced to 25 years in prison for throwing his son against a wall and killing him [29]. Unfortunately, these are not isolated incidents. Violence against children is a universal and all-too-prevalent phenomenon. Despite clear legislation, professionals who have a moral and legal duty to protect children like Hamzah Khan and Theopullus Groepies are not held accountable for non-reporting.

The South African Children’s Act No. 38 of 2005 [30] defines a child as a person under the age of 18 years. According to the latest population estimates, there are 15 454 742 children under the age of 14 in SA (from a 2013 mid-year

estimate of 52.98 million) [31] and a further 5 168 797 between the ages of 15 and 19. This means that almost 38% of the SA population is legally defined as children. Thirty per cent of the population is under 15 years of age, with a further 8% between the ages of 15 and 19.

Despite progressive children's rights legislation in line with international conventions, the official statistics for crimes perpetrated against this vulnerable population in South Africa remain alarmingly high. For the period 2012-2013, 495 540 cases of crimes against children were reported [32]. Research into rape in SA revealed that in 84% of all sexual crimes committed against children, the perpetrator is known to the child [33]. Children are subjected to a full spectrum of abuse, including verbal, physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

#### IV. PAKISTAN

There is no official agency in Pakistan to record the data and statistics of child sexual abuse cases. Sahil is the only NGO which is gathering data of child sexual abuse cases in Pakistan.

According to the report [34], the total number of sexual abuse cases in 2014, stand at a staggering 3508 including 8 cases which were directly reported to Sahil and it brings the number of abused children to 10 per day. This figure also shows an increase of 17% from the previous year.

Abduction cases have shown an increase of 7% from 1,706 cases in 2013 to 1831 in 2014. On average 5 children are being abducted every day.

The major crime category of rape/sodomy including gang rape and gang sodomy show that there were 1225 cases and 258 cases of attempted rape/sodomy, gang rape and gang sodomy. An even more serious crime is committed when the victim is murdered. A total of 142 victims were murdered after sexual assaults. Sahil has started recording child marriages since 2012 as it a sexual crime against young girls which is now being reflected in the print media. In 2014, 103 cases of child marriages were reported.

Gender-wise distribution follows trends of the previous years where more girls are victims of sexual abuse. This report shows that 2141 girls and 1367 boys have been abused.

A total of 6531 abusers are on record. The largest groups identified were 1790 acquaintances and 1246 strangers. Like previous years, the highest percentage of vulnerable age group among both girls and boys was 11-15 years.

The data shows sexual abuse can occur anywhere, at any time, therefore children are not safe. Statistics show 38% of cases of sexual assault took place within enclosed areas whereas 21% case took place in open spaces.

The time period of abuse shows that 53% of the children were abused once. In 16% of the cases, children were abused for more than a day.

Province-wise division shows that 2054 cases of abuse were reported from Punjab, followed by 875 cases reported from Sindh, 297 from Balochistan, 152 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 90 from Federal Capital Islamabad 38 from

Azad Jammu Kashmir, 1 case from Gilgit Baltistan and one case was reported from FATA.

#### V. INDIA

Nineteen percent of the world's children live in India. According to the 2001 Census, some 440 million people in the country today are aged below eighteen years and constitute 42 percent of India's total population i.e., four out of every ten persons. This is an enormous number of children that the country has to take care of. While articulating its vision of progress, development and equity, India has expressed its recognition of the fact that when its children are educated, healthy, happy, and have access to opportunities, they are the country's greatest human resource.

In India [35] 53.22% children reported having faced one or more forms of sexual abuse. Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar and Delhi reported the highest percentage of sexual abuse among both boys and girls. 21.90% child respondents reported facing severe forms of sexual abuse and 50.76% other forms of sexual abuse. Out of the child respondents, 5.69% reported being sexually assaulted. Children in Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Delhi reported the highest incidence of sexual assault. Children on street, children at work and children in institutional care reported the highest incidence of sexual assault. 7.50% abuses are persons known to the child or in a position of trust and responsibility. Most children did not report the matter to anyone.

Children are not considered a key audience segment in either news broadcasting or print. News targeted at children is confined to periodical children's supplements or pull-outs carried by some newspapers.

#### VI. MASS MEDIA AND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

The media play a significant role in forming and influencing people's attitudes and behaviour. Child abuse and the media [36] drew attention to the essential role of the media in increasing society's awareness of, and response to, child abuse and neglect. Of particular note was the part played by news and features that reported on specific child abuse cases, research and intervention strategies. Such media attention to child abuse has, at times, positively influenced public, professional and political responses to the circumstances in which children and young people find themselves. Understanding media influences, and how to use the media constructively, may thus be an essential tool for those who advocate for children, young people, and their families.

In addition to news stories, feature articles, and investigative journalism, sporadic mass media education and prevention campaigns are launched. These campaigns usually endeavour to broaden community knowledge of child abuse and neglect, to influence people's attitudes towards children and young people, and to change behaviours that contribute to, or precipitate, the problem of child abuse and neglect in our communities.

Mass media present the opportunity to communicate to large numbers of people and to target particular groups of people. As observed by [37, p. 478] mass communication is significantly different from other forms of communication. They note that mass communication has the capacity to reach 'simultaneously' many thousands of people who are not related to the sender. It depends on 'technical devices' or 'machines' to quickly distribute messages to diverse audiences often unknown to each other. It is accessible to many people, but may be avoided. It is orchestrated by specialists whose intent is to persuade potential audiences of the benefits of their attention. It is 'controlled by gatekeepers' who censor the content of messages. And finally, unlike one-to-one communication, it produces only minimal, delayed feedback to its senders. Thus, a well-focused mass media campaign, educational program or live-theatre production has the potential to contribute successfully to community education and the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

#### *A. Images of Children in Society and the Media*

Journalists willing to advocate for children and young people face the challenge of counterbalancing negative images or 'demonisation' [38] of children and, particularly, of adolescents, in print, television and film.

#### *B. Media Influences on Children and Children's Rights*

The impact of media advertising on children and adolescents is well documented, as is concern about some aspects of the media's powerful influence on children's attitudes and behaviours (see, for example, [39]). Television may be 'a more powerful socialisation agent than peers and teachers' [40, p. 119].

As acknowledged in a major New Zealand newspaper, it is notable that: 'The media promote violence as an effective way of dealing with conflict through television, films, videos, and interactive video games' (The New Zealand Herald, 28/11/01).

Indeed, the constructive use of mass media can assist in teaching children and young people socially desirable ways of dealing with conflict, knowledge of their rights to integrity and protection from harm, healthy eating habits and lifestyles, and ways to assert themselves and their rights in a positive, acceptable manner.

Mass media education and prevention campaigns may be designed to target children and young people, providing them with useful information and alerting them to avenues for further information, help and support. Campaigns can also use regular television programs for children. Drawing on the research of [41] and [42, p. 15] the Inquiry into the Effects of Television and Multimedia on Children and Families in Victoria (2000) states: 'Children have shown cooperative behaviour following one observation of just one episode of positive social behaviour in a commercial television drama . . . and cartoons with a positive social message have produced positive behaviours in pre-schoolers . . . Discussions of complex issues and approaches to conflict resolution have also been successfully utilised in Australian drama.'

As reported in Issues Paper 14 in this series, Child abuse and the media [43], children can be encouraged to express their views through the media. The UK Children's Express is one example, as is Youth Forum in Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper.

#### *C. Impact of Media Campaigns on Victims of Child Sexual Abuse*

The impact of media campaigns on the lives of victims is sometimes reported in print media stories about them. Sydney Morning Herald [44, p. 6] published a piece about another victim of sexual abuse, assaulted by her stepfather. It was reported that shortly before driving over him with her car, causing long-term injuries, the victim saw 'a televised community announcement about standing up against child abuse'. As in many cases of incest, the victim's stepfather had been released from prison after serving a sentence which was perceived by his victim as not fitting the crime she had suffered.

Mass media education and prevention campaigns present a viable means for governments to be seen to be doing something in relation to the problem of child abuse and neglect. Campaigns may assist not only in the prevention of immediate harm to children and young people but also in allaying the long-term social and economic consequences of child maltreatment. Campaigns must, of course, be backed by supportive services for children, young people and their families.

#### *D. Media Impact on Child Sexual Abuse*

Child abuse is now increasingly the subject of television dramas, documentaries, films, and live theatre productions. Some of them, characteristically controversial, have attracted comment in the literature and have been reviewed in the print media [45]-[50]. Television programs are often followed by information about where victims and offenders/potential offenders can seek help, and phone numbers to ring (helplines) are often displayed.

This 'media-based television series' was considered to be successful, specifically in relation to its impact on increasing the parenting confidence of mothers. However, [51] concluded that the impact of the series could have been increased: 'by the strategic provision of service support systems, such as telephone information contact lines or parenting resource centres, which could be advertised as part of a coordinated media strategy planned to coincide with the airing of the television program. These services could provide information and back-up resources, such as parenting tip sheets, to parents seeking further advice after viewing the program. Staff at these centres could also identify and refer families who may need more intensive help.'

#### *E. Existing Policies on Reporting Sexual Abuse*

Some existing policies recommended for journalists for reporting child sexual abuse cases:-

According to Cecilia Russell of the Star the following policy is adhered to by journalists of the Star when covering Sexual Abuse:-

- (1) Do not identify a victim (or survivor) of sexual violence.
- (2) If victim gives permission for his/her identity to be revealed the newspaper only does this when they are fully satisfied that the victim (or survivor) understands the full implication of doing this.
- (3) Never identify an underage victim.
- (4) The newspaper is careful not to identify the victim through describing circumstances and location of the incident or the victim.
- (5) The law is clear that you cannot identify an underage suspect at any stage.
- (6) The suspect can only be identified in cases of sexual abuse after he/she has pleaded.
- (7) Photographs can also only be published after a plea has been entered.
- (8) There are cases where the court instructs that photographs should not be published.

Elsabe Brits of Die Burger states the following on Die Burger's policy on sexual abuse:-

- (1) If a child is sexual abused and or raped one may NEVER EVER mention his/ her name. Child defined as anyone under the age of 18 years.
- (2) If a child is raped by her father, you cannot mention the father's name even if found guilty.
- (3) The identity of a rape victim may NEVER be disclosed or any detail that may lead to disclosure of her/his identity. This can only be reviewed if the victim requests to be identified. It is important to get the approval on record.
- (4) The name of the alleged perpetrator of ANY sexual crime may not be published until he/she has entered a plea.
- (5) In civil cases (non-criminal) names may be mentioned. These are only heard by the high court.
- (6) Details of the crime scene are given to a certain extent and one should stop when they are in bad taste or the details are too gruesome.

Gert Knoetze of The Herald highlights the policy of the Herald as follows:-

- (1) Do not name the victim except in rare cases where the victim feels that being named would highlight the heinousness of the case.
- (2) We protect rape victims and the victims of child abuse as the law requires.
- (3) Avoid giving details that are too explicit.
- (4) Literature on coverage of sexual abuse:

Patrick Mooney in "Some Ethical Issues for Journalists Covering Sexual Abuse Cases" recommends the following policy guidelines:-

- (1) Trustworthiness, which includes accuracy, honesty, promise keeping and independence from manipulation by outside forces. As far as sexual abuse is concerned the public should know that the newsroom and the journalist can be trusted to relay relevant and accurate information.

- (2) When reporting sexual abuse stories journalists should endeavour to be impartial by giving reasonable viewpoints and sides to a story.
- (3) Respect and consideration for all parties involved and a minimization of bruised feelings, as long as this does not conflict with legitimate public interest.
- (4) Public service which involves giving information that will help the public make informed decisions.
- (5) Diversity should be promoted which involves covering all of the communities, which the paper serves. Stereotypes in regard to sexual abuse should not be promoted.

A legal brief on Cyber law in South Africa highlights the following guidelines on reporting on children<sup>2</sup>:-

- (1) Media must contribute to the social responsibility of raising public awareness about the rights of children.
- (2) Child-rights journalists should be seen as media advisers.
- (3) They must seek to expose hazards of children's safety and security and all forms of exploitation.
- (4) Media should play a role in advocating children's rights issues.
- (5) Reports, articles or photographs should not demean children or patronise them on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, sexual preference, religion or mental or physical disability.
- (6) Photographs should not depict children in compromising, sexual or degrading situations.
- (7) Photographs of children, where possible, must be obtained with the knowledge and consent of a responsible adult, parent, guardian or caregiver.
- (8) Reportage about children must be accurate and fair, as well as sensitive to the vulnerability of children.
- (9) While media helps uncover cases of abuse and rape of children, their absolute right to privacy should be ensured.
- (10) Journalists should consider the publication of any images or material, which would expose the child to further abuse from society.

#### *F. Policy Guidelines*

The policy guidelines for reporting child sexual abuse cases are as under:-

- (1) Journalists must avoid a situation where they are responsible for causing the secondary trauma of the victim.
- (2) Journalists who report on sexual abuse must be aware of the procedures followed by the police and the courts and do their best to facilitate and not hinder these procedures
- (3) Journalists must be aware of the rights of the victims reported upon. This will help journalists to create a fuller and more factual report and make their task of imparting awareness to the public much easier.
- (4) Journalists must be sympathetic and sensitive when reporting on sexual abuse. Journalist should be refrained from reporting unnecessary details.
- (6) Journalist should try to write follow-up stories on cases of sexual abuse reported.

- (7) Stories reported on should be a catalyst for some action or change
- (8) Journalists should not just report cases of sexual abuse but educate the public on what sexual abuse is, what to do if or when happens and where to get help

## VII. CONCLUSION

The media, particularly the electronic media, plays an important role in shaping society's views and influencing the way people think and behave. The media raises awareness, influences behaviour and generates public opinion. It also provides credible information, alerts stakeholders and creates a demand for special support services. The media creates pressure groups for early implementation of laws and works as a watchdog of society. By increasing awareness, it plays a critical role in determining responses at all levels to sexual violence against children

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) Journalists who report on sexual abuse should receive special training on what sexual abuse is, its effects and legislation pertaining to it.
- (2) Media must contribute to the social responsibility of raising awareness about sexual abuse.
- (3) Reporting on child sexual abuse must be fair, accurate and sensitive.
- (4) Journalist should, if the victim is willing, express their feelings.
- (5) The identity of victims must not be revealed until permission is gained and pictures must be used as sensitively as possible.
- (6) The suspect must not be named until after correct legal procedure has been followed.
- (7) Journalist should not be ridiculed in preparing their reports about child sexual abuse. They must show a sense of responsibility and impartiality.
- (8) Rape and sexual abuse across all communities must be covered.
- (9) If a child has been sexually abused by the father or mother the parent's name must not be published.
- (10) Follow up reports should be done on the fate of the guilty and that of the victim.

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